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TURANGAWAEWAE

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Students of Pompallier Catholic College share about their Lockdown experience

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IT'S ABOUT BELONGING

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EDITORIAL

It's About Belonging

Lockdown gave us a liminal experience of belonging. We had an identity — the "team of five million" — and a goal: to quash the coronavirus in our country. And the General Election last month indicated a confidence in our leadership and a mandate for them to govern well. We want them to capitalise on the energy and goodwill of the team and to tackle inequities across our society. We also want them to communicate about their governance in the way that they have been doing about COVID-19. Communication is key to our capacity to change — most big changes affect us and we need to keep feeling our relationship to others in the team. Belonging builds up our confidence and security.

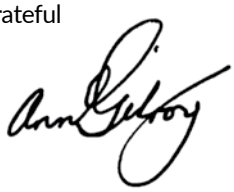
While we need to belong, we cannot be uncritically loyal for the sake of belonging. The election results illustrate this. Many voters "gave" their vote to Labour rather than to a party they may have voted for usually. It reminds me of Henare Tate's explanation of the principles of tika, pono and aroha in Māori theology. He said that we need to do what is right and just (tika) but we need to do that in the right way (pono), and only then will we have aroha — loving relationships. The growth of loving, kind and inclusive relationships is our continued goal and depends on us as a team. As Christians we understand this as participating in God's dream for the world.

Two new Church announcements challenge our belonging. The first was Pope Francis's encyclical *(Fratelli Tutti)* on the "fraternity" of people around the world. The message of the encyclical is prophetic, especially with COVID-19 causing fear and isolation in the world. The encyclical encourages Christians and all people to embrace the common good for everyone in the world. But the Pope's address throughout is to men — the fraternity. It is exclusionary and tone deaf to the appeals of women in the Church. (I'm sure I wasn't the only woman who wrote to Rome before the encyclical was published letting them know that "fraternity" does not mean "men and women" in English.) This is a blow to women's belonging.

The second was Pope Francis's reaffirmation of his support for civil unions to protect the legal rights of persons in same-sex relationships — to ensure they belong. The New Zealand Catholic Bishops issued a media comment endorsing the Pope's sentiments. We expect that the Church's published teaching will be revised now to include this change, eg, in the *Catholic Catechism*. And we hope that the teaching Church will take a fresh look at human sexuality and personhood in the light of the research in the last decades. We look forward to more barriers to belonging falling with the announcement of Church blessings of these relationships.

The contributors to this issue discuss some of the challenges, comforts and complexities of belonging. We are grateful for their generosity in sharing their experience, reflection, research, faith, art and craft.

And as is our custom, our last words are of blessing and encouragement. ♥



It's Decision Time

We can think of death as a personal, final thing. It is a curious fact that we spend much of our lives contemplating death.

A healthy preoccupation with death is natural and even useful. Across cultures, religions and nations, it has driven us to make more of our time in Earth, to reframe our day-to-day existence and to treat others with tenderness.

Recently, however, I came across a compelling reason for thinking about death in a refreshed way. Oxford philosopher Toby Ord, an Australian by birth, argues that to deal with the existential threats of today and get our priorities straightened out, we need to first understand what is at stake.

This means a transformative shift in the way we consider the world and its stakeholders.

Most politicians have the bad habit of crafting policies for the few voters and vested interests that can sway an election. This democratic trope is useful when deciding where a new local road should go, but it fails miserably when the future of everyone is at stake.

What we need to move towards, Ord argues, is a holistic view of humanity, one that goes beyond ourselves and our communities to the whole world. The reason is simple: when we face existential threats like climate change, nuclear war and pandemics there is more at stake than our immediate communities.

We risk everything we are, we have been and, significantly, everything we could be.

In 200,000 years of humanity in Earth and 6,000 years of modern civilisation, we have achieved many things of which we can be proud. Progress in recent years has been profound.

If we manage to maintain a habitable planet, our descendants could live better lives yet. If we allow Earth to support human life, thousands of generations could follow. And maybe even more if we can move to live in other planets.

Around 100 billion humans have lived in Earth up to now. But an even more vast future is in peril. In terms of history, it is as if humanity is in its adolescence, and behaving like an adolescent — making stupid decisions; behaving as if we're invincible.

The threats to Earth are very real. We need to understand what is at stake and decide whether to do nothing, or reconsider our trajectory.

The ongoing toxic effects of even a few of today's activities could wipe out most of humanity and civilisation as we know it. While that may sound like hyperbole, the forecasts are proving alarmingly accurate. It is time for real decisions.

During the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis at the height of the Cold War, there were many occasions when it could have been decided to strike preemptively or even in "retaliation" because old radar systems were producing false positives. Tensions between the US and the Soviet Union could have bubbled over into nuclear war.

Had either side detonated a nuclear device, millions would have perished and cities been levelled immediately. Millions more would have died in the ensuing nuclear winter when crops failed due to prolonged lack of sunlight.

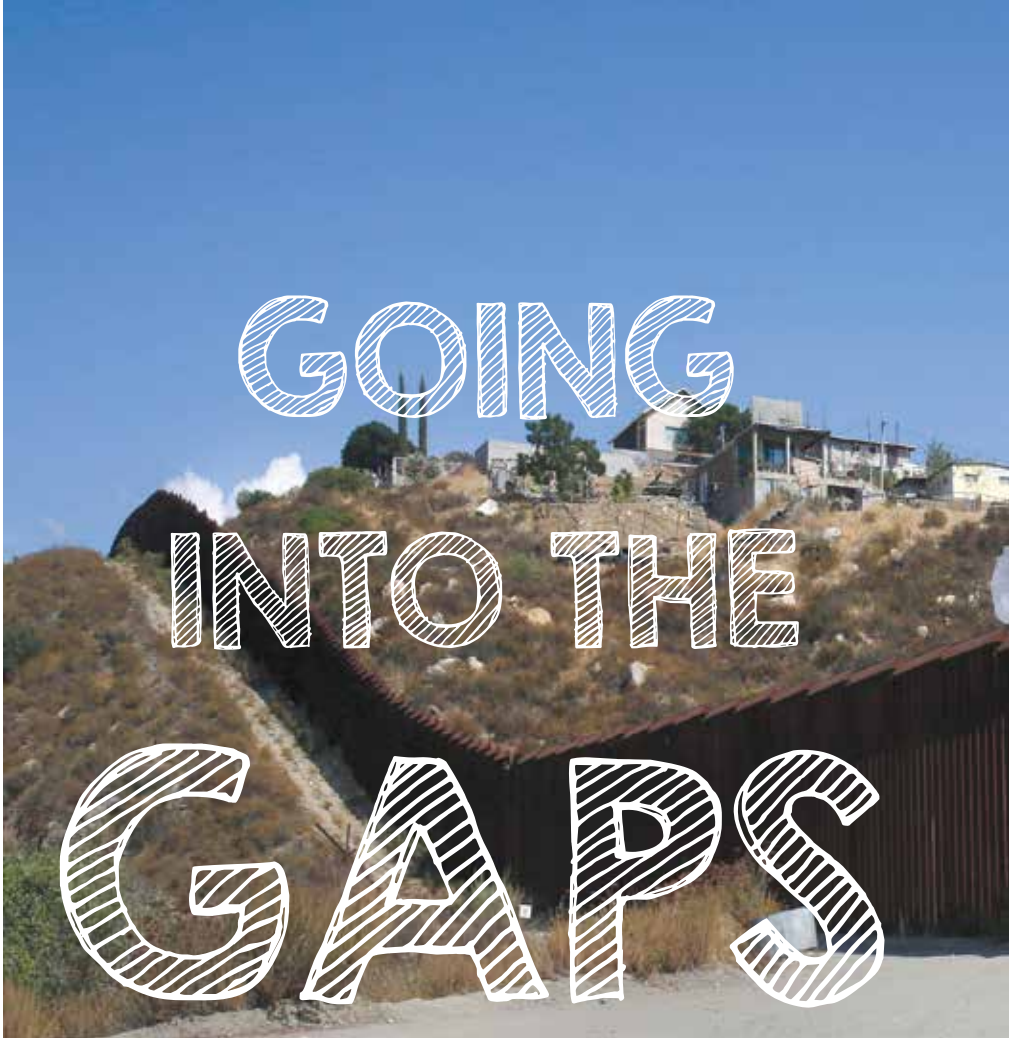
None of these victims would have had a say in the destructive decision-making in Washington or Moscow.

And although tensions have deescalated and there is a ban on the stockpiling of nuclear arms, nuclear weapons have been developed to be even more destructive.

The picture is bleak. The rate at which we are destroying the planet has accelerated, a deadly pandemic is with us, and we are beginning to tinker with new technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), in threatening ways.

But our fate is not sealed. It is urgent that we step back from this danger — our playing with fire. We must make good decisions — for ourselves, for our children and for the future of Earth.

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



GOING INTO THE GAPS

JANE HIGGINS discusses the challenges we face in promoting belonging in our society.

"Go up into the gaps." So writes Pulitzer Prize winner, Annie Dillard, in her wonderful essay collection *The Abundance*. She's been reading Ezekiel and cites his excoriation of false prophets who have failed to go up into the gaps, the breaches, in the walls protecting the embattled city. This failing has left the people vulnerable to enemy incursion.

I'm interested in walls at the moment, and very interested in gaps in walls. That's because I'm trying to understand what has happened to belonging.

Belonging with Conditions

Belonging is good. We want to belong, we need to belong. It's an essential part of being human. Hannah Arendt once wrote that terrorism begins with an absence of belonging.

And yet, I'm not sure that's true anymore. It's never been easier to find a community ready to welcome you in, provided that you sign up at the door, or the login, to the beliefs that community holds dear. I don't simply mean those online groups inhabiting the wilder reaches of the internet. I also mean various churches, political parties, campaign organisations and interest groups.

We go to these places because we want to seek out our people. We want to feel safe and seen, and the company of our people is a powerful place for experiencing that.

Unfortunately, it's also a powerful place for nourishing what writer-researcher Brené Brown has termed "common enemy intimacy". This is intimacy based simply on hating the same people. It's a counterfeit of belonging, but invitations to join up to it are everywhere. I know I'm tempted by it whenever I'm drawn to read an article about Donald Trump, or climate change denialism, or QAnon — just so that I can think to myself: *"What is wrong with you people!"*

Belonging Can Wall Us In

Like many people, I watch in horror the partisan gridlock in the United States and the bitter division in the United Kingdom. These are fuelled by frightening levels of certainty. Conversations across camps in those countries appear to have ceased almost entirely because positions have become utterly entrenched. So entrenched, in fact, that if you take a position on one issue, this seems to provide license for people to assume they know your position on every issue. And if they know that, or assume they do, why have any conversations at all? Why not simply succumb to the comfort of hunkering down inside the walls and lobbing accusations at the enemy?

Curiosity Can Limit "Othering"

Brené Brown urges us, instead, to be curious. She reminds us how passionately we wish others to hear what we're saying, and then invites us to invest that same level of passion in listening. And if the people we're trying to engage with aren't curious in return, let's think about why. Are they clinging to certainty out of complacency or out of fear? It's hard to challenge complacency, but we can surely work out ways to address fear.

Here in Aotearoa, I think and hope we're still curious, still listening to one another, although we're certainly not immune from "othering".

Deadly forms of this are the on-going legacy of colonisation.

Milder forms are buried in everyday, well-meaning discourse. The language of the "team of five million", for example, has been a great way to bring people together to fight the COVID-19 virus, but it has made possible the characterisation of those coming home from overseas as "other" in sometimes unhelpful ways. These homecomers can be seen as a threat: might they be bringing the virus here when our team has worked and sacrificed for months to keep our country and our people safe?

Hospitality with Civility

The COVID homecoming situation is a concrete example of a more

general challenge to our forms of belonging: how can we be hospitable to those whose beliefs, world views and opinions we do not share or even vigorously oppose? Civility is important here. Indeed, civility is a necessary condition for hospitality to flourish because being hospitable makes us vulnerable.

Brown cites the non-profit Institute for Civility in Government to define civility as "claiming and caring for one's identity, needs and beliefs, without degrading someone else's in the process". I find this helpful. It means there are limits to hospitality: it can't happen when safety or dehumanisation are at issue. But I think it can happen when comfort is at issue. I think we can risk comfort. As singer-songwriter Bernice Johnson Reagon of Sweet Honey in the Rock once said: "If you're in a coalition and it's comfortable, you know it's not broad enough."

Boldness with Openness

Curiosity, then, is important. And hospitality. What else can we bring to the crafting of forms of belonging that will leave us open to possibilities and points of view outside our own? When everyone has taken a side, and is fierce in their defence of it, openness takes courage and judgement. It invites us to be bold.

Curiosity, hospitality and boldness: these are states the spirit can embrace when, as Alice Walker says, the heart is "so open that the wind blows through it".

Which brings us back to the gaps. It's cold up there: it's high and spare and risky. But we can see a long way. And we can meet strangers who might broaden our world. Annie Dillard is urging us to go there, to put our faces to the wind that whips through those spaces, to find the places where "the spirit can discover itself like a once-blind man, unbound."

Whoever goes up into the gaps, goes there to encounter God, to admit to failings and sin on "our side" and to plead for mercy.

But she's cryptic, and reading her I was puzzled. It doesn't seem very helpful if Ezekiel is simply urging people into the gaps in order to defend or rebuild the wall. So I went and read what he had to say. And it wasn't what I expected.

Meeting the Divine in the Gaps

In Chapter 22, Ezekiel tells us that the one who is coming from outside to break down the wall, the one who must be met and bargained with lest the city be destroyed, is no enemy general. It is Yahweh. Yahweh is coming because those within the walls have mistreated their widows and orphans, they have oppressed the foreigners in their midst and committed sexual violence against women. They have accepted bribes, made profits from the poor and exhorted unjust gains from their neighbours.

Whoever goes up into the gaps, goes there to encounter God, to admit to failings and sin on "our side" and to plead for mercy.

Where does this leave us in our attempts to understand belonging? In humility, for a start. Seeking mercy. But also, it invites us, I think, to be curious and hospitable and bold. To sacrifice, or at least not cling to, comfort.

Can it still be called belonging, this state of being so open that the wind blows through? I think it can.

We'll always need and cherish those places where we can gather and speak in safety, the places we can go out from with confidence, and return to with relief.

What the gaps in our walls are offering us, though, is something else. The chance to meet God. The chance to be transformed.

Photo: ZUMA Press, Inc. / Alamy Stock Photo

French street artist JR constructed a towering portrait of Kikito, a one-year-old Mexican boy living in Tecate, Mexico next to the USA border wall.

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

Sacred Life from Common Bones

MAKARETA TAWAROA writes that Māori knowledge is needed in government decision-making.

As the number of people out of work continues to grow, many Māori households and communities will face huge problems because of structural racism. Most New Zealanders will find this hard to accept but there is one very simple reason why it is true. It is because we still live in a settler, colonial society, where policies are mainly supportive of the dominant culture. In Aotearoa the State is the product of British colonial expansion — its characteristics reflect these cultural and imperial origins. But the problem runs deeper than gloss and appearance — the real problem lies in the *ideas* that motivate the people who run our State.

Inequalities Magnified

I agree with First Union President Robert Reid, who said recently that the welfare system is a two-tiered system — one for Māori and Pasifika beneficiaries and one for Pākehā beneficiaries. The inequities that currently exist are magnified by the Income Relief Payment. For example, if you lost your job (including self-employment) from 1 March 2020 to 30 October 2020 due to COVID-19, you may be eligible for the COVID-19 Income Relief Payment. This gives up to 12 weeks of payments to help with living costs after a sudden job loss and allows time to find other work. The scheme works well for those who fit into these categories — but many Māori and Pasifika do not.

Involvement in Decisions

All of New Zealand has now moved to Alert Level 1, and our attention is moving to the long-term repercussions

of the pandemic. It is critical that Māori and Pasifika be involved in the decision-making recovery process as the recession will hit them the hardest. Māori and Pasifika communities will carry a higher level of risk to health, livelihood and wellbeing in this new environment. Infection and death rates will be highest for Māori and Pasifika of all ages if community transmission escalates.

The social and economic impact of the pandemic will be felt for longer and more intensely for our people who live in precarious conditions. There is immense pressure to fast-track economic recovery — a recovery which will be largely designed by non-Māori, and will deepen the pre-existing inequities.

There is a large body of knowledge around mātauranga Māori which is being completely overlooked. It is time to draw on both systems: Māori knowledge and ways of knowing, and Western science. We need both systems to inform our expertise, experience and leadership.

Reconnecting

Recently my cousin Bob came home to live because he was unable to find affordable accommodation. He got tired of living in a tent on a beach in the Bay of Plenty, particularly in the winter. He had become estranged from his wife many years ago and was sad that he had not been reconciled with her before she passed away. He became very depressed. His favourite daughter lives in Australia so he feels lonely most times. He is estranged from his two other daughters who live in their childhood home which had belonged to their mother. She had come from the Bay of Plenty. Bob came home for a tangi and had, after a few false starts, decided to stay. He now lives in an old family home, cooks on a barbecue and lives off the grid with his dog Rowdy.

In the middle of Lockdown Bob joined a small group of kaumātua and kuia who meet weekly on our marae. The programme is flexible and we have a lot of fun. Most of us are his cousins though he doesn't know us very well. We all share a common ancestor and whakapapa which makes us whānau in the true sense of the word. We come together because we want to be something greater than we would be on our own.

Cousin Bob's main problem was housing. Housing costs are the single largest contributor to the poverty gap. Even those receiving the Accommodation Supplement say that nearly three-quarters of their income is spent on housing and that rents are raised in equal proportion to the increase in the Accommodation Supplement.

Understanding Māori

I listened to a radio programme recently that was trying to define who is Māori and who is not, including the pros and cons of the Māori electoral roll. There were all sorts of definitions being touted. It was not a well-informed conversation.

One of the injustices that has been done to Māori is to take away our right to define who we are as Māori. Pākehā have defined the terms. If you look up the word "tribe" in the dictionary, it says "a primitive social group". A "sub-tribe" is "a subset of a primitive social grouping". This is a very inadequate explanation.

I like to look at what our people say the words mean. For example, the word iwi is part of the word koiwi which is our bones. When a woman is pregnant with a child she is hapū. When she gives birth to a child the act of giving birth is whānau. Therefore a Māori child is whānau from a hapū woman descended from common bones.

This describes the network of relationships which define who we are as Māori. The important thing about this network is that we cannot separate whānau, the act of giving birth from hapū, the state of being pregnant. We cannot separate hapū from the common bones of shared ancestors. We cannot isolate out an individual whānau from the hapū which gave birth to it and the iwi of which it is a part. This whole of integral relationships is more than "a primitive social group".

I have been following the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care. Our vulnerable tamariki and mokopuna could have been saved from horrific abuses if there was a better understanding of the importance of Māori relationships. My cousin Terry spent 25 years in Porirua Hospital simply because his occasional epilectic fits were poorly understood by medical practitioners and he was diagnosed inappropriately.

Working with Wisdom

Making connections with the wisdom of the Māori world is the best way for us to get through COVID-19. We must exercise our rangatiratanga, or the mana of the iwi, which is essentially the power to protect. It is the power to protect our lands, our waterways, our resources, the power to protect our young and old. It was the basic power that te iwi Māori had to look after themselves, make laws for themselves and to keep themselves safe.

Respecting Tapu and Noa

One such law is the law of protection around tapu and noa. In pre-colonial times, the health of the Māori community was protected through tapu and noa. Tapu was the basis of law and order and designated what was safe and unsafe. It was believed that transgression of tapu could lead to mental illness, sickness, physical illness and even death. Noa dictated everyday practices, as a complement to tapu. For example, there were some things that belonged to a certain place and they were not to be moved or mixed with anything else. This separation was necessary to keep people safe. It is similar to why we all stayed home during Lockdown so as not to spread the virus.

Many whānau still follow these laws because they are part of the laws of nature which exist for our safety and wellbeing.

Panting: ***Whakawhitiana*** by Theresa Reihana © Used with permission www.maoriartist.com

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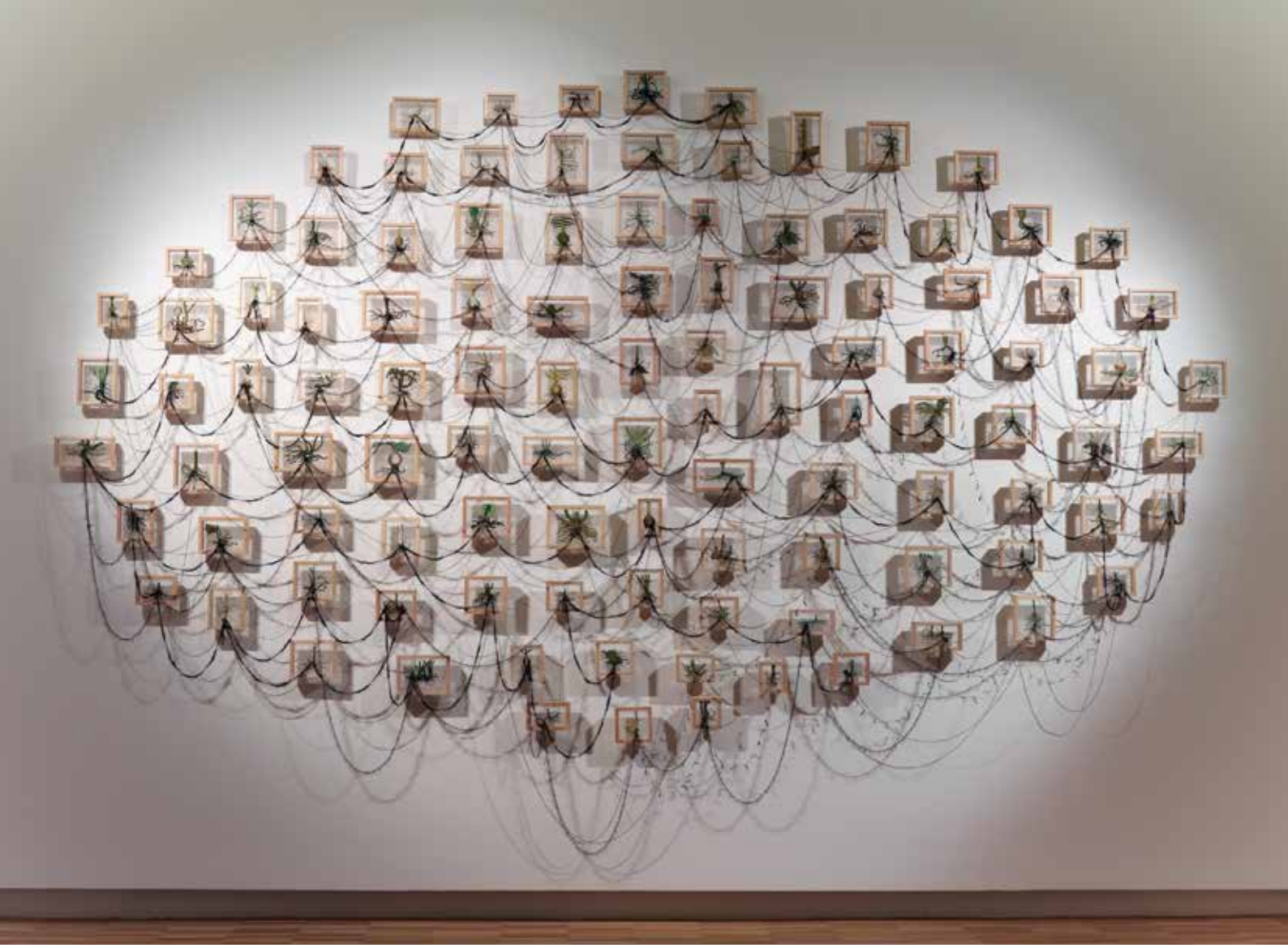

AN In-Between BELONGING

JOEY DOMDOM shares the story of Diane and Jun who are in New Zealand on work visas during this time of global pandemic.

The story of Diane and Jun from the Philippines will resonate with many migrant workers in New Zealand this year.

Diane, a computer engineer in the Philippines, accepted a job offer from a New Zealand-based company. It was an opportunity for her family that she did not want to miss. She moved by herself to New Zealand in 2018, and immediately started the process for getting her husband Jun and their two children aged five and three to join her. Jun, a seafarer, saw that moving to New Zealand was a way to be together with his family. He'd spent months away at sea for years and although he made good money he said he'd not "been there" for his family. His visa application was successful and he arrived in New Zealand in March, just days before Lockdown. Almost immediately he landed a job as a casual labourer for a construction company in Wellington and became friends with Alex, who was also on a temporary work visa as a skilled builder.

During Lockdown and subsequent pandemic restrictions, Diane felt that she was included in New Zealand society. She said: "I felt I was being looked after by my employer. I was totally honest to them. I let them know of my anxieties and fears for myself [as a temporary visa holder] and my family. My employer was genuinely concerned for my wellbeing."

Jun established relationships with

Jun and Diane

other Filipino workers. Like Jun, Alex was highly motivated to make the most of working in New Zealand, because he is providing for his three children in the Philippines. During Lockdown the workers shared their contacts for information and help: about employment, support for basic needs like food, phone cards, winter clothing and introductions to agencies such as the Outreach Ministry of the Filipino Chaplaincy in Wellington and Catholic Social Services.

In-Between Life

Becoming a migrant worker always involves loss — the big loss is the separation of families. Migrants anticipate a better future, but moving and settling into a new place and community inevitably involves letting go part of the past, even losing established relationships. Those who leave their families behind make huge efforts to mitigate the loss by keeping in touch through social media, phone calls, monetary or material gifts. They can feel as if they live "in-between" — with family and work pulling the person in different directions.

And the losses keep coming. Milestones are missed — a baby's first words, first days in school, graduations — and the weddings and funerals of family members. Belonging in a new community cannot make up for such losses.

And in a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, migrant workers and their families can experience even greater anxiety. While this might make them retreat into separate social groups, they need their communities to reach out to them and encourage them to contribute to the general wellbeing.

Anxiety About Home

Understandably, Diane and Jun are anxious about their children and family in the Philippines.

Despite having some of the strictest restrictions on people's movements in the world, the number of new COVID-19 cases in the Philippines continues to rise. And there are doubts around the accuracy of the reported data as many fear that actual numbers are much higher. Yet indications point to the Philippine government giving low priority to the public health of citizens. The official approach to the pandemic, coined "medical populism", exposes a lack of cohesive and systematic management in addressing the pandemic and the economic crises.

The proposed national budget for 2021 shows that the government will defund areas such as the human resource capacity that could improve the national response to public health in this crisis. The government's priorities lie with defence and transportation infrastructure — areas in which there is known corruption.

Everyday Concerns

Diane and Jun contact their two young children daily. They have 24/7 CCTV access to their home in the Philippines, but they confess that technology does not satisfy the longing for their physical presence. Jun says he feels "affected talking to them for too long over the phone. It would be great to have them here. I simply focus on my goals of providing for them and getting them here."

Diane has a further concern about the small, privately-owned company that employs her. "When it was made known to us that our income would be reduced, I was really worried. The income would be cut down but the expenses here and in the Philippines for the children's support remain the same. I work in a company which I know is not financially strong yet. Could it survive the pandemic? My visa is attached to my employment, and if I have to return to the Philippines, I would not know what to do."

This uncertainty about continued employment and the prospect of being unable to support their family contributes to the couple's anxiety. As temporary visa holders, Diane and Jun don't have the same level of access to government support as permanent residents.

Faith Bridging the In-Between

Diane and Jun must face these challenges and stresses without the safety net of savings, extended family or residency. But, like Diane and Jun, many temporary work visa holders

Jun and Alex

draw strength from their faith and the faith community they become a part of.

Diane says she prays daily. She explains: "We attended Mass online, and serve in the church when it became possible. We pray the Rosary every night … I took hold of God's word: 'I hold you in the palm of my hand, that I have my plans for you.' I handle this situation with faith in God."

Many other migrants, like Jun and Diane, are drawn to the places and people where they can express their faith and encounter God — be it in a communal space or digital space. They want New Zealanders to include them. While parishes and chaplaincies may be only too aware that they lack the resources and skills for dealing with some migrants' concerns, it is the empathetic responses that Diane and Jun most appreciate. The little gestures of making them welcome, treating them as part of the community, involving them in activities and in opportunities of service. It is this inclusive approach that is beneficial for everyone and society.

Artwork: ***The Bond Is Stronger in the Age of Division*** (2017) by Geraldine Javier (Philippines, b.1970) ©
Wood, silk screen; organza, synthetic yarn; embroidery and crochet, dimensions variable
Art Gallery of New South Wales D G Wilson Bequest Fund 2017 .
Photo: AGNSW 521.2017.a-kkkkk

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BELONGING with LOVE

Church membership is more challenging than believing a set of dogma writes THOMAS O'LOUGHLIN.

"What do they believe?" Mention the name of any religion and probably our first reaction is to ask about its content. The emphasis is, at once, on a list of ideas about the universe, human life, purpose and what, if anything, is beyond the universe. With my wish list in hand, I tick the ideas I accept and put a cross against those I consider weird, wrong or crazy.

Interestingly, this is the same way we approach various philosophies, political systems and any number of "off-the-shelf" spirituality books. The world is a marketplace of various beliefs and we can either buy a "whole package" (accepting all the belies of a religion); the "lite version" (accepting key list items but rejecting others); or, we can have the "pick and mix" selection which we make to order.

Few of us ever question the idea that, for example, if we wish to be Catholic, then the key thing is that we sign up to "all the Catholic beliefs". Moreover, we hear people who say "I am no longer a Catholic" or "I could not be a Catholic" because "I no longer" or "could not" believe X, Y or Z. This focus on beliefs — statements that demand acceptance — is reinforced by our culture of ideologies and by a long history of the Western churches fighting over which are the exact beliefs and statements of beliefs that are declared orthodox. All this fighting and emphasis on having the right set of beliefs, has made it difficult to distinguish between a religion and a philosophy, or between a religion and a political party.

For many Christians today — Catholics in the USA are a good example — the notion of a "party line" is almost identical with "orthodoxy" and with belonging to a religion. One "brand" of Christan debates with another — their brothers and sisters in the Christ (if they listen to Paul or the liturgy) — with the same venom, bitterness and suspicion that they conduct

their party politics.

While I might condemn such animosity-driven politics as damaging to the public forum and the common good, when I find the same style being used in the name of Christianity, or Catholicism, then I am scandalised at the "Sin of Cain": sibling rising against sibling, made worse because it is done in the name of the God who is Father of each of us.

Is there another way to view religion?

Religion a Means of Belonging

A religion is also a means of belonging. It gives us a home with others so that we can share a vision, help and be helped, and with others affirm all that is part and parcel of our humanity. We all need to belong more than we need a box of doctrines or a bag of beliefs. If we do not belong, our humanity is enfeebled. We need to exercise care for others and we need the care of others. Cut off from one another, we wither.

While we might find *Robinson Crusoe* a good read, and there is a streak of devil-take-the-hindmost individualism in our culture, isolation is actually a vision of horror. We really are social animals! During these COVID-19 lockdowns we have started to discover this as a reality in a way that we could not have imagined a year ago.

Need to Interact with One Another

On the one hand we've found that people's mental health is suffering when they are cut off from others. We know how much we need to be with others (Zoom, Skype and FaceTime are inadequate substitutes) and we need to know that we are not forgotten. We need to belong.

On the other hand, we have discovered the joy and energy that comes from looking out for one another. Knowing that, somehow, we all belong to one another. We are each the keeper of our sisters and brothers. We want to be able to know that there is an "us" and that we are working together.

And — working with people we might never have met before COVID-19 — that belonging to the human family is more important than divisions caused by lists of beliefs that can set us at loggerheads. Perhaps now we need to think of religion as belonging before we think of it as believing?

Belonging Before Believing

This is a frightening prospect for many of us. We might love the idea that, for example, the Catholic Church is a monolith. Unflinching it stands with clear lines indicating who is "in" and who is "out". This can be attractive to those who see themselves as champions of faith and also to those who want the Catholic Church as their enemy — a monolith enemy is an easy target. Both sides see a very close link between religion and social control and cohesion.

Church must be a community of welcoming, acceptance and working together. It must be a community that puts forgiveness and reconciliation close to its centre.

However, first and foremost the Church is a place of belonging: we are welcomed into the Church at Baptism. We become a brother or a sister of both the Christ and of one another and we become daughters and sons of God. We pray: "Our Father." It is as this community, this Church, that we profess our faith: it is our common vision, hope and commitment. It is not a series of questions on a form such as we might get at an immigration desk at the airport: tick these boxes and you're stopped from entering the country.

Church Needs to Be Welcoming

Once we begin to think of the Church as a place of belonging, then the fireworks begin. Church must be a community of welcoming, acceptance and working together. It must be a community that puts forgiveness and reconciliation close to its centre. So a sacrament of reconciliation makes sense, but not if reconciliation and healing are seen as "payback" or a moral rectitude test.

Healing needs to be at its centre, but not if that is seen as re-modelling to a standard issue. And we must work together because belonging must develop awareness of all our human bonds and belongings.

So we can ask, is Church a "home" where every race feels valued? Do Black Lives Matter in Church — along with every other colour? We might say "yes" glibly but we are less than 200 years since Catholics defended slavery as acceptable within the divine plan.

Church Needs to Accept Us

Does Church accept us all as we are? Again, we might answer "yes", but does for example a gay couple experience their love as valued in the community as that of a straight couple? Do we all have a place at the table where we can share the loaf and cup of the Lord as siblings? Or do we use Eucharist as if it is a reward for rule-keeping rather than food to help us travel on together?

And as Church do we work together for humanity and the health of the planet, for our common home? We need the encouragement of one another to change our lifestyles and to put pressure on our governments to make this a priority.

Belonging can sound so sweet, but it can rapidly become a challenge to faith that is far more demanding of us than any credal box-ticking.

Thomas O'Loughlin is Professor of Historical Theology at the University of Nottingham and author of several books.

Belonging
Zugehörigkeit
归属感

SAMANTHA STEELE **reflects on her experiences of belonging overseas and coming back to Aotearoa.**

Growing up, I didn't often question whether I felt a sense of belonging or not. Perhaps if I had been asked I might have thought about how my passport said "New Zealand", about singing the national anthem at school assembly and eating fish and chips — but more likely I wouldn't have had an answer at all.

Self-Consciousness of Not Belonging

When I left home at 16 in 2011, it was to live with a host family in the Chinese city of Langfang, not far from Beijing. It is much more international there now, but at the time it was uncommon to see anyone visibly foreign, and when I started school every morning I would feel uncomfortably aware of the other students' curiosity about me. Though it may not have helped, I often wished I had been given the standard uniform of the other students so I could at least partially blend in. In the early days, I felt relief at spotting my host family waiting for me at the end of the day — people to whom my presence was neither mystery nor novelty.

Signs of Belonging

As the months wore on, I became part of the family in subtle ways. There were the ways that reminded me of home, such as my host mother telling me to tidy my room, or bringing me carefully cut fruit while I studied. Other ways took slightly longer for me to appreciate, like a host aunt continuously placing food in my bowl as I wondered if I'd ever be allowed to stop eating, or my host grandparents delighting in telling me how much weight I'd gained — a sign that I was healthy and enjoying Chinese food, a compliment I didn't realise until much later! When I came to leave the family I felt a warm connection to them but at the time, I wondered if the flight back to New Zealand marked the end of a belonging, having to leave one family and return to another.

Taking Risks to Belong

Arriving in Beijing three years later for a university language course, I was one in a large group of exchange students. I was excited to meet an Australian, Will, in my class, who played in a band at some underground clubs. I was pleased when he invited me into his world one weekend. Despite our geographic regional connection, we actually had very little in common. At the time I was shy, watchful and focussed on learning to read Chinese novels. Will was loud, involved and able to crack jokes with the local taxi driver on the way to the gig. Where Will strode into the bar greeting everyone like an old friend, I walked behind, smiling sheepishly when people noticed me, wanting to feel part of the community but unsure of how to shake off my conspicuous newness.

When the band started playing I was standing alone and frantically looking for Will. Standing tall and chanting along with the band, he gave me a grin and plunged into the crowd. Watching him I knew there was only one thing to do: join in. Until the band finished their set, we danced and yelled along to lyrics we could barely understand, alongside everyone else in the room. Belonging sometimes means getting involved. After the show as I sat outside with Will, people waved to both of us, and someone handed me a cold drink and asked me if I'd be there next week, too.

Different Culture Shock

When I moved to Germany to continue my studies, I felt confident I would find a similarly welcoming community in my small Bavarian city. I had expected moving to Europe would be easy, that any culture shock on the Continent would be negligible to what I had already experienced. I was wrong.

The formality of the culture in Germany meant at first I wondered if I would ever find my place. Making meaningful connections with colleagues and classmates felt like a constant work in progress.

A sense of belonging isn't always tied to one static thing, like a nationality, family or city. Rather, it is more often found in small interactions ... These are moments where I simply feel known.

In the end, some of the easiest connections I made were with two of my fellow cleaning staff at the hostel I worked at part-time. They were an Iranian student struggling to have his foreign qualifications recognised, and a Chinese mother working towards taking her son back to China. All three of us were separated by language, age and life stories, but as it turned out I can get to know someone pretty quickly when we're mopping floors together in a foreign country!

Throughout the next two years, I was always relieved to see either of them at the start of a shift. We quickly came to know when to shoulder more of the work because one of us was missing home more than usual, or to share in another's small victory over endless bureaucratic minutiae.

Though things improved for me in the city, the little moments of understanding the three of us shared help us form a sense of belonging among erstwhile strangers.

In time I relaxed into life in Germany — I grew accustomed to eating rye bread, never crossing on a red light and the shops being closed on Sundays. I began to feel comfortable in the community.

Returning and Not Quite Belonging

I was surprised to feel somewhat overwhelmed when recently I arrived in Wellington after two weeks in managed isolation. I was shocked to find the world around me felt somehow familiar yet hard to grasp — it was as if I was trying to remember a language I'd once known well.

The driver of the taxi taking me to my accommodation asked where I was from.

"Dunedin," I told him. "I've just come back from Germany."

He replied that he had been living in New Zealand for only a few years. We talked about how it was, moving overseas, learning the language, finding a job.

I think it's a common theme among foreigners to ask about one another's country, experience and to weigh up where or how the person might be better off. I felt a sense of comfort speaking with him and a mutual understanding of some of the reasons why we might each leave, or return, home. During that conversation it dawned on me that I didn't need to worry about not fitting back in.

Francis writes in *Fratelli Tutti* (par 95) that a sense of mutual belonging can be found in a growth in openness and the ability to accept others, and this is true. But after years of trying to settle overseas, I've also come to understand that a sense of belonging isn't always tied to one static thing, like a nationality, family or city. Rather, it is more often found in small interactions — an aunt instinctively filling my plate, or singing with the crowd at a noisy concert, or a conversation with a total stranger. These are moments when I simply feel known.

Photo by Karuka/Shutterstock.com

Sam Steele has an MA in Chinese Studies and works in Wellington since returning from China and Germany.

Buildings that Belong

For TONY WATKINS architecture that acknowledges kaitiakitanga gives expression to belonging in place.

Many of us with a passion for architecture and Earth as home for all, are concerned about what is happening in our built environment. Many buildings show our lack of respect for either their unique locations or the rich diversity of the people who live in them.

The alarming and accelerating gap between the rich and the poor is a key issue in architecture, environment and politics. We constantly see the poor not belonging at the table where decisions are made, the rich creating built environments that do not belong, and architects facing moral choices about how they will address the conflict between environmental demands and their clients' wishes.

New Zealand's wealthiest people have almost 70 times more assets than the average citizen. The poorer half of the country possesses just two per cent of all the nation's assets. This gives the wealthy inordinate power. The disparity of wealth is a key issue we need to address before we begin to talk about climate change, loss of species, or any of the other significant environmental issues.

Tony Watkins in spite of being an architectural maverick and outsider received the 2019 NZ Institute of Architects President's Award.

Western civilisation has been based on the idea of exploitation. At first, we exploited other cultures reducing their cultural wealth to gold. We kept a few relics in our museums. When we ran out of other cultures we moved on to exploiting the environment. It seemed to us that it was free and defenceless.

Now the environment is beginning to fight back, with the near collapse of our planet and of life as we know it. We are slowly realising that in failing to recognise our place in the network of relationships in Earth, we have been exploiting our future.

The Moral Dilemma of Architects

As key professionals in planning and building, architects cannot ignore the wealth gap. They face a moral choice. Should they serve the rich or serve the poor?

Most architects end up serving the rich because they are the ones with the resources to commission buildings and pay the fees. In turn it makes sense for the rich to invest their surplus money in buildings as personal monuments rather than leave it in the bank.

However, when architects design for the wealthy they can also be supporting the exploitation and destruction of our culture, our heritage and the natural environment that gives us life.

The Crisis of Placelessness

Architects, more than other professional groups, can contribute to our lack of belonging by building structures that have no relationship to context, community, history or stories. Habitat II, the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements held in Istanbul in 1996, identified "placelessness" as the greatest architectural crisis of our era.

It could be argued that it is the wealthy who cause this placelessness, and that architects in fact have little power and make few real choices about buildings. However, architects are in a unique position to be able to speak for the built environment. As professionals they have a commitment to global issues beyond the demands of an individual client, however wealthy.

Architects may think of themselves as creators but they can too easily be destroyers. When architects get over being sustainable, resilient and creating the most brilliant, liveable, "green" buildings in the world, do we ever pause and ask if we have enriched the world or left it poorer?

Through Contributing We Understand

The gap between the rich and poor is widened when the local community voice about a proposed building is ignored. The wealthy, with the

Photo of Rawene by Tony Watkins

tacit support of architects and local government, can override objections from those in the neighbourhood. The excessive land and resources used for spectacular building projects can disrupt continuity and destroy relationships. It can also displace ordinary people from the area by driving up land and property prices.

Belonging in a building means more than just inhabiting it. We make it our own through our personal contributions. Expensively designed "passive" houses leave nothing for the dwellers to do. Houses without even a workshop indicate that there will be no contribution to growth in the future.

Humans Are Not Stewards

Humans are not stewards. We belong in the natural world, and in seeking perfection we need to perfect that relationship.

We need to do away with the concept of stewardship because it is an anthropocentric idea. It assumes that humans are gods and we tell nature what to do. The concept of stewardship can promote the exploitation of the environment in the pursuit of wealth and power.

Building our own house and taking responsibility for it is a political act and an acknowledgement of our belonging to an environment. Those who love seek to give power away.

In Belonging We Are Fully Alive

The concept of kaitiakitanga, which assumes that we belong in nature, is enshrined in the Resource Management Act (RMA). When nature is damaged we, too, feel the pain. Like Gaia, kaitiakitanga assumes that everything is interconnected in one great whole.

We are fully alive only when we completely belong. When our built environment expresses our oneness with the natural environment. When everyone and all life have a home in what Pope Francis calls our common home.

Kaitiakitanga Manifested in Architecture

Kaitiakitanga means that architecture and architects need to be driven by selfless love of the environment rather than self-love. Then building will not only do no harm but will celebrate and respect the natural environment.

When we all belong in our world there will be no gap between rich and poor because we will be one people rather than competing individuals.

Kaitiakitanga is a way of seeing. In a perfect world it would be manifested in our architecture. Vernacular architecture not only belongs in place, culture, time and occasion. Through its inner harmony, integrity and truth it also makes belonging possible.

Belonging without *Othering*

Belonging. From the outset Christians in the Early Church were different. They saw themselves as a "third race" — belonging, yet not belonging. Covenanted together as the people of The Way, they were coy about imperial and ethnic claims upon them.

The extraordinary flourishing of monasticism from the fourth century was certainly an invitation to intimate belonging, but posed an emphatic alternative to contemporary paradigms. Throughout church history, groups like the Franciscans and Dominicans, the Anabaptists and Quakers separated themselves from the usual norms, yet reached out to renew society. How unbelievably difficult it must have been for the early abolitionists in their battle against slavery to spurn solidarity with their own interest groups. Likewise, today, it's no picnic for US Christians to resist the "America First" ideology, especially if they live in Republican states.

The need to belong is a drive we all recognise. In distant New Zealand I take ridiculous pleasure in identifying with Hibernians, my favourite Edinburgh soccer team. Beside my desk are photos of three generations of my Scottish ancestors. I'm trying to learn a little Gaelic, so I can more fully "belong". But our loyalties can so easily lead us into dangerous territory, "othering" those who do not happen to belong to our particular clan.

Maybe we need a hierarchy of belonging, accepting who we are as family, age group and class, as gender-determined, but always looking beyond that. I am a Presbyterian, properly proud of my heritage, but ecumenism flows in my veins, too, and delight in interfaith challenges. I am Scottish but graciously count even English folk as friends. Our team of five million belongs to the Pacific, to Asia, to the whole wide world.

Peter Matheson is a peace activist, a Church historian, Emeritus Professor of Knox Theological College, Dunedin and author.

Kindness

To recap what we now know: it did not begin
in a laboratory in Wuhan, nor with a pangolin or bat,
but it already lay dormant within us, like a seed
in need of certain conditions to grow;

its symptoms are many and various,
and may include some, or all, of the following:
tear drops, sudden laughter, a feeling of warmth,
and a peculiar uplifting of the heart;

it leaves its traces everywhere: from boxes
left on doorsteps to conversations over fences;
it can be transmitted over vast distances,
through a phone call, or from a smile across a street,

or a certain softness of tone spoken beside
a hospital bed; it affects young and old equally;
there is no race or gender immune from it;
it has the power to topple bad governments;

if one person were to pass it on to just three others
and they, in turn, were to pass it on to three more,
in no time at all, the world would be full of it,
and where, might we ask ourselves, would we be then.

by Brian Bilston ©

From Testing Hope

Students at Pompallier Catholic College, Whangarei reflect on how COVID-19 changed their year.

Lockdown for me was like a giant 30-day challenge. I tried yoga for the first time in my life. It was a goal to do it every morning before online classes. It helped wake me up and gather my thoughts as to what I would do for the day.

I tried getting busy — as Head Girl I had a lot of responsibilities. I made motivational videos, helped create liturgies for Easter and Anzac Day, as well as other fun content. It was nice to engage with a lot of different students. Building relationships was and is important for me.

But the most important challenge was to focus on the things I was grateful for. As a daughter of an essential worker I was worried for my mother's safety every day that she went out to work. Especially since she is a single mother. So knowing that we went into Lockdown in hopes of minimising the risk of contracting COVID-19 was reassuring.

I'm grateful that New Zealand took immediate action. I'm grateful to live in a country that worries more about the health and well-being of the people.

Sharon Gadolo, Year 13, is Head Girl of Pompallier Catholic College. She aspires to be in the New Zealand Police Force to help keep Aotearoa safe.

He aha te kai o te rangatira? He kōrero,
he kōrero, he kōrero.

What is the food of the leader? It is kōrero,
it is kōrero, it is kōrero.

I remember where I was the day Lockdown was announced. I remember sitting in my study class with a group of junior students, and the teacher was actually giving a lesson about COVID-19. I joked around with the kids, and making empty speculations about alternate realities in alien universes. My heart dropped when I saw the case update — I pretended I hadn't seen it. Lockdown was announced at lunchtime.

It seems ironic — now that we have been through so much as a nation, and as a global community — that we thought we knew what was coming back then. It was all so new, so confusing, so surreal. Lockdown seemed like one of those things that would never happen to a tiny little country like our own — I've always known Aotearoa as nothing short of a paradise. Safe. Isolated. So Lockdown was scary. Back at school, I hear so often: "We have had so much taken away from us," and in reality, we have. The things so many of us were excited for as a graduating class — just gone. Lockdown was often a challenge, and a test of our hope.

But it could also be peace. It was a break — a chance to reset and relax. It was making bread every morning with Mum, and taking the dogs for a walk every afternoon. It was the family debates, the online classes, and the nightly phone calls with the ones we missed. It was a time that forced us to appreciate the value of our relationships, our friendships, our schools and our workplaces. More than anything, Lockdown was a lesson — one that shaped our entire world and one that kept us safe.

Moving into the adult world next year, I am wary, but excited. This pandemic has taught me to be ready for anything, and how to find joy in the little things when all the big things seem to go wrong. It has taught me the true importance of communication, and these are lessons I will forever treasure.

Emma Sutherland, Year 13, is passionate about Te Ao Māori and helping others.

to Being Graced

My experience with Lockdown was actually fairly enjoyable. I know that this year as a whole has been just awful for a lot of people, but interestingly enough I haven't seemed to be too affected by it. I am a person that needs very little social interaction so I spent a lot of my time watching YouTube, TV shows and things like that.

The thing that I missed the most was not having orchestra rehearsals for a few months. My biggest passion is music and I spend most of my week playing, teaching and learning. So not having that was a big gap in my life — especially with all the free time that I had.

An important aspect for us in Northland is that we have had very little direct contact with coronavirus. There have been no cases for a long time. Nonetheless the success that the government has had in protecting people and preventing coronavirus has been really good. It will be interesting to see what effect this has on the election.

DJ Hopkinson, Year 12, loves classical music, mathematics and fantasy literature.

When Lockdown began it was surreal. Not only had the entire world come to a standstill, it forced my mind to come to a stop also. To be alone with my thoughts; the good and the not so good. The thoughts that had lingered in my mind for years but had been disregarded with the distractions of daily life.

It was an interesting time, as we all know. The only way to interact with the world was through the screen in my hand or on my desk. I remember seeing other people delve into new passions and hobbies, having productive daily routines, finally having all the time in the world to get new projects done.

I, on the other hand, was so consumed by swells of barricading thoughts, the fear of the unknown and countless other things — heavy thoughts that weighed so forcefully upon my shoulders — that I found myself struggling to get through each day. The days all faded into each other.

A slow recovery began, a slow emerging from darkness to light. A slow stepping forward that I still continue. So that one day I found myself at the edge of a waterfall not far from my house, getting to know myself again, filling what felt like the broken shell of myself — with grace.

Grace Lindsay, Year 12, loves music, painting and making people laugh.

What kept me going through the months of Lockdown was the thought that if we all attend to our isolation we would be making a proactive choice to prevent the spread of COVID-19. I also had the thought that other people have been in isolation for longer periods of time and that the few months I was in Lockdown was nothing. Searching and creating the positives is the only way to get through a negative situation.

Getting back to school was something of a gratitude test. I am certainly grateful that I have been allowed back to school. I realised that some children around the world have not been granted the gift of education. This helps me appreciate even those aspects of school that others complain about.

I believe that Lockdown proved that the people of Aotearoa are able to join together and deal with any situation when we face it together.

Kieran Robinson, Year 12, is interested in self-development, combat sports, creating and achieving goals and learning new skills

SHIFTING PRIORITIES AND

This school year has been different. Not bad, but different. Weeks of Lockdown, events cancelled, church via the internet, waiting in anticipation for the 1pm news — so many things just that little bit different. It took me some time to adapt but now I have learnt to accept that change is inevitable and we are adaptable. The best we can do is to put on a smile and a good attitude. This makes things better for everyone.

During the seven weeks at home, I managed my own learning but missed my friends and caring teachers. I realised what a privilege it is to be able to attend a good school, with friends and caring teachers. It made me see how some children don't have school or an education available to them and I am thankful to live in a country like NZ where people's well-being is valued above everything else. I thank God everyday for all the blessings in my life and I hope that even in these far from normal times, people will realise to be more thankful for small things in life, and to rely more on God than on the things of this world.

Anabella Hugo, year 9, loves everything science, playing hockey and caring for animals.

As 2020 has progressed I have noticed that my expectations have become more connected to the external world. At the start of the year it was about me achieving a plethora of goals and successes. In general, it was all about "winning". Now as I reflect on my goals I have realised how selfish and inward they were. One good aspect of Lockdown was that it was a time to reflect and evaluate.

My main goal now is to research and advocate for protecting our beautiful planet. This grew in response to hearing reports of clear skies and the return of nature. We do not need to accept the degradation of our natural world that has become the norm.

What kept me going in Lockdown was listening to music — music transports me and connects me to other people's struggles.

Although it sounds utopian, "He waka eke noa" — we are all in one canoe. Recent events such as the return of COVID shows that protection from the rest of the world is a very thin line. While New Zealand may become a key model for the future, there's also an obligation to help other countries.

Samuel Bourke, Year 12, is a greenie and is planning to study environmentalism for future generations.

COVID-19 has been the root of a newfound approach to my life. Just as the parting of the Red Sea was to the Israelites a huge surprise of their faith towards God — the Lockdown experience resulted in a transformative change of my beliefs.

The pandemic made me realise that there is no such thing as a predictable future, but only one set to surprise and challenge me. For the year of 2020, I had given myself the expectation of a perfectly planned lifestyle, packed with adventure, enjoyment and achievements. However, just 85 days after welcoming the new year, that aspiration was unobtainable. Plane and concert tickets were hidden in the back of my closet, with no foreseeable future of being used again. Multiple social events were abandoned and the only interactions were between the faces on a screen or the soothing voices of music that I played continuously.

Being thrown into a new way of life with no set plans, introduced me to a lifestyle without an itinerary and taught me how to live in the moment. COVID has presented me with a new, more "go with the flow" version of myself.

Rose Martin, Year 12, is interested in learning new things and developing self character.

FEELING GRATEFUL

Students at Pompallier Catholic College share what they learnt about themselves during Lockdown and returning to school.

Lockdown was a time of reflection for everyone, but it was also a "time out" from all the stress and worrying that we usually brush off. Like the global issue that we dismiss, because it doesn't affect us. But, over time, all this pressure wears us out. So Lockdown was a break from all that.

Throughout Lockdown, I learnt that we should be grateful for everything given to us, and to not take things for granted. We were shown how lucky we are to be living in Aotearoa, where the virus has not impacted upon us as overwhelmingly as in some other countries. We saw how lucky we are, for the opportunities we have. During Lockdown, these opportunities were taken away from us. We realised just how precious our freedom is. Not everyone in the world is as lucky as we are. Whether it is appreciating our education and health services or just having sufficient food and clean water. All these are reasons to be thankful for all that we have.

But most important of all, we realised that in Aotearoa we are all in this together and we will always look out for one another.

Harry Trubshaw, Year 9, loves music, playing hockey and other sports.

Returning back to school again after being in Lockdown for eight weeks felt like returning to normal. I enjoyed being able to have the in-person support from the teachers — trying to communicate with them over technology was rather difficult. It was nice to be able to see my peers again. Interpersonal communication with one another was quite different compared to the social media that I was having to do throughout the Lockdown. Although I do a lot of social media, you can't beat person-to-person interactions.

During the first few weeks back at school the rules were different as we had to sanitise the desks, have special seating arrangements and continuously wash our hands. However, I eventually got used to it. Overall I found returning back to school great. It was nice to be with everyone once again.

One thing I have realised as a result of the Lockdown is how fortunate I am to be living in New Zealand, especially within these trying times. I am thankful for the government and the people across the country who all worked together to get rid of the virus.

Madeline Bassett, Year 12, is passionate about helping people develop their true character.

Seeking God Wholeheartedly

In an ecological reading of Psalm 63 VERONICA LAWSON reflects on how all living creatures yearn for the bounty of God.

Psalm 63

1 O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul *(nephesh)* thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where
there is no water.
2 So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
beholding your power and glory.
3 Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you.
4 So I will bless you as long as I live;
I will lift up my hands and call on your name.
5 My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast,
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips
6 when I think of you on my bed,
and meditate on you in the watches of the night;
7 for you have been my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.

More often than not in our Sunday liturgies, a contemporary hymn replaces the responsorial psalm after the first reading with the result that we are becoming less and less familiar with a deeply significant part of our Jewish-Christian tradition. The Book of Psalms has been called a "school of prayer" or a "book of praises". While prayer and praise are key features of this collection of 150 songs or poems, there are other genres represented such as meditations on the Law and celebrations of the Jerusalem Temple. Sadly the music is lost. Fortuitously, the lyrics have survived.

The eight verses of the responsorial psalm for the 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time are taken from Psalm 63, which combines elements of lament and praise. The three verses not included in the selection (verses 9-11) identify the speaker as a king who praises God as his protector on the one hand and, on the other, identifies God as the agent of vengeance on those who seek to destroy him. While these verses fall outside the scope of this reflection, we can critique the inference that the suffering of evildoers is a function of God's retribution. We might bring these verses into dialogue with other passages from the Book of Psalms that present a different attitude to suffering. In Psalm 65:3, for instance, the psalmist is overwhelmed by personal "deeds of iniquity" and is aware of God's forgiveness.

An ecological reading of the verses that comprise our responsorial psalm

seeks to explore the diverse elements and the network of relationships in the text. First there is God who is addressed in Genesis as *Elohim*, the name for God as Creator of the heavens and the earth, of the entire cosmos and of all that is. The title *Elohim* is plural in form but singular in meaning, with an emphasis on might and power. And yet, God is presented here in personal terms, "my" *Elohim*, and as source of life-saving sustenance for the speaker.

There is nothing abstract about the representation of the Holy One of Israel in this psalm. God is grounded in relationship with God's created world: God's power and glory reside in compassionate response to hunger and thirst.

While God is said to dwell in the sanctuary made by human hands, the sub-text or inter-text of the opening verse is the biblical image of God transcending human constructed space and providing water to slake the thirst of all that inhabit the wilderness. Steadfast love *(ḥesed)* or loving kindness that is more precious than life is predicated of God. Elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures, God's *ḥesed* is frequently linked with God's fidelity. In Greek translation, it comes to denote the mercy *(eleos)* of God. God has wings in this psalm: is this a reference to the winged cherubim who overshadowed the mercy-seat or seat for Israel's God on the Ark of the Covenant, or is it depicting God as a protective mother bird sheltering her young beneath her wings? It may be both.

There is nothing abstract about the representation of the Holy One of Israel in this psalm. God is grounded in relationship with God's created world: God's power and glory reside in compassionate response to hunger and thirst. The ecologically sensitive reader, attentive to the hunger and thirst of the parched and weary land that serves as a metaphor for human thirst for God, brings to the surface the pain of Earth in our time of climate crisis, the pollution of streams from mining, the devastating bush fires that destroy life in its multiple forms and the thirst of so many other-than-human species.

The analogy of the "rich feast" in verse 5 evokes the banquet of fine food and wine of Isaiah 25:6-9. An ecological perspective alerts the reader to the anthropocentrism or human-centredness of the Isaian text, where the banquet is for all "peoples", and of its engagement in this context where God satisfies the spiritual hunger of Israel's monarch "as with a rich feast".

Israel's ruler "seeks" *(saḥar)* God with his whole being. There is an intensity in the Hebrew verb *saḥar* that is not communicated in the English translation "to seek". When the speaker declares: "My soul *(nephesh)* thirsts for you; my flesh *(basar)* yearns/faints for you", the parallelism of the Hebrew poetry suggests equivalence between these two key concepts. In other words, both *nephesh* and *basar* have reference to the speaker's whole being. This verse evokes the creation of humankind in Genesis 2:8 where YHWH *Elohim* forms the human *(ha-adam)* from the humus *(ha-adamah)* and breathes the breath of life into the nostrils of *ha-adam* so that *ha-adam* becomes a living *nephesh*. In Genesis 2:19, every animal of the field and every bird of the air will be designated a living *nephesh*.

As we make the words of the psalmist our own, we might gather into our prayer all the living creatures of Earth that yearn for the sustenance that derives from the bounty of the creator God, who is the help of all that lives, and in the shadow of whose wings all creatures sing for joy.

Photo by Nimit Naik from Pixabay

Veronica Lawson RSM is an eco-feminist biblical scholar and author of *The Blessing of Mercy: Bible Perspectives and Ecological Challenges*, (2016).

Merchant, Miner, Mandarin: The Life and Times of the Remarkable Choie Sew Hoy

by Jenny Sew Hoy Agnew and Trevor Gordon Agnew
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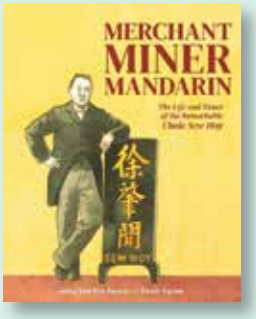
Reviewed by Gerald Scanlan

BOOK



Jenny Sew Hoy Agnew and Trevor Agnew have undertaken a prodigious feat of research to present their insightful and unexpectedly relevant portrait of a truly remarkable pioneer.

While the Sew Hoy name and family are well-known in the deep south, how that came to be makes fascinating and at times disturbing reading. Jenny and Trevor draw on extensive historical records, cultural insight and family wisdom to situate Choie Sew Hoy within both Chinese and colonial British cultures and to illustrate his deft navigation between them.

In their hands, Choie Sew Hoy's story becomes a lens on the turbulent latter decades of the 19th century, featuring the goldrush, Dunedin's economic transformation, regional and national politics, the casual racism and outbursts of violence that Chinese immigrants experienced, the emergence of business and social elites, the boom and bust colonial economy and the striking impact of innovation and technological progress.

Choie Sew Hoy emerges from this account as undoubtedly remarkable: astute, generous, determined, gracious, courageous, bold and far-sighted. His life and story offer a compelling testament to the merits of immigration, cultural diversity and racial tolerance. It is a story about our past but also our future — a biography with a prophetic voice.

Doing Works of Mercy

KATHLEEN RUSHTON **discusses mercy in Matthew 25:31-46.**

Matthew 25:31-46 reminds me of when in 2011 I stood gazing at the six relief panels on the façade of the 17th-century Seven Works of Mercy House in Ghent, Belgium. The seventh work is missing — this is because it is to be lived out in that home. Now I ponder how we are living the works of mercy in Earth during this time of pandemic.

We can think of specific initiatives: hospitals for the sick, soup kitchens for the hungry, shelters for the homeless. But as Pope Francis says if we "look at the works of mercy as a whole, we see that the object of mercy is human life itself and everything it embraces."

Into the Chaos of Another

Moral theologian James Keenan writes of mercy as "the willingness to enter into the chaos of another." This means entering into the entire "problem" or "chaos" of a particular situation — my own chaos, the chaos of our world, the chaos of evolutionary processes.

Matthew 25:31–46 gives the only description of the Last Judgement in the New Testament. The sole criterion is good works. In the biblical cultural context, "good works" and "evil works" had precise meanings. Good works were actions of mercy on behalf of those in need of them and works of peacemaking that eliminated discord. We see this meaning also in the Old Testament such as in Isaiah 58:6–7 and Micah 6:8 and elsewhere in the New Testament such as Mt 5:38–48; 1 Timothy 5:10, 25; 6:18.

Earliest Christianity spread during a time of social chaos and chronic misery in the densely populated cities of the Roman Empire. Short life expectancy meant there was a constant stream of newcomers to the cities — strangers who were well treated by Christians there. Christians gathered in the homes of wealthy members and witnessed to the belief that they could not love God unless they loved one another. This was revolutionary behaviour because for the Romans mercy implied "unearned help or relief" which clashed with their sense of justice. The works of mercy in Matthew 25:35-38 describe seeing to the basic needs of the majority poor. What is new is that the community identifies the poor with Jesus the Christ.

When we reflect on the basic needs of the poor today we can see the ongoing need for mercy.

Feed the Hungry

We know that in our world we produce enough food to feed everyone — but millions are hungry and have neither growing land nor money for food. Climate change is affecting food security. And the nutritional status of the most vulnerable population groups is likely to deteriorate further due to the ongoing health and socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. We can help relieve this by learning about the issues surrounding hunger — globally and locally. And we can directly assist — and show mercy — by, for example, checking that the shelves at our local Vincent de Paul or mission food bank are adequately stocked.

Give Drink to the Thirsty

Access to clean water is a human

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

right — yet many do not have safe drinking water. Rather than seeing water as belonging in common to all, there are global moves to privatise and commodify water. Water is interconnected in the ecosystem and the pollutants we pour on the ground end up in our water as do the pollutants we spew into the sky. These are "invisible ways" we participate in the pollution of this primary necessity in Earth.

We can show our appreciation of water by not wasting it. We can be in solidarity with our brothers and sisters requesting their human right to clean water. And we can also find out about water management in our area.

Welcome the Stranger

The United Nations Refugee Agency tells us that there are at least 79.5 million people around the world who have been forced to flee their homes. These people are stateless and lack access to basic needs such as adequate housing, education, healthcare, employment and freedom of movement. The problem has grown so large that some refugee families are waiting generations before they are invited to another country.

We can reflect on how we could respond to Jesus's statement: "I was a stranger and you *entertained* me [that is, received me as a guest]." Maybe it's by supporting local shelters for the homeless or those escaping domestic violence.

Clothe the Naked

Millions of poor families have inadequate clothing for their situations. In contrast, the fashion industry supplies our shops with cheap, throwaway garments, most of them manufactured in poorer countries, in poor working conditions and where the workers have poor wages. There can be slavery in some areas of the production chains of these goods. As well as becoming informed about the ethical origins of clothing, we can limit our buying and recycle, repurpose and repair more. We might also consider volunteering at a Vincent de Paul, Salvation Army or Hospice shop.

Visit the Sick

We know how human behaviours have affected the well-being of Earth's ecosystems and Earth's capacity to support life. As well as living more carefully by learning from this destruction we may be able to join community groups in such activities as clean-ups, planting and replanting, protecting species and waterways.

And we can be more present to one another. In this COVID world, we may not be able to visit and touch the sick as we once could, but we can give signs of acknowledgement and empathy. We can become more informed and understanding of those with physical and mental illness and ensure they do not fall out of the mainstream of life. We can learn to listen, converse and pray with people who are sick or lonely.

Visit the Prisoners

"I was in prison and you came to me" (literal translation). Prison reformers claim that the number of those in our prisons is too high and in many cases the time spent in prison does not prepare the person to move back into the community meaningfully. We could be interested in learning more about the areas of reform in our prisons, the gains made and what still needs to be done. And we might be able to support the ventures that help those who have come out of prison to integrate into the community again — to find work, housing and to reconnect with their families.

We could learn about and advocate for prisoner access to personal development programmes, eg, education and restorative justice programmes. Faith can help transform our lives and for some prisoners the ministry of prison chaplains helps deepen their faith and confidence. How can we support this ministry? And we might reflect on whether a person recently released from prison would feel welcome and at home in our parish.

Some people risk imprisonment by standing up for justice against governments or corporations. We can think of Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi at Parihaka during colonisation, Aung San Suu Kyi in home detention, Greenpeace protestors in the Pacific and many more. We might feel drawn to finding out more about the power of advocacy campaigns.

One or other of these suggestions may inspire us to live the works of mercy more intentionally. As Mother Teresa said we can practise them in our neighbourhoods: "Stay where you are. Find your own Calcutta. … there where you are."

22 November Mt 25:31-46
RL — Feast of Christ the King
RCL — 25th Sunday After Pentecost, Reign of Christ

Painting: ***Bread and Butter*** by Conor Walton © Used with permission. wwwconorwalton.com www.instagram.com/conorwalton70/

FINDING A BALANCE

The Bible is clear that following Jesus is about serving — being the last by putting others first. Jesus models this throughout the Gospels with little children, hungry crowds and sick people.

I often tell myself that I will serve God later. I think to myself that, for now at least, I should focus on me: on studying, socialising and being busy. And yet I know that the Kindom way of living is not something to squeeze in from 2-4pm on a Tuesday when I don't have lab reports due.

I am currently in the thick of exams, end-of-year events, 21st birthday celebrations and final assignments. I want to live as a disciple first and a student second — but I'm so busy. So I am trying to incorporate little actions into my life that will help to shift my focus outward.

I practise making time for those around me. I've realised that if I wait for when I feel like I have time, I never get around to any act of service. So, when I have things to do, I try to remind myself to choose what is truly important. When I succeed the result could be a long, lovely after-lunch conversation rather than biking straight to the bank. Or stopping to read a friend's essay knowing that they would do the same thing for me. Or making a flatmate a cup of tea, or calling a loved one (who lives far away) during a study break.

Another way to welcome and include others is through food. Many of Jesus's interactions with people happen over meals — with Martha and Mary, at a wedding feast, with a tax collector. Each member of our flat cooks once a week. We often have friends over for meals — serving them food and doing the dishes, pausing for laughter and good conversation. We were going to eat anyway — adding an extra plate doesn't put us out — and by welcoming friends we create community.

And I try to welcome the world in by paying attention to it — being attentive to the people around me and to my environment. I try to be a good friend, listening to the struggles and sadnesses of my friends; I notice trees drooping under their abundant blossoms. I pay attention to my own needs, too — the times when I should stop to pray, to breathe, to listen.

As disciples we are asked to look after all of God's creations, not just the human ones. Composting an apple core, biking or walking, remembering a bag is not going to stop the broader forces of environmental destruction driven by greed and capitalism. But it allows us to remember and notice creation beyond ourselves.

Lastly, practising gratitude and recognising my blessings shifts my focus and encourages others. I want to get better at telling the people I love what I appreciate about them and my life. I want to recognise their small acts of generosity as I try to be generous myself. Being openly grateful helps me recognise the One who is looking after me.

Christian life isn't like one of my exams: I don't study hard, get the best mark I can and then lean back in my chair, forgetting half of what I learned. It's a million tiny decisions, choosing generosity, fellowship, care: dinners offered, conversations shared, friendships formed. It's shifting my gaze beyond 21sts, lab reports and tests to the One who made them, and me.

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

Becoming New: Finding God within Us and in Creation

by Anselm Grün and Leonardo Boff
Published by Orbis Books, 2019
Reviewed by Cathy Harrison

BOOK

Given that Anselm Grün and Leonardo Boff come from very different places (Germany and Brazil) and intellectual perspectives, it is remarkable how they articulate and respectfully share common conclusions and insights. Broadly speaking, Grün follows the Benedictine contemplative tradition which emphasises God within us while Boff is compelled by the Franciscan tradition which is centred upon God permeating all creation, cosmogenesis.

Grün, referencing the wisdom of philosophers, the church fathers and modern psychologists, contends that we can't have a relationship with God unless we first have an honest relationship with ourselves.

Boff ponders the emergence of the Universe. In speaking of the relationship and inter-connectedness of all life, he elegantly weaves together the wonder and awe of the cosmos through the lens of science, the insights of Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme and the ethical and poetic wisdom of Pope Francis's *Laudato Si*.

Both theologians speak of God as unfathomable Divine Mystery. As they demonstrate, the imagery of Meister Eckhart, Teilhard de Chardin and quantum spirituality compels us to detach ourselves from the limitations of anthropocentricism and remain forever open and drawn into the grandeur and Oneness of the mystical, cosmological heart. In discerning a range of timeless narratives, they show that Love is the essence of God (1 Jn 4:16). Whether this is felt within the depths of our true selves or in the vastness of the universe, relational and unifying love is forever *Becoming New*.

Minor Detail

by Adania Shibli
Translated by Elisabeth Jaquette
Published by New Directions (reprint edition), 2020
Reviewed by Susan Apáthy

BOOK

Minor Detail is a saddening "must read" which for me provoked much thought and prayer on the horrors of war and the way innocent individuals and whole societies are caught up in its actions and consequences.

Based on an actual incident which occurred in 1949 in what is now the territory of Southern Israel, the first half recalls how a Bedouin girl was captured by soldiers, gang raped and shot. Its narration is chillingly detached. The second half is narrated by an Arab woman who, some 50 years later, decides to visit the site of the incident and discover what she can about it. She takes for granted the daily indignities and mistreatment experienced today by Palestinians in Israel, but her fragile emotional stability reveals the toll they take.

The story is claustrophobic and intense, the writing is spare and precise, full of recurring images that lead us to see history tragically repeated, and to reflect on the ongoing and almost intractable problems of Israel and Palestine.

This is a memorable and beautifully written book, but emotionally it is not an easy read. It resonates far beyond the "minor detail" it describes.

Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody: The Making of a Black Theologian

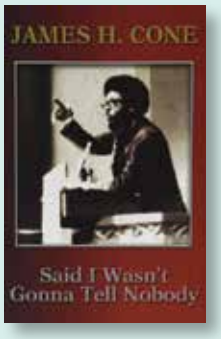
by James H Cone
Published by Orbis Books, 2018
Reviewed by Tui Cadigan

BOOK

Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody, a line from a traditional Black Gospel hymn, is the autobiography of African American preacher, teacher and theologian James H Cone, known as the father of Black Liberation Theology. It gripped me from beginning to end.

Cone lived in a context of chronic racism and white supremacy but also with the excitement for African Americans of Malcom X, Martin Luther King Jr and the Black Power movement. He sought justice for the suffering poor and oppressed and those without power in this society. Cone's theology offered students, preachers and teachers an alternative to the white Eurocentric theology that dominated seminaries, theological colleges and university faculties.

Cone describes his transformation from lacking confidence (he worried if he spoke up he'd be deemed another "angry Black man") to deep anger and interior rage and, finally, to finding his voice and speaking his truth. He articulated a theology that shed "Black" light on the Cross and the Jesus of the Gospel for the good of humanity. I found the comparative symbols of the Lynching Tree and the Cross very powerful.



This readable book is essential reading for those teaching and preaching outside their own cultural milieu as it draws attention to the limits of interpretation — their own and those hearing them. It is a useful resource for Māori and Pacific students intending to study theology. And it has the potential to encourage and inspire anyone who finds themselves as a lone voice on a critical issue.

I Am Greta

Directed by Nathan Grossman
Reviewed by Paul Sorrell

FILM

In 2020, teenage climate activist Greta Thunberg is a household name. At one point in the film, she is shown briefly meeting Pope Francis amid swirling crowds. He shakes her hand and encourages her to "keep on doing what you're doing". But what is he thinking? Perhaps his mind is turning to Psalm 8: "Out of the mouths of babes", or Jesus's injunction that unless we all become like children we will never see the Kindom of God.

Beginning her protest as a 15-year-old sitting alone outside the Swedish parliament, with a sign proclaiming "School strike for climate" propped up beside her, Greta has already packed more into her life than most of us ever will. Filmed over two years, Nathan Grossman's documentary gives us an intimate portrait of the private girl as well as the public activist. At times it is painfully intimate as Greta, who lives with Asperger's and other conditions, struggles with the demands made on her and is cajoled by her father to write, rest and eat when she would rather spend time with her beloved dogs or grooming her pony.

Yet, in public, Greta is uncompromising, a fearless champion of the planet. Her analysis of our predicament — "You adults have failed to act, so now it's up to us children" — contains an unassailable logic. She is a child who must grow up before her time because the adult world has failed her. In her flawless English, she speaks of being unimpressed by the state palaces where she is greeted by political leaders and the conference chambers where her impassioned words are echoed by polite applause. She addresses her international audiences with utter frankness, culminating in her "How dare you!" philippic to the UN Climate Action Summit in New York in 2019.

Perhaps Greta finds such polite evasiveness less acceptable than the outright hostility projected by politicians like Trump and Bolsonaro, who scold her for being a disobedient child and truant schoolgirl. (Ironically, both the US and Brazil have fared particularly badly under COVID-19 — the warm-up act for climate catastrophe.)

Greta compares the Earth to a bag of sweets that we are constantly dipping into: "One day the Earth will fight back." The events of 2020 have shown us, perhaps more clearly than ever before, that the fightback is underway. There are so many reasons why we all need to see this film.

CROSS CURRENTS

by Susan Smith

Election Results

An election campaign is over — what a blessing for all. We could argue that the results demonstrate the triumph of decency over misinformation, hectoring, belittling of opponents and deceit by a significant number of politicians seemingly captivated by the Trumpian model. It is good that the tail will no longer wag the dog as happened when New Zealand First frustrated Labour policies, apparently for the protection of hard-working New Zealand. But that was not the case. NZF was secretly receiving thousands of dollars from some of the country's wealthiest people as a way of ensuring that their interests were prioritised. While I have little enthusiasm for ACT's individualistic ideologies, David Seymour's good humour and unfailing politeness were surely a plus. Labour has the chance now to address the country's burgeoning inequality problems and environmental concerns. Here's hoping they take up these challenges with enthusiasm and commitment.

Catholics and Biblical Fundamentalism

The *Catechism* used in Catholic schools in 19th-century Australia and New Zealand read: "The Church forbids that the Bible, literally translated into the vulgar tongue should be given to be read by all persons indifferently. She even forbids absolution of sins to be given to those who choose to read it, or retain possession of it without permission. The proof that it cannot be a good thing to put the Bible into the hands of all persons is, that being full of mysteries it would injure rather than profit the ignorant; and this is manifest from the zeal with which Protestants scatter abroad, everywhere and at great expense, an incredible number of vernacular translations of the Bible."

For Protestants the biblical word was the Word of God. But Catholics, after the Council of Trent, thought the Word of God came to them through popes, bishops and priests. Vernacular translations were suspect, and most Catholics did not know the Bible.

Then in 1943, Pope Pius XII's encyclical, *Divino Afflante Spiritu* called for two significant changes: new translations of the Bible into vernacular languages using the original Hebrew and Greek; and biblical scholars to use modern textual and historical critical methodologies. Biblical scholar Raymond Brown described the encyclical as the "Magna Carta for biblical progress".

The laity was mostly unaware of these momentous steps and continued to think that God's will was revealed through the utterances of the clergy, or Marian apparitions. This changed dramatically after Vatican II, and today there are probably as many lay biblical scholars as clerical.

When lay Catholics were finally able to familiarise themselves with the biblical text, Catholic biblical scholarship informed their thinking. Not for them an uncritical acceptance of the Bible as literally true. This was one positive result of the late embrace of the biblical word. Unlike some evangelical and Pentecostal communities for whom the Bible is interpreted literally — as catastrophic responses by some communities to COVID-19 in Aotearoa and elsewhere demonstrate — Catholics are not biblical fundamentalists.

Rich Profit More Than Poor

Since March the government has handed out $13.6 billion in wage subsidies. More money was paid out in wage subsidies than the total payments of the 25 years of the Treaty Settlements Programme. But did all big business need assistance? SkyCity, for instance, made over $66.3 million annual profit and received $31.1 million in wage subsidies. Somerset Retirement Villages made $45 million profit and received $8.7 million in wage subsidies. Foley Wines, owned by Trump mega donor, Bill Foley, made $6.9 million profit and received $600,000 in wage subsidies.

TUI MOTU InterIslands
The Independent Catholic Magazine Limited

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

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

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The editor reserves the right to abridge longer letters while keeping the meaning.

ORDINARY TIME EXPLAINED

A recent contributor to *Tui Motu* refers to the Church walking in "ordinary time". Given the sense in which we use the word ordinary in other contexts these days, "ordinary" is an unhappy translation of the Latin *ordinarium*. To follow the sense of the Latin we need to go back to our primary school maths days when we learnt about "cardinal" numbers — one, two, three, four —and "ordinal" numbers — first, second, third, fourth. So as distinct from the focused seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, etc. we are now in not ordinary time but in ordered/numbered time — a season of life, opportunity and growth, progressing step by step to ever more faithful discipleship of Christ, as God leads us in love and service.

Tony Williams

SINGLE ISSUE VOTERS

With the US election there arises that all too familiar figure — the single issue voter. I have been a member of "Voice for Life". I do not believe in abortion on demand. However, I would not deem myself a fellow traveller with Donald Trump for whom it is just a ploy to gain voters such as Colleen Adams. The president changes his beliefs when it suits. He uses police to clear a church parking lot so that he can wave a bible for the cameras. Sadly he does not seem to have read it. He is the epitome of the saying "a text without a context is a pretext".

He purports to be pro-life but under his watch the USA leads the world in COVID-19 deaths.

It was single issue voters who got the USA into its present situation on abortion. All Ronald Reagan's cabinet members were evangelical Christians. His health secretary said he could have got some sensible abortion legislation through Congress, but was thwarted by those on both sides of the debate who would not budge from "total" for or against. So the High Court determined the US position in the Wade v Roe case. Thus the current position on abortion was in effect mandated by the adamant for and against single issue voters.

Dennis Veal

DIVERSITY OF PERSONAL JOURNEYS IMPORTANT

Just wanted to say that I found *TM* Issue 253 hit the nail on the head: well, perhaps more correctly, it hit a particular nail in my head.

Overall, a good and timely theme — and pertinent viewpoints. We earlier had a brief chat about what had "punch" as far as the overall impact of the magazine? What has "punch" for this reader are the "personal journey" contributions — the diversity of those journeys and the diversity of their narration. The responsive reader feels less alone and realises that it is OK to be on a path that is perhaps somewhat shy of the expected norm.

Peter Slocum

THANK YOU

I really value and enjoy your magazine each month. I am not Catholic and find your magazine open, accessible, interesting and loving. I believe all paths lead to Love in the end whatever words are used.

Kate Burness

Looking OUT and IN

Some early mornings I read a book or go walking or talk to my husband. Other mornings I hold my cup of tea and mark a sacred pause before the whirl of cycling to work, tasks, emails, phone calls and texts starts up. Dawn is a time to pray and think. Sometimes I sing a song with the ukulele or write in my journal. Sometimes I find half an hour but often it is just 10 or 15 minutes. This time of quiet helps me set things off on the right foot and know that God is among and beside and with me in the action of the day ahead.

Often when we have gathered with others for a meal there has been a slightly awkward pause at the start of the meal. Are these friends the grace-saying types? I often jump in and offer to say grace or a karakia, or to start off a song to give thanks for the kai and the hands that prepared it (I guess I am a "grace-saying" type). This pausing and acknowledging the gift of food, and God as the source of all goodness, is something I don't think about for very long but it is a valued part of my spiritual practice.

At night my youngest climbs up onto the bunk bed and finally lies flat and still, and we stop to tell each other things we are thankful for from the day just passed. Then we say a short prayer together and sing a goodnight song. The items for thanks are often the same as yesterday (strong legs, friends, fresh bread, U2 and Coldplay sort of things) but that doesn't matter. Sometimes we use a TSP format prayer (Thank You, Sorry, Please). This is a good rhythm to quieten ourselves and prepare for sleep.

There are many spiritual practices that need more "practise". The other day I sat around a table with others and we talked of a friend we all know. She is kind, patient and sincere and also (because she is a human being) has shortcomings. Rather than talk about her courage with many recent health challenges, I gossiped about something negative she did last week. The words I said were not necessary, kind or helpful and I wish I had held my tongue. The practice of speaking good about others is one I need to put into action every day.

I have spent too much of my Christian faith journey trying to parse the details of my beliefs. Teetering around the Bible (that book with so much wisdom and so much that vexes me), I have spent many hours pulling apart and putting back together ideas and doctrines. What is the substance of my faith? Can I develop my own coherent and articulated doctrine? Maybe this doctrine stuff was what I needed in another season but now it seems less important. Joining with others who seek God on a Sunday morning, giving away money often, drinking tea with neighbours, saying sorry. These and other faith practices connect me and propel me forward. Now as I travel beside others on The Way, I am more interested in who someone is, what they do and how they live life than the granular detail of what they believe.

So here is a call-out to spiritual practices. Today and each morning new with grace, birdsong and light, practices of faith can pull me up on my feet and onwards towards the Creator, Redeemer and Giver of Life.

Photo by Louis Hansel on Unsplash

Kaaren Mathias is living in Christchurch with her family. She sings, cycles, writes and sews wizard capes and promotes community mental health in New Zealand and India.

May threads of love
acceptance and kindness
bond us together
into a kaleidoscope of belonging
Spirit of God

From the *Tui Motu* team