

Tui Motu



brother sun and sister moon

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This year is the 800th anniversary of the approval by the Pope of the Franciscan Order. So, *Happy Birthday* to all followers of St Francis. Surely no saint in the calendar – with the possible exception of St Paul – has ever had such a profound influence, inside and outside the church.

Celebrity figures – and this is especially true of saints – always run the risk of being obscured, even disfigured, by myth-making. St Francis, even in his own times, suffered much from this form of fairy tale hagiography.

For that reason we reprint an interesting analysis by John Wijngaards (p 10) of the way in which Francis chose an apostolic rather than a contemplative vocation. He demythologises the story, and so presents Francis's decision-making as a process Christians like ourselves can imitate.

The danger with myths is that we are content to be entertained by them rather than moved to action. St Francis was essentially a man of action. This is brought out in our leading article by Jim Consedine (pp 6-8). Europe in the 13th Century was changing rapidly. It was a civilisation of new towns, new commercial enterprises, as well as robber barons and acquisitive abbots. Francis sent his friars to evangelise the new towns and challenge their new-found wealth and self-indulgence by the friars' simplicity of life.

Many aspects of St Francis's message are equally relevant to our own times. It is a happy coincidence, therefore, that this issue also contains the second of our series, *Building Communities of Hope*, sponsored by the Dominicans – on the *Transition Towns* movement, by Mike Kelly (pp 14-15). This is followed by an interview with a couple, Dugald and Alison MacTavish, describing how a transition town actually works. We read how communities are rebuilt by sharing skills and local crafts.

Breathing much the same spirit, Satish Kumar (pp 12-13) insists on a return to the ideals of sustainability based on small scale enterprise, so that the planet may be saved from the wanton destruction wrought by the economics of globalisation.

Self-delusion seems to be a disease of this age. In terms of scientific progress and cultural achievement it is the 'best of times'; in terms of environmental degradation and economic exploitation of the poor, it is manifestly the 'worst of times'. We badly need a reawakening of the spirit of the 'poor man' of Assisi, to teach us again the virtues of re-creating healthy communities and caring for the earth.

Francis is hailed as patron of the environmental movement. This means much more than preaching to the birds and the fishes. To follow Francis means to turn our backs deliberately on many of the luxuries of our way of life: our easy use of motor cars and planes, our insistence on cheap and abundant consumer goods. The call of Francis today is for us to live more simply – that others may simply live. The loss is to our comfort and convenience. The immeasurable gain is the re-incarnation of true community.

that referendum!

Have you finished beating your wife yet?" This famous example of the 'idiot question' springs to mind when faced with the postal referendum on disciplining children we are being invited to vote on. The wording is so skewed that the referendum becomes a useless exercise, costing the country over \$9 million. Little wonder that both Mr Key and Mr Goff have refused to answer it. The referendum that we really need is a vote to change how such methods of testing public opinion are licensed and worded.

M.H.

this is what I want!

This was the excited cry of a young man 800 years ago, whom the Lord had just spoken to in the words of Scripture. The place was Assisi, Italy. The young man was Francis Bernadone, known to us as St Francis of Assisi.

The words of Scripture he had just heard were: *Go and preach: 'the kingdom of God is near'.*

Heal the sick, bring the dead back to life, heal those who suffer from dreaded skin diseases, drive out demons. You have received without pay, so give without pay.

Do not carry any gold, silver or copper money in your pockets; do not carry a beggar's bag for the trip or an extra shirt or shoes, or a walking stick. A worker should be given what he needs (Mt.10, 7-10).

Francis' new way of life attracted many followers: one or two at first, then hundreds, and ultimately thousands of men and women, who came to be known as the Franciscan family. 2009 marks the 800th anniversary of the approval by Pope Innocent III in 1209 of the original *Rule of Life* drawn up by Francis for his first followers. It encompassed a return to a simpler way of living, deeper prayer, with a profound love of God who is our Creator and who gave us his Son Jesus Christ and Jesus' mother Mary.

Francis lived in turbulent times, caused by class distinction, power struggles,

greed and corruption: all the fruits of human weakness and sinfulness. Instead, Francis preached peace and love of neighbour.

He also preached love and respect for the whole of God's creation, animate and inanimate. This was expressed in his famous poem, the *Canticle of the Creatures*. One stanza reads:

*praised be you, my lord,
through our sister mother earth,
who sustains and governs us,
and who produces various fruits
with coloured flowers and herbs.*

This message has been taken up by many people ever since. The church therefore honours Francis as patron saint of the environment.

As the numbers of Francis' followers grew, so also did the tensions between those who wished to follow Francis's way exactly and those who wished to compromise. Serious divisions took place. In consequence, there are now three First Orders of male religious, all friars – priests and brothers. They are the Friars Minor, the Friars Minor Capuchin and the Friars Minor Conventual.

There is also a 'Second Order', of women religious, known as Poor Clares, who exist in great numbers round the world. They were founded by Francis' friend, St Clare of Assisi. Then there is a Third Order Regular,

men and women religious who have also sought to follow Francis and live a life of penance.

Finally, there are many lay people, single and married, attracted to the preaching of St Francis but unable to become religious. Francis himself provided these with a rule of life, to be lived in their homes, businesses, among their neighbours. Various popes down the centuries have revised this, culminating in the promulgation in 1978 of a new rule by Pope Paul VI. Their name also was changed to the Secular Franciscan Order.

During this year 2009, the Franciscan Family focuses upon and gives thanks for both the grace of our origins and 800 years of faithful service of God. We invite you too to join us in giving thanks.

Lucian Armstrong ofm

year of st paul

With Mike Riddell's final commentary on aspects of Paul's letters (*page 5*), we draw a line under Pope Benedict's *Year of Paul*.

Readers have commented that *Tui Motu* is worth every cent of \$5 just to read Mike Riddell on Paul. Many thanks to Mike.

Correction

Words were omitted in the final paragraph of *Martin de Jong's article on aid funding* (June TM p 9). The sentence should read: "NZAID's supplementary funding of *Caritas Tonga's* programme via *Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand* is done through 'the KOHA scheme', representing about 5 percent of the government's overseas aid spending."



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fr john wallis

I was interested to read about the John Wallis Memorial Lecture in the June *Tui Motu* (pp 10-12). Most readers will not know who John Wallis was.

Fr John founded the *Missionary Sisters of Service* in Tasmania in 1944. In his own words: "There is no other Order of Sisters in Australia quite similar; certainly none with the same programme of full-time missionary work for the people of the outback."

There are two Kiwis in the Order: Maria Kavanagh, sister of the late Bishop of Dunedin and Betty McManus, whose late brother Pat was leader of the Christian Brothers in New Zealand. I had the privilege of being one of his Sisters for a time in the 1970s.

Some of the things Fr John left me with came directly from the *MSS Constitutions*:

- have hospitality of mind and heart;
- there were no red lights in the documents of Vatican II;
- have a sense of zeal for what you do;
- go into the highways and byways for those who are lost;
- do all things well as Jesus did;
- look at big maps; see the big picture;
- keep your eyes on God;
- lastly, Jesus own call: *if you would be a follower of mine, then you must take up your cross every day and come with me.*

Vicki Summerfield, Christchurch

obama's notre dame address

May I comment on Jim Neilan's espousal of Barack Obama's address (*TM June*). The speech handed the President's opponents plenty of ammunition and showed the extent to which the Obama White House is deaf to US Catholic concerns.

Can we question the majority of the US Catholic hierarchy who boycotted the event to express their opposition to the President's radical pro-abortion agendas? Why "wonder" about protesting bishops who were only being faithful to their 2004 document *Catholics in Public Life*, which says that Catholic Institutions should not honour "those who act in defiance of our fundamental moral principles".

letters to the editor

We welcome comment discussion, argument, debate. But please keep letters under 200 words.

The editor reserves the right to abridge, while not changing the meaning.

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

Obama told the Notre Dame students that they can "doubt" their faith even if they "cling" to it. His call for "open hearts, open minds, fair-minded words" is ultimately a plea to doubt the objective tenets of one's faith. In such a world doubt becomes the criterion of faith.

He speaks of the golden rule – to treat one another as we wish to be treated. He does not practise the same conviction in his own political policies on abortion, embryonic cell research – including, most notoriously, the lifting of a ban on federal funding for overseas abortion providers.

Brian Fenton, Wanaka

Obama offered the students a broad and inspiring vision for life. In that sense he was being more 'catholic' than the absent bishops. If he espouses a view on abortion contrary to Catholic orthodoxy, then boycotting him is the least effective way of persuading him. Ed

brazilian abortion

The Catholic Bishops state that the Brazilian abortion issue is "a hugely complex situation" and whilst acknowledging what was done to the nine-year-old girl/woman was wrong, show no compassion for the girl, her mother or her doctor.

What constitutes being acknowledged as a woman as opposed to being a child in the Catholic Church? At nine years old in New Zealand, a girl would have received Holy Communion, may be confirmed, may or most likely not be physically mature re menstruating, and mentally and emotionally be classed legally as a girl child as opposed to being a woman.

To excommunicate her is to show

no understanding at all of her very precarious situation. Physically, for a nine year old girl to carry twins would be very hazardous. Add to that the actual birthing process plus the dreadful obvious emotional and social trauma – and it becomes even more reasonable to ask why all our church hierarchy should be men.

In the sexual abuse issues that our Catholic Bishops have dealt with for several years now, they have shown the perpetrators much compassion and not excommunicated them. Could not they show the same compassion for the girl and her mother?

Commenting, in the manner in which the bishops have done, makes Catholics sound like a 'whacko' cult rather than a mainstream religion. Was the rapist excommunicated? Or was he lucky enough to be an Anglican or a Presbyterian, or just a male?

concerned citizen, Oamaru
(name & address supplied).

the curse of cromwell

I take issue with one thing in Michael Pervan's interview (*TM June*): "The Cromwellians smashed the images... because they had lost their faith."

Cromwell does not have a good press with Roman Catholics, and when one recalls the massacre at Drogheda in Ireland that is not surprising. However, he was aware of his humanity, insisting he should be painted "warts and all".

At the time of the Puritans the established Anglican Church in England had become so elaborate, and in many cases the priests so decadent, that people worshipped ritual and buildings rather than God – a direct contravention of the Second Commandment. The smashing of ornate fittings in churches was a rebellion against this perceived, and in many cases actual, idolatry. To describe such actions as symptomatic of loss of faith is a nonsense.

The Civil War in England was traumatic, but the Puritans were a breath of fresh air for the English, much as Pope John XXIII was for the Roman Catholic Church.

Dennis Veal, Timaru

ring out those bells

Earlier this year I was graced by the delightful presence of 74-year-old Leonard Cohen performing in concert. It was something akin to a religious event – perhaps resembling an extended funeral where the deceased was able to participate in his own farewell. The entire audience was entranced by the talent and humility of a poet/troubadour who has provided the accompaniment to a generation.

Time and again Cohen knelt and doffed his stylish hat to his fellow performers and the audience, as if he were the one privileged to be there. He spoke of his troubled past with drug use and of his exploration of philosophy and religion. But they came to nothing, he suggested, because “cheerfulness kept breaking through”. I know what he means.

He sang one of my favourite songs, appropriately entitled *Anthem*. Chock full of Biblical imagery, the song contains the oft-quoted chorus:

*Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack, in everything
That's how the light gets in.*

I find this to be a profound theological statement about the relationship of humanity to the divine. It summons us away from the quest for perfection and piety, suggesting instead that our own flawed natures are the raw material of God's presence in the world. The ‘crack’ – the inevitable flaw in all of creation – is transformed by grace into a source of light.

Although I doubt he could have sung it so entrancingly, the apostle Paul was the first to articulate this nugget of wisdom – with poetic imagery of his own. His description was that we carry the treasure of the gospel in jars of clay; flawed vessels (2 Cor.4,7). This, he suggests, is to remind us that the source of grace and light is not us but the God within us. It is an insight often lost in the history of Christianity.

This hard-won revelation comes most frequently to those who have suffered in some way; sufficiently so to dent any pride or arrogance in their own ability. Of course we all know of Paul's external traumas, which include imprisonment, persecution and shipwreck. But it seems more likely that it is inner turmoil which undergirds his thinking in 2 Corinthians.

Paul speaks of being “under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life”. Any person who has suffered severe depression will

recognise this sentiment exactly; but it is not one we might have expected from the lips of Paul. He is regarded as the strong man of the New Testament – opinionated and verging on bombastic.

the humanness of Paul

There are various clues in his writing to the fact that life was not always easy for Paul, and that he may have been troubled in body and spirit. He was, quite simply, human. And he suffered from the frailties and misgivings which beset the human condition. Who is there who does not at times feel a fraud, who does not wake in the night fearful, who does not struggle against self-doubt?

It is part of our fallen humanity; a sign of the “clay vessel”; a condition which acknowledges the “crack in everything”. But that is not where Paul's confession rests. Rather, he says, “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Cor.4,8).

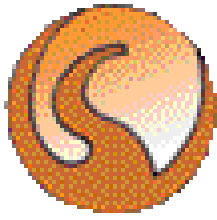
God doesn't save us from illness or weakness or disaster or our own complex self-deception. We suffer as everyone suffers. But none of that negates the beauty and truth of that which we bear witness to, nor the irrepressible hope that these forces can neither destroy us nor are the truth about the universe.

For many years I worked among the psychiatric community. These were men and women whose lives were afflicted with troubles not of their own choosing. They suffered greatly, both inwardly and outwardly. And yet I found among them a humility, a delightful lack of tact, a compassionate caring, an acceptance and a deadly black sense of humour which enriched my life.

The light shines through the cracks. The treasure is to be found in clay jars. Paul's understanding is this: “Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory which outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Cor.4,16-18).

Paul, our great man of faith, was not immune from struggle. He is all too human – argumentative, stubborn and aggressive. Yet he has left us a legacy of beauty and wisdom which continues to beam into our lives. Leonard Cohen urges us “ring the bells which still can ring”. In this year of Paul, let us hear the clear and strong pealing of his words ringing into our world.

Mike Riddell



brother sun and sister moon

*praised be you my Lord with all your creatures
especially sir brother Sun
who is the day – through whom you give us light
and he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour
and bears the likeness of you O highest one.*

*praised be you my Lord through sister Moon and stars
in heaven you formed her – clear precious and beautiful.*

*praised be you my Lord through brother Wind
and for the air – cloudy and serene – and every kind of weather
through whom you give sustenance to your creatures.*

*praised be you my Lord through sister Water
so useful and humble – precious and chaste.*

*praised be you my Lord through brother Fire
through whom you illumine the night
for he is beautiful and cheerful – robust and strong.*

*praised be you my Lord through sister mother Earth
who sustains us and governs us
with fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.*

from Canticle of the Sun – Francis of Assisi



francis

the little poor one of assisi

Jim Consedine

What has St Francis of Assisi got to offer to more than one million people living in the greater Auckland area, who are faced with a government determined to 'solve' Auckland's transport problems by creating more roads and rolling nine local councils into one super-city council? One might think very little. St Francis never drove a car. He didn't use any gasoline and never visited Auckland.

Yet he might have a very important lesson for the people of Auckland as they contemplate their future of a 'big is better' social structure. With our world facing peak oil production and use on top of global warming, we cannot sustain a hydrocarbon economy which continues to chew up resources and spew out gases at an ever-increasing rate threatening the very planet we live on. More highways

and a centralised super-bureaucracy are symbols of a dying system. The super-city notion comes from the same superego stable as failed banks and financial institutions, huge multimillion dollar salaries and gross incompetence. This type of thinking lacks imagination and creativity in the face of a need for a radical change to embrace the Earth and not further damage it.

Francis knew about radical change. He did it himself and lived it. That is why he continues to speak to an age seemingly out of control. His life of simplicity, voluntary poverty and his spiritual vision still resonate in the hearts of humankind today. He remains the archetypal embodiment of a universal spirituality, which sees the divine all around us and recognises the interdependence of all creation. In addition, he remains a champion for the poor and the oppressed of every age. No wonder his appeal is global.

This year we are honouring St Francis, 800 years after the approval of the Franciscan Rule; we reflect on why he has become the most loved and widely-known saint in history; and why he continues to appeal to people of all backgrounds.

the life of francis

Context is everything. We can't understand the Sacred Scriptures properly if we ignore the context in which they were written. The same applies to the life of Francis of Assisi. We run the risk of sentimentalising him if we don't understand the times in which he lived and the events which shaped them.

What was the world like in the early 1200s when Francis lived? Firstly, it was a world totally dominated by the church in every aspect. There was no escaping its influence. There were no nation states as we know them today, independent from the church.

In turn, the church was controlled by an elite consisting of two overlapping groups: the clerical culture consisting of bishops, priests, religious and monasteries, and a wealthy elite of rich families, nobles, business interests and feudal landlords. The family of Francis was numbered among the latter.

According to Leonardo Boff in his 1981 biography of Francis, "beneath the papacy of Innocent III, the church achieved its highest level of secularisation, with explicit interest in dominating the world. It was the

church of the great feudal lords. More than half of all the lands of Europe were ecclesiastical holdings. The monastic life was widely feudalised; to be a monk was... to enter into the system of power, of lands, of material goods."

Secondly, it was a world where the vast majority of people were poor and uneducated. The rich/poor divide was as real then as it is today. Structurally the majority of people were discriminated against by reason of their birth, not their abilities. The institutional church was often more interested in administering its lands and goods than it was in defending the rights of the poor or evangelising them. The church helped maintain these unjust structures in place, often holding them to be of divine origin.

Francis's life of simplicity, voluntary poverty and spiritual vision still resonates in human hearts today

Thirdly, it was the era of the Crusades and the fight against Islam in the Holy Land. In a society built around the twin poles of clericalism and empire, the clerical church believed itself to be the heir to the promises and glory of the Roman Empire. As with empire, might was right in the mediaeval church. Nobles and knights and the middle classes, fuelled by a desire to fight for Christ in ways that only military minds could conjure up, flocked to join the Crusades against the foreign infidels. Those who fought in the Crusades were assured of many indulgences and eternal life if they were killed. Those whom they fought were perceived as being evil and condemned to hell if they died.

francis's conversion

It was from within this context that Francis saw the corrupting influences of power around him and the violence it generated. From the comfort of

his sheltered and wealthy home, he experienced a call for radical conversion to something quite different. When he heard the voice of Christ while praying in the church at San Damiano to "go and repair my Church, which as you see is in ruins", he understood that to be a spiritual renewal from the bottom up.

He sought to turn the model of church on its head by becoming poor and discarding wealth. For him the foolishness of Christ was a far more powerful weapon than any army. Love of enemy, non-violence and peace-making became his weapons, replacing war, the sword and the arrow.

It is important to note his conversion is within the context of the church, not outside it or against it. Francis understood his vocation to be as a servant of the church, acting within it. In order to do this, he moved from the centre of wealth and power that his family had come to represent, to the periphery. As Boff says, "the periphery is where the great prophets arise, where the reforming movements are born and where the spirit flourishes. The periphery possesses a theological privilege because it is there that the Son of God was born."

The dramatic stripping of his clothes in front of his astonished and angry father was Francis's way of symbolically leaving behind the privileges of his upbringing so he could genuinely be poor among the poor. As Joseph Ratzinger (now Benedict XVI) wrote, "Francis's *no* to that type of church could not be more radical. It is what we would call a prophetic protest."

Francis envisaged a new way of being church. He chose to remain a lay person for most of his life and only agreed to be ordained deacon after much persuasion. He felt the laity especially the poor had been pastorally abandoned by the church. The simple living out of the Beatitudes became the cornerstone of his approach to the poor. As Boff says so succinctly: "for





the first time in history, the poor have gained ecclesiological worth and not just charitable value.”

Francis could not tolerate clericalism, and laid down strict laws refusing to allow his followers to accept privileged positions including leadership in the wider church. He instructed his *Friars Minor* not to found new monasteries but rather lives together in small communities and support each other, thus proposing a fraternal model of community rather than a hierarchical one.

In an age when Latin was the norm in church circles, Francis placed the preaching of the Gospel in the language of the people at the forefront of his mission. He wanted ordinary people to get to know and love Christ through their knowledge of the Scriptures.

He was led to see all of creation as reflecting the presence of the divine. While much of his love of animals has evolved into mythology, it remains true that he developed a wonderful love of birds and animals, and he made such love a part of his creation centred spirituality.

The church Francis committed to rebuild was a church of the poor whom he recognised and acknowledged as being closest to God. It was a church of servanthood rather than control and domination, a church that celebrates life in all its created goodness and sees the interconnectedness of all of creation, a church fed on the Word of God and the sacraments and a church that reaches out to those most in need.

st francis for our times

Where do we see the influence of Francis in our own time? In a society dominated by the gods of consumerism and greed for money and power, Francis has become an archetypal figure representing change to a more simple style of life. He is fondly recognised as a patron saint of the ecological movement. He represents simplicity, goodness and a care for the Earth. His statue sits comfortably

in many household gardens in our modern suburbs.

In an age which demands a radical change in lifestyle for the majority of First World people, Francis stands as a model and an inspiration. We should not sentimentalise his efforts. In many respects, his was a harsh life. His voluntary poverty often left him hungry and cold. His peacemaking efforts were the fruit of long hours of prayer and fasting. But his efforts did lead to a liberation of his spirit, leaving him a joyful man. The *joie de vivre* of Francis echoes down through the centuries.

francis represents simplicity, goodness and care for the earth

For many he is a far more important figure than the sentimentalised secular version. Both Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, cofounders of the *Catholic Worker*, were greatly taken with his simplicity, his love of *Lady Poverty*, his closeness to mother earth and all living creatures, his peacemaking efforts and his love of the Beatitudes as the wellspring of spiritual life.

They were attracted by his integrity of spirit, his love of the poor, his vision of the common good, his driving passion to make love the generator binding all social relationships. The *Catholic Worker* movement has long held him up as one of its patrons. Many of the CW houses and farms offering hospitality around the world are named after him, including St Francis CW Farm at Whirinaki in the Hokianga.

Many others have been deeply influenced. The prophet, E. F. Schumacher, author of the 1977 classic *Small is Beautiful*, presented economics in small local models – “as if people mattered” – as being the way to live sustainably. It is a deeply Franciscan model and a fruit of Schumacher’s Christian faith.

More and more this model is seen to make most sense in our own day. However, it does fly in the face of the global free market economic model of the past 30 years so beloved by transnationals and the banking and financial corporations. These same corporations have proved to be liabilities, creating the current financial fiasco. The simple life of Francis stands in stark contrast to these systems.

More recently the *transitional town* movement (see pp 14-17) has reflected something of the Franciscan spirit in its processes. It is a movement which has emerged from the United Kingdom but taken root in many parts, including New Zealand, where already nine towns are following its processes. Basically, it recognises we cannot keep using finite resources like oil and hydrocarbons at the same frenetic pace of recent decades.

The movement seeks ways within local communities to create alternatives that respect the planet we live on and the interdependent relationships which govern it. This leads transitional towns to seek ways of developing things like affordable housing, sustainable transport and shared communal gardens.

They try to create where possible a return to small town economies, the values they represent and the shared accountability that goes when people take personal responsibility for such endeavours. The sense of community is a wonderful by-product of such co-operation. Francis would approve wholeheartedly. The ‘transitional towns’ movement has a Franciscan spirit running right through it.

The spirit of Francis calls us to better judgment, to greater respect for the planet, to work more for the common good and for the need to take back control of and responsibility for our lives. Francis took an option for the poor. He had a heart for social justice. His commitment in his own time remains a challenge to us all in our times too. ■



*cars or homes?
motorways or
neighbourhoods?
community or the auto-
mobile society?*

*Robin Kearns asks
the curly questions
about Auckland's new
motorway*

wrong way!

Placards are beginning to appear on houses in the north-western corner of Auckland City with slogans like ***Tunnel or Nothing***. Aggrieved residents are objecting to a recent government decision on an extension to State Highway 20 that traverses the suburbs of Mt Albert, Avondale and Waterview. This decision is a move away from the previous government's commitment to a fully underground solution and opts for a cheaper version that will only be partially subsurface.

While the Transport Agency acknowledges it will have "greater effects than the all-tunnel scheme", this is cold comfort for those directly impacted. Its widely-circulated flyer seeking feedback carefully avoids mentioning the number of houses that will be removed in the course of the 5.5 km development. The *NZ Herald* reports this figure to be 365. One house destroyed for every day of the year so that motorists will drive unimpeded between one interchange and another! And that's just the households who will be compensated and move. Many others will ultimately be adjacent to the noise and fumes of a very busy highway.

Transport Minister Steven Joyce says he believed the Agency struck "a fair balance between the needs of the local community and those of the country and the economy" in developing this plan. Does the local community agree with such fairness and balance? The placards, letters to the editor and possibly even the resounding defeat in the Mt Albert by-election suggest not.

Significantly, the information flyer speaks of the Transport Agency "managing adverse effects" and "compensation... for any required properties" This is legally correct language and the required olive branch of bureaucracy. But there is little recognition of the emotional ramifications of this decision – the spectre of

homes lost, the uprooting of beloved trees, the scraping bare of memory-filled streets.

The *Automobile Association* reports that the completed ring route will yield an estimated benefit to the economy of \$840 million a year. A big figure for a big road! And yes, many of us will be able to cut minutes off our trips to the airport. The easy route is to applaud convenience.

But people and community are belittled in the shadow of such arguments. For it's not just houses that will be destroyed but homes. And homes are more than houses. A neighbourhood is home writ large; a place where people belong. Streets, paths, parks and corner shops are the common ground for the exchange of familiar glances, shared news and remembering years past. Neighbourhood is the fragile *taonga* that lines drawn from A to B too easily divide.

These are times for other voices to be heard amid the calculus of auto-dominance. Voices that might say:

- what guarantee we'll have petrol to fill our tanks and hurtle along this expanse a decade hence?
- is this not being seduced by induced demand – that more roads will just encourage more cars that will need more roads... an ever-growing cycle?
- and what of cities where motorways have become "so last century"? Like Toronto, where the planned Spadina Expressway was scuttled after sustained opposition.

The difference in Toronto was that the neighbourhoods in the motorway's path included affluent and well-established communities. Would this community-dividing scheme for SH20 have surfaced had it been routed through Remuera rather than an area of modest-income households? ■

Robin Kearns is a Mt Albert resident and urban researcher

how francis experienced christ

Christians brought up on the Little Flowers of St Francis may sometimes think of the mediaeval world as inhabited by saints and demons and miraculous events. How do we 'demythologise' Francis of Assisi so as to make his life relevant today? John Wijngaards shows us how.

“If we were to take the stories about Francis of Assisi at face value, he must have lived in a world shot through with supernatural intrusions. When Francis preached, the birds of the air settled around him and fishes poked their heads out of the water to listen to him. When he prayed at night, angelic choirs could be heard providing appropriate background music. Christ frequently appeared and spoke to him. In other words he experienced God’s presence in a very explicit and miraculous way.

the vocation of francis

“A typical example would be what happened to Francis and his early companions. Francis could not make up his mind whether his little band of mendicant friars should restrict themselves to prayer and contemplation or dedicate their lives to an active apostolate.

“In his *Life of St Francis* St Bonaventure narrates that the brethren argued about it for a long time:

But Francis, true servant of Christ, did not trust in his own efforts or those of his brethren. With urgent prayer he implored God to let him know his Divine Will concerning the matter. Then he was illumined by a divinely revealed oracle. He understood that he had been called by God to this purpose, that he might win back for Christ the souls that the Devil was trying to carry off. Therefore, he decided to live rather for all people than for himself. (*Life*: Ch.iv p. 322, Everyman, London 1973)

“What happened when Francis was ‘illumined by a divinely revealed oracle’? In the context of the other miracles and wonders, does it not suggest that Christ appeared to him in an aura of light. Because we have never seen Christ appear to us in this fashion we are inclined to switch off. And rightly so. Even if these things really did happen to St Francis, it does not help us in the least. By putting Francis’s experiences on the shelf of mediaeval miracles, we may well be doing him, and ourselves, an injustice.

“Yet if we compare independent sources, we can reconstruct the historical events to a high degree of reliability. We have from the 13th Century the *Little Flowers of St Francis*, two biographies of Thomas of Celano and the life of St Bonaventure. We can add the *Mirror of Perfection* (1318). As various traditions have been independently preserved, we can detect the accretions and uncover the historical kernels by comparative study.

what really happened

“In the *Flowers of St Francis*, we read that Francis was in great uncertainty as to what God intended him to do with

his newly founded Order. Should the members be wholly intent on prayer or should they preach? So he decided to seek advice.

“He called Friar Maffeo and sent him with the same request to Sister Clare and Friar Silvester: ‘Please pray devoutly to God that He may be pleased to reveal to me which is the more excellent way: to give myself up to preaching or entirely to prayer.’ After some time Friar Maffeo returned from his mission. Both persons had come to the same conclusion. It is interesting to note how the reply was conveyed to St Francis.

“When Friar Maffeo returned, Francis treated him like a messenger from God. He washed his feet and set a meal before him. Then he took him aside some distance into the forest, knelt down before him, bent his arms in the form of a cross, and asked of him: ‘What is it that My Lord Jesus Christ commands?’

“Friar Maffeo replied: ‘This is the answer that Friar Silvester and Sister Clare received from God: you should go forth to preach throughout the world. Christ has not chosen you for yourself alone, but for the salvation of others.’ When Francis heard these words, he understood they expressed the will of Christ.

what it means

“Here we have an interpretation of what St Bonaventure meant by ‘divinely revealed oracle’. There was no apparition of Christ, no ecstasy. Francis relied on the prayer and insights of two holy persons. The external guidance received and the testimony of his own heart combined to reveal a manifestation of God’s will.

“With our 21st Century everything-or-nothing approach, we might draw the conclusion that nothing happened at all. Apparently we accept only full scale miracles or the dull monotony of everyday life! That is where we miss the point and where the Middle Ages can teach us something.

“Christ may not have appeared to Francis in human form and radiant with light. But does that mean Francis did not have a real experience of Christ in the event? Is it not likely that Francis, who was so open and sensitive to God’s presence, perceived in a flash of insight that it was Christ himself who communicated his will in this way? Bonaventure’s statement is quite accurate: Francis **was** illumined by a divinely revealed oracle.” ■

From *Experiencing Jesus*, pp. 83-86, by John Wijngaards.
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giotto paintings of francis of assisi



Giotto: *Preaching to the birds* (from the legends of St Francis). In the basilica of St Francis, Assisi. (1297-99)

The Florentine painter, Giotto di Bondone (1166-1237) and St Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) were almost exact contemporaries.

The legend of St Francis inspired devotion amongst artists, especially Giotto, whose frescoes in the church at Assisi were painted when he visited with his master, Cimabue the Florentine, between 1296 and 1300. The paintings portray his beloved saint in a naturalistic manner – a break from the Byzantine and Gothic – in flowing mystical colours, sometimes with gilding.

St Francis considered all nature as the mirror of God. This is beautifully illustrated by Giotto's painting of his lecture to the birds. The care and delicacy with which the birds and trees are depicted are clearly the result of an observant nature. The earthy colours give an earthly background for a mystical event. The hands of St Francis are earnestly feeding words of wisdom to his avian audience while those of his companion express surprise. The viewer is invited into this painting by the blue colour which traditionally represents humanity. The charm of the occasion is completed by the external knowledge that the birds flew off in the form of a cross before scattering to the four winds.

The second Giotto painting was chosen because of the topical interest in the relations with the Islamic world. In the contrast between the least of God's creatures and the all powerful Sultan Francis does not change his gentle concern. His deep desire to travel was thwarted by misfortunes. However, he was permitted to visit the Crusaders attacking Damietta in Egypt. In his generosity of mind Francis wanted to meet the Sultan as he had wanted to meet the Moors in Spain and in Acre.

The Sultan reciprocated and was so impressed by his humility and sincerity that he offered him a free and safe visit to the Holy Land. The painting emphasises these Franciscan qualities of the "poor little man of God," who owns nothing standing in this opulence of the architectural form and colour. Yet Francis exudes his own spiritual dignity.



Giotto: *St Francis before the Sultan*. Assisi. (1297-1300)

The *Trial by Fire* was probably apocryphal, but arose from the Sultan asking for a miracle in which God would show the paramount religion. Francis acquiesces whereas the Moslem on the left is turning away.

Perhaps we can learn something from St Francis in the above situation and are indeed fortunate that Giotto, the first of the great painters, has left such a record of Franciscan spirituality in over 40 paintings in Assisi and the Bardi Chapel in Florence. ■

Margaret Ann and Neil Howard

a detail



Giotto: *Ascension of St Francis*. Bardi chapel, Santa Croce, Florence

This undamaged fresco is a study for meditation. The friars are huddled together for support, narrow-eyed with grief. Giotto records individual responses: one raises his hand in salutation, another has a more joyous look.

economics of place

Satish Kumar

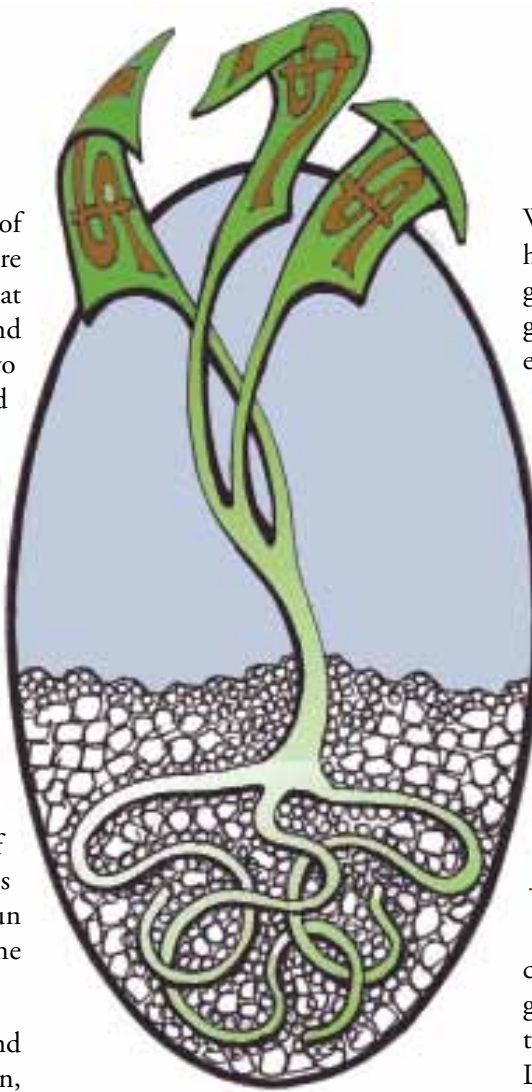
In the beautiful botanical garden of Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) there is a one-thousand-year-old Great Banyan Tree. It has one thousand branches. Each branch forks into two branches; one moves upwards and embraces the sky, the other drops down to put roots in the Earth and thus creates a new trunk to support the skyward branch.

Looking at this ancient tree it is difficult to distinguish which is the original trunk or the original branch. Each new trunk is grounded in its place by putting down new roots to sustain the sky-bound branches. This is one of the most amazing examples of *sustainable growth*: while branches spread skyward reaching for the sun and the stars, the trunks and the roots remain firmly fixed in place.

There is another great tree in England – a magnificent yew in Dartington, churchyard, Devon. Botanists believe that this yew is between 1800 to 2000 years old. Almost as old as Christianity itself and the tree was there long before the church!

“What is the secret of the sustainability of this great yew?” I asked one of Dartington’s gardeners.

“The roots of this tree are as broadly and deeply embedded in place as the branches are spread wide and high in the sky. Of course, you don’t see the



roots but they reflect the branches you can see,” the gardener answered.

“Is this true of most trees?” I enquired.

“Yes it is. The great oak, the birch, the Lebanese cedar you see here in the garden are all embedded in their place. They have extensive networks of roots underground. If the trees did not have a sense of place they would not survive”.

What a perfect illustration of balance, harmony and wholeness. Outward growth complemented with inward growth. If only the globalisers of the economy learned from the trees; if only the bankers, hedge-fund holders, stockmarket managers, financial experts and economists would see this relationship between inner growth and outer growth.

If only manufacturers and retailers would realise that the economics of the planet has to be built on the economics of place. Economics without a sense of place should have no place. The breadth of the economy has to be in balance with its depth.

We cannot save the planet and destroy the place. We cannot serve the interest of the global community and undermine the interest of the local community. Large is lovely only if it is balanced by the beauty of the small; if we allow the small to diminish, then one day the large too will perish.

Large banks are facing a sorry state of affairs because they have swallowed up small saving banks and mutual societies; we sowed the seeds of the credit crunch when we abolished the credit unions; we laid the foundation of the economic downturn when we blindly pursued the path of unlimited economic growth. What goes up comes down.

So the economy has to stay within the parameters of ecology, ethics and equity. Day and night we chant the mantra of 'economy' while our ecology is in ruins, our ethics have been shelved, our principles of justice and equity are put on the back-burner.

We blindly follow the religion of materialism, we worship the god of money, and we sacrifice everything at the altar of the economy. We indulge in consumerism as if there were no tomorrow. As a result, in the short term, banks are running out of money, consumers are short of cash, house prices are tumbling and unemployment is rising. In the longer term, we face global warming, global terrorism, global poverty and population explosion.

The cause of these multiple crises is our disconnection with the place to which we belong. Wherever we live we need to be rooted in our place. If each and every one of us took care of our place, our home, our community, the soil by which we are sustained and the biosphere of which we are an integral part, then the whole planet would be taken care of.

Being embedded in a place is a prerequisite for being free to look up at the sky and embrace the world. Love of place and love of planet are two sides of the same coin; when we belong to a place we belong to the planet.

I wish everyone would join the NIMBY (*Not in my back yard*) movement! If every backyard were saved from motorways, airports, industrial estates, business parks and superstores, then the whole country would be saved from them.

It amazes me to see that economists, industrialists, business leaders and politicians have forgotten the true meaning of economy. They only think in terms of profit maximisation and increased money supply, whereas the true economy means good housekeeping; proper management of all aspects of the home.

The criterion of good house management is to ensure that all the members of the household are living in harmony with each other and the place. And of course home is always a particular place. Money is only a means to a good economy, not the economy itself.

So, in order to address the root causes of the economic downturn and the recession we face, we need to revisit the theory of economics; otherwise, the cycles of boom and bust will continue to infect our societies. The present financial crash and market meltdown offer us an opportunity to look deeply and design a new paradigm of sustainability. The economics of debt and derivatives is fake and fragile. Bottom-up economics based on trees and *terra madre* (soil), on people and place is resilient and reliable.

The days will soon begin to lengthen until we reach the spring equinox and continue to do so until the summer solstice when we enjoy the balmy summer mornings and warm evenings – but we cannot have such long summer days for ever. After the solstice day length declines and we have to accept the dark winter nights. Only near the equator can we have days and nights in equilibrium. The challenge for politicians, economists and business leaders is to find an 'economic equator', a market

equilibrium so that we can enjoy a "steady state economy".

People talk about making poverty history, but to do that we also have to make wealth history. The very wealthy are the other side of very poor; higher mountains are bound to create deeper valleys. A culture of equilibrium requires balance, harmony, proportionality and a sense of place. Without them we are bound to suffer boom and bust.

There are two roads to economic recovery. The first is the conventional road; to bail-out the banks and fuel consumerism, put more money in mortgages and hope to get back to business as usual. But the second, more genuine, option is to think holistically and invest in land and agriculture, in renewable energy and practical skills. The Earth is our true bank. We are at a crossroads – which path are we going to choose? The answer should be obvious.

Economics of place is the key to a steady state economy. Let us celebrate our place, and build an economics of place. ■

This article first appeared in the March/April issue of Resurgence, written by its editor Satish Kumar. It is reprinted with their kind permission.

www.resurgence.org

Hope is our Song conference

Labour weekend – 23-25 October. Palmerston North

workshops so far confirmed:

- Helene Mann: *Hope, Peace and Creation – Our Celtic Heritage*;
- Brian Dawson: *Singing to the Lord in a digital age*;
- Graham Parsons: *They won't sing in our church*;
- Barry Brinson: *Leading singing from the keyboard*;
- Barry Brinson: *Writing arrangements for band or instrumental groups*;
- Pamela Tankersley: *The use of hymns in worship apart from being sung*;
- Douglas Nyce: *The use of SOLFA in the training of church singers*;
- Bill Bennett: *Resourcing church music for small churches*;
- Colin Gibson & Marnie Barrell: *A conversation on writing hymn texts*.

For updates, see NZ Hymnbook Trust website: www.hymns.org.nz

transition towns

*How can we grow better communities, asks Mike Kelly?
Mike notes he isn't the only one perplexed and reluctant to face this.
The church too has been in denial. It was then he stumbled on
the concept of transition towns.*

Like the church, I was a bit slow in coming to realise the full impact of what is happening to our planet: that for various reasons, including the effects of human exploitation of natural resources, our world faces collapse. Like the church, I was caught between two understandings of creation: the old one, that humankind was given the mandate to subdue and dominate the earth; and the gentler one, that our task is to cultivate and care for it.

I was also aware that among the arguments about where we are going, there is another dichotomy: some people regarded humans as evil and destroying a beautiful planet, while others argued for development and technology as the purpose of life.

I had lived years of growing concern about the prevalence of chemicals in our food and other parts of life; of wanting to live more healthily and more simply; of thinking about the depletion of so many natural resources; of watching the growing gap between rich and poor; of becoming convinced that marginalisation and alienation are social evils that can be overcome by building communities.

And I knew about the prodigious efforts by many people, including Christians, to reach out for a new understanding of our place in the

universe and to warn people like me of the consequences of doing nothing. The church took a long time to come to that commitment: at one time the Vatican hosted an American-inspired conference in Rome where an aggressive scepticism was the theme.

Then I stumbled upon a phenomenon called *Transition Towns*. It is a concept that arose from its founder's observation that we face twin facts that will, in the foreseeable future, cause an inescapable change to life on earth. The two facts are *Peak Oil* and *Global Warming*. Peak Oil refers to that fact that we have now passed the time when new sources of oil will continue to be discovered – with earth-shaking results on our way of life. Global Warming speaks for itself.

Transition Towns (TT) is an attempt not merely to deal with the consequences of these twin catastrophes, but to see them as an opportunity to build something better than what we now have.

It seems a little doom-laden as it considers the inevitable changes – at any rate, the losses – that face a world of scarce oil and climate change: transport becoming expensive and difficult, lack of power from coal, gas and electricity, the abandonment of all types of plastics (including most modern fabrics), unavailability of

many common chemicals (fertiliser, pesticides, medicines), coastal flooding, collapse of communication systems.

Rather than seeing all this as disaster, TT asks: *how can we use this situation to remake a world, a better world?*

- Without transport, then what? We need to rebuild local communities.
- Without power, then what? We can rediscover skills and abilities that our forebears knew and found satisfaction in.
- Without chemicals, then what? We need to discover the gifts of nature that can feed and clothe and heal us.
- Without electronics, we can learn to revalue the gifts of time and talk.

For me, this has been a revelation. I see this in two respects:

(1) The Green Revolution is not just about seeing ourselves as merely part of an all-embracing nature. Rather, for us Christians, the fact of the Incarnation has enormous implications, recognising that God becoming human means that the human and natural environment is a part of the redemption and a function of our humanity and our connection to our world.

(2) We must acknowledge that we are not merely functions of an economic and technological state, but members of communities, neighbourhoods, societies who can live and grow and

make meaning together as we could never do as cogs in the machine.

a pax christi initiative

Patrick Doherty, of *Pax Christi*, reports on a programme originating out of the USA but being adapted by *Pax Christi Aotearoa New Zealand*.

The programme is parish-based and entitled *Listening to Earth: faith and action in a time of global crisis*. It is solidly founded on Catholic social

teachings, and aims to renew the local faith community through prayer, study and action.

Each session includes lots of stories, concentrating on those which speak of environmental injustice. Stories are followed by group discussion and prayer.

It has been found that behaviour change rarely occurs simply through the provision of information. Effective, long-term change generally occurs in a

community setting. This programme is designed to provide a non-threatening environment whereby the participants can move into action with members of the group making commitments to change and following them through.

Many small and large communities around the world have groups of people following a *Transition Towns* agenda. There are more than 50 here in New Zealand. ■

See <http://www.transitiontowns.org.nz>

transition town in east otago

The Hampden Community Energy Group started operating in 2005. Locals Dugald MacTavish and his wife Alison had been reading up on the global energy crisis. They saw that the arguments made sense. So they resolved to do something about it

“We phoned up various local people inviting them to a meeting. We based it on an article in the *Listener* in 2003, written by Rick Sibson. It was about *Peak Oil*. We then arranged a meeting with a group of speakers including Anton Oliver and some Otago University academics. There was also a movie doing the rounds called *The End of Suburbia*. It describes the decline in availability of oil and its effect on communities in the United States which are totally dependent on the automobile. The question is: *what to do when the oil runs out?*

“This meeting led to much discussion, and all sorts of possibilities were put up. We prioritised four aspects:

- putting up signs in the town to attract public attention;
- installing solar water heating;
- running ‘classes’ to inform and educate;
- starting a local market.

“A local market would mean people don’t have to travel so far for their shopping needs and thus it would make the community more self-reliant. Most people in Hampden travel 45 km to Oamaru or 80 km to Dunedin for shopping. The ingrained habit has been to hop into the car to shop, for essential services, even for entertainment.



Hampden ‘transition town’ organised litter recycling collection. When everyone goes to the local town for everything, the villages start to die.

“At one of the first workshops, someone got up and said: ‘looking around this meeting, there aren’t many locals here’. Then someone else suggested the locals should put their hands up – and it was most of the people in the hall! Lots of the people there simply didn’t know their own neighbours. It





Hampden: building the cob oven

was a powerful moment: it showed how weak the local community had become. Once upon a time you would get together for activities such as sport, but now you can drive off to something a bit plusher in Oamaru.

“We have found that this initiative to make something else happen seems to have generated a life of its own. Now there are yoga classes,

classes for Tai Chi, for ballroom dancing and computer classes. The only visible change in the village is a cob oven set up in the centre, made of clay. It’s a usable oven. However, outside the hall it’s our only bricks and mortar initiative. Our real focus has been to start new activities and try to change attitudes and behaviour.

solar heating

“Half a dozen homes so far have gone in for solar heating, so there is some interest there. We proposed to the local power people that they might consider installing solar water heating units in our homes, and when the units were up and running we would pay them back through our energy savings. We saw this as an imaginative pilot scheme, which might eventually spread to the whole town.

“The local network company seems a bit reluctant - I suppose, because there would be financial risk and of course ultimately they would be selling less electricity. We have even suggested building a local wind-powered generator.

“We think government at all levels should see this sort of scheme as a priority: to insulate houses, install solar water heating, perhaps start local power generation. If the local council were to initiate this, they would be able to do it on a scale to attract the most efficient contractors, and it would be done very reasonably and without risk. Solar heating panels cost about \$3-4000 for an average sized home. Now that electricity is becoming so much dearer, installing them becomes economically attractive.

“The outcome of these initiatives is that communities and individuals become more self-reliant. Even if the power network were to break down as it did a couple of years ago after the storm in South Canterbury, everyone would still have hot water. Educating people also gives them the skills to survive such crises.

sharing skills

“At the local library, on a Saturday morning, from time

to time we run demonstrations to get locals to share their skills. Making cheese, how to make pasta, sewing a rag rug: these are examples of simple domestic skills. And it encourages people to find out how to make things for themselves. Now there are people making their own sea salt and learning how to cure and salt food.

“Each demo lasts for an hour or two, and each attracts a small interested group. We had a morning on how to graft apple trees – and that attracted about 20 people, which is satisfactory for a little community.

“We also had a specialist potato grower come in, to help local growers. We even thought we might get a scheme started to grow kumara in this area, using hotbeds. Kumara hasn’t been grown south of the Waitaki River. It would be something to develop new crops like that.

“At one time we ran these demonstrations two or three times a month. People began to see their library in a new light - as a source of valuable information. They would come, interact with their neighbours, then go away with new ideas and new friends. You soon learn about the resourceful people who live roundabout. A lot of the older people especially have much wisdom to offer.

“By sharing our knowledge we can make new ventures easier. For example, someone had a cow with mastitis, and it transpired they didn’t know how to milk it. There were locals who had these skills, so the owners were put right - and we had a happier cow! The philosophy of this is to share what you have in the way of skills rather than having to go a distance and find an ‘expert’.

the local market

“For two years now we have been having a market in the town every two months, usually when there’s a public holiday. They are always on Saturday mornings and are widely advertised. They attract 25 to 30 stalls and people come from quite a distance, both to buy and sell.

“Unfortunately we have run into problems with local government ‘health and safety’ regulations. To sell prepared food entails paying quite hefty fees, and it has to be prepared in commercial grade kitchens. Vegetables and garden produce of course can be sold with much lower fees. It’s interesting that if we were selling for charity, all the



Hampden: the local market helps encourage

regulations would be waived. Apparently it's officially okay to poison people if it's for charity!

"The local council insist on imposing charges because they say they have to monitor whether things are being done hygienically. The fee in the Waitaki region is \$440 per year simply to sell produce on a stall. Anything processed costs more – \$35 per food stall per market – and it must be prepared in a commercial grade kitchen.



Large local growers

"We have asked them to ease these charges, because they are actually hindering our operation, even though health risks are minimal. Our people would far rather buy something from a grower they know than buy an anonymous can of peas in the supermarket.

"So we've had to struggle a bit with bureaucracy. During the recent summer we tried mini-markets every week with

just half a dozen or so stalls. This was more a question of selling to locals or to summer visitors. People sold plants, produce, herbs, even surplus books from the library, mixed stalls which might sell cucumbers along with some craft work. They were fun meetings, and they attracted less bureaucratic attention.

"One of the keys to 'transition' in a community is commitment: people have to come regularly and support what is going on. It's a bit like going to church. The interaction needs to be regular, and then people really get to know one another.

"One of the features of a self-reliant community is building up the local economy. Markets provide an outlet for people



Finding out what you've got: "So what variety of apple is this one?"

with a surplus to dispose of. A little old lady might just have a few pears to sell off her tree. But someone else might be growing produce specially in their market garden or making cheese to sell.

the apple day

"This year we celebrate the 130th anniversary of Hampden as a borough. We thought we might kick it off with an *Apple Day*. We held it in April when the apple crop was ripe. The aim was to try and identify varieties which have been growing hereabouts for a hundred years. Then these could be grafted in August onto root stocks. The new trees would then be planted out - a sort of gift from the past to the future.

"An apple man from Oamaru came down and he was keen to show us how to make cider. A group came up from Riverton and brought samples of some 70 apple varieties. A local expert from Palmerston came, so that people could bring along their own samples to be identified.

"Then we had demonstrations of what you can do with apples, like making cider. A working cider press attracted a lot of attention. Cooks shared their knowledge of old apple recipes, and a Swiss lady demonstrated making Apfelstrudel. All this was held for about four or five hours in the Community Hall, and it attracted over 500 people. So it was highly successful.

"Of course there are still people in the community who think we are 'bananas'. They are the ones who didn't come to hear the Hampden Apple Day: the apple crusher in action scientists in the first place, so have not been a party to the education process. They tend therefore to become defensive. That's why local gatherings and demonstrations are so important. Someone will come along casually, have a yarn and a cup of tea; they become interested and they join in. And they learn what it's all about.

"The most difficult part is changing the opinion of a whole population. It's basically a community activity. We want this change to be for the townsfolk of Hampden. You cannot expect everyone to be in the same place at once. But by working together and providing something which people can see improves life in our community, we have real hopes for the future." ■

photos supplied by Alison MacTavish & Doreen Dunckley



the music of trinity

Glynn Cardy

In J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* Harry and his friends face the imposing obstacle of a large aggressive dog called Fluffy who has three heads and is pacified by music. In popular Christian culture God is similarly portrayed as a three-headed being called Trinity.

Each head – or face – of the Trinity has its own peculiarities. The First *Persona* of the Trinity is traditionally called 'God the Father'. It is the unbegotten source and Creator of all, as well as the *abba* to whom Jesus prayed.

abba the father

The problem with this First *Persona* is that as scientific knowledge has grown its head has shrunk. We now know that a Creator did not make human beings as a potter makes a pot, or put stars in the sky like a parent hangs mobiles from a child's ceiling. Life took billions of years and billions of mistakes to evolve. The evolutionary force is neither kind nor cruel, it is indifferent. The craftsmanship of a consistent loving creator is not obvious or verifiable.

Further, the gendered labelling of this *Persona* as 'Father' has brought its own problems. Initially the problem was that 'Father' inferred prior existence and superiority to, not co-eternal and coequal with, the Second *Persona*, 'the Son'. In the last century the problem has been with this God's masculine



and unfathomable beauty both beyond us and yet, inexplicably, reaching out to touch us. We can look at, describe, and despair of the crude theological instrument called 'the First *Persona* of the Trinity'. However, it's like being fixated upon a musician and the musician's instrument as if they are of ultimate and eternal importance, when what is really of value is the sublime *music* that can reach out and into the far corners of our soul.

christ the son

The second head or face of Trinity is Christ. The early Christians' experience of Jesus shaped their understanding of God. They experienced Jesus as a loving friend, as a prophetic boundary-breaker, as inclusive of women, foreigners, and other outsiders, and as courageous suffering. "God was in him", they said. In Jesus they touched God.

gender and the tradition's affirmation of patriarchy. As Mary Daly famously said, "When God is male, the male is God." The notion of Trinity elevated and sanctified male power.

Yet despite these problems this first head of the God, when stripped of some of its antiquated metaphor, says something spiritually important. Within our human experience there are glimpses of wonder, mystery,

The Council of Chalcedon [451 CE] asserted that Jesus was "truly God and truly a human being" without attempting to say how such a paradox was possible. The philosophical debates around and following the Council all failed to affirm *both* Jesus' deity and humanity. The combatants came down either on one side or the other; and have continued to do so down the centuries. Was he divine, human, a blend, or did he put on his

humanity like an overcoat just for our weather?

Trinity was an attempt by the Early Church to put the Jesus of experience into the heart of divinity. Traditionally this has been portrayed as the earthly Jesus being elevated into the heavenly God. However, it is more accurate to understand the Incarnation as locating and grounding God in human experience. Instead of a King Jesus sitting on a heavenly throne, we have God suffering at Calvary, Auschwitz, Deir Yassin, and Guantanamo Bay.

God was fully God in humanity. God was not just fully God in Jesus' humanity, but actually and potentially in our humanity too. All those God attributes of love, power, creativity, suffering, forgiveness and grace were in Jesus and are, if we allow them to be, in us. Our relationships are the locus of divinity. God is earthed, as God has always been. There is no extra-terrestrial God.

Again music, poetry, and the creative arts are more and better able to express this dance of divinity and humanity, this blending and enrichment of love, this merger of heaven and earth, this majesty of humanity and commonness of divinity.

the holy spirit

The third head or face of Trinity is that of the Spirit. In the Bible She first appears as *ruach* hovering over the chaos. The 'bird' imagery persists, but breath, fire and wind are also associated with Her. In the Greek Her feminine tense is neutered as *pneuma*, but is never made male. The Spirit darts in and out of Biblical scenes and is never wholly tamed. On some She alights, on some She plops, and some She drives wild.

Not surprisingly She has been the most controversial of the Trinity threesome. Initially the Spirit wasn't taken as seriously as the male duet of Father and Son. She was God, but not fully God. Thankfully those latter crafters of the Trinity doctrine,

the Cappadocians, insisted upon her inclusion.

Throughout history the church has usually wanted to restrain the Spirit with their Biblical understandings and restrict Her to the dictates of church councils. It is interesting though that within the make-up of what has largely been an authoritarian male Godhead there has remained this free Spirit: creative, feminine and potentially anarchistic.

In 1410 the Russian Andrei Rublev painted a famous icon. On the one hand it portrayed the scene from *Genesis 18* of Abraham and Sarah's three visitors at the Oaks of Mamre. On the other hand it was an insight into the Trinity, three distinct androgynous beings communing together. Yet the mystics tell us that in this icon the Trinity is not what we see in the foreground. Trinity is not the three beings but a way of being. It is not the beings of Father, Son and Holy Ghost but the background 'betweenness' that is God.

I began with J.K. Rowling's Fluffy the fictional three-headed dog. The way of thinking of God as a three-headed being is similarly fictional. Trinity arose from reflecting on a singular way of being [Jesus] and grew into three God-beings. Yet the Trinity is not about three beings but rather a way of self-giving being. It is a flow of love energy.

The three *Persona* [Source, Christ, and Spirit] are signs pointing to a way. They are not what is signified, or the destination. They are not God. A three-headed God-being is too static, too fixed, and ultimately becomes an idol. People are seduced into sitting and worshipping a stationary signpost.

On the contrary it is better to think of Trinity as a piece of music, a movement of grace, gift, and transformation. It is wild, passionate, forgiving and free. Trinity points to God as a verb rather than a noun, loving rather than lover, giving rather than giver, and shedding rather than accumulating power.

For too long Trinity has been used to maintain a patriarchal image of three hierarchical beings – two of whom were male – as the Christian presentation of God. For too long it has been used to justify the elevation of 'fathers' to reign over women. For too long it has been used to denigrate Jews and devalue the insights of people of other faiths. It has become a three-headed monster.

We need to remember, listen to and play the music rather than look at old musicians and analyse their instruments. We need to pull our God back down to earth, toppling all the gods off their thrones of power. We need to pray our God into the pain of living and into the reality of love. We need to humbly dance transformative possibility with those of any faiths. When there is no difference between

who is 'christ'

'Jesus' refers to the man who lived and died in Palestine some two thousand years ago. 'Christ' refers to that essence of Jesus that transcended death and is in the heart of God. It's not a male historically-limited being that is in the heart of God, but a transformative suffering love that can be portrayed (as artists frequently do) as a child, a woman, or a man.

In 1984 a sculpture called Christa was hung in the Cathedral of St John the Divine, New York. It was a crucifix with a woman hanging on it. We need to understand the 2nd Persona of the Trinity much more broadly and radically than another male lording it over the earth.

Glynn Cardy is Vicar of St-Matthew-in-the-City and Archdeacon of the Anglican diocese of Auckland

practising non-violence

Jesuit John Dear is a busy man. As pastor, peace activist, chaplain, lecturer and retreat leader his schedule takes him across North America. But over the past two decades he's also found time to publish 20 books. "You will be My Witnesses: Saints, Prophets and Martyrs" was published recently by Orbis. Here Gerry McCarthy asks him what it is that motivates him

thérèse of lisieux

When I reach Fr Dear in Madrid, New Mexico, I ask him about St Thérèse of Lisieux, who is among the 30 witnesses he selected for the book. "She probably would be dismissed by many peace and justice people," he says, "because we assume she is the epitome of just being nice and that's all you have to do. I disagree with that, and I've studied her extensively for 25 years."

Fr Dear says Thérèse of Lisieux has much to teach us today. "First of all she is a teacher of personal and interpersonal non-violence," he says. "I included her in the book because I think Jesus wants us to be non-violent in every area of life. Not only when it comes to waging war or building bombs to blow up the planet, but to be non-violent to the people around us and toward ourselves."

Fr Dear is particularly concerned about the widespread self-hatred and inner violence in North America. "That's why suicide is high in the United States," he explains. "There is just so much destructive personal behaviour."

He says Thérèse of Lisieux "clearly and consciously" worked against that

self-destructive behaviour by using the basic teachings of the Gospel. "She is trying to go deep into inner non-violence and to practice it perfectly toward herself and the other women in the convent," he adds.

He also says Thérèse of Lisieux wrote some beautiful things about accepting her own weaknesses. "That's a profound insight for our personal lives, but also politically" he says.

*In the U.S. culture
you're only somebody if you have
a lot of money and possessions.
That is at the heart
of violence.*

"That's what Gandhi did. He said we're going to accept our weakness as the people of India, and use weakness and powerlessness as a power to bring down the British Empire."

non-violence

But Fr Dear admits practising non-violence in our daily lives is challenging. "I've been a Jesuit for 25 years," he says. "When you start rubbing elbows with people around you – then you want to get violent. Just like in any ordinary family."

But he adds: "In the end you have to be non-violent with yourself, family, friends and neighbours if you want to contribute to the non-violent transformation of the world – everything is connected."

But Fr Dear is particularly well known as an activist. In 1984 he was first arrested for civil disobedience at the Pentagon. Since then he's been arrested more than 75 times for acts of civil disobedience against war, nuclear weapons and the death penalty.

During our conversation, I ask him what it means to be non-violent. "For me being non-violent means seeing every human being on the planet as my sister and brother. That we're all one and already reconciled," he says. "If you go into that spiritual vision of reality you can never hurt anyone again, much less be silent while 35 wars are raging in the world, hundreds of millions are starving, and twenty thousand nuclear weapons are threatening the entire planet."

As he discusses non-violence, Fr Dear is particularly critical of the war on terror. "One of its lies is that we are in a war on terror," he says. "But war is the ultimate form of terror. You cannot fight terrorism through terror – that's just going to breed further terror."

He adds: “The U.S. has thousands upon thousands of nuclear weapons and it’s holding the entire world hostage. But these weapons don’t make us safer. They actually can’t physically protect us, and anyone that was in New York City the morning of September 11 will tell you that. I was there. The nuclear arsenal wasn’t protecting us. It’s a lie.

daniel berrigan

I want to ask Fr Dear about some signs of hope today, and I can’t help but mention Jesuit priest and peacemaker Daniel Berrigan who once said: “You find hope when you do hopeful things.”

This prompts Fr Dear to speak about Berrigan as his teacher and mentor. “Dan remains a light of peace and a voice of truth like none other in the United States,” he says. “He’s a saint and holy prophet. He changed my life. It’s why I entered the Jesuits and remain a Jesuit – and why in the past I’ve ended up in prison.”

He says Berrigan is ignored by the culture and media. “But his focus is on the God of peace,” he says. “He’s practising the Gospel and doing hopeful things. Dan has more faith, hope, and love than anybody I know in this country. He’s still my teacher and I’m trying to do hopeful things too as he taught.”

During our conversation, Fr Dear takes a moment to speak about the prevailing culture of wealth, celebrity, and status. “In the U.S. culture you’re only somebody if you have a lot of money and possessions,” he says. “This is what’s at the heart of violence.”

He continues saying: “In the West and certainly in the peace movement in the West we’re all about results, making a difference, and making it happen. That’s exactly what’s wrong. That goes against the entire spiritual life. Because that’s the way the Pentagon thinks.” He continues saying: “The Gospel doesn’t talk about results. It does talk over and over again – especially in the

Gospel of John – about having a fruitful life. That if you go deep into love your life will bear good fruit.”

As he speaks about this culture of status, Fr Dear recalls what Thomas Merton once said. “You live a quiet, prayerful life. Speak the truth. Say your prayers, and do what you can to help end the wars in the world – and God will do the rest. Your life will bear good fruit and touch many people.”

until his last second Jesus is turning to god: ‘Here I come, I’m your beloved.’

He adds: “That’s very different from trying to be effective, results-oriented, or successful. Now you’re really on the path to holiness, spirituality, and faith.”

the loss of imagination

In his writing on non-violence, Fr Dear frequently speaks about the “loss of imagination” as one of the casualties of violence. “We have to become people of active, creative non-violence, every one of us, everywhere, to become teachers and champions and heralds and apostles of creative non-violence,” he writes.

But he says that’s not happening where it should. “I blame a lot of Christian people in the U.S. for supporting war and a war-making state. We’re just not faithful to the non-violent Jesus,” he says. “Each of us has a responsibility to stand up and say *no* to all of this – and to take action and to demand a new future of non-violence.”

When it comes to non-violence, Fr Dear says you can’t just talk about it. “You have to practise it,” he explains. “You have to stand up publicly and get involved in grassroots peace and justice movements and do something.”

But he adds a cautionary note. “You don’t have to do everything. That’s another mistake. But you’ve got to do

something, and do it well, with love, a good heart, and lots of faith.”

As our conversation came to a close, I ask him about the essence of practising non-violence. “My friend Henri Nouwen talked a lot about being the *beloved* sons and daughters of God,” he says. “He said that was the breakthrough for Jesus in the Jordan River. During his baptism Jesus hears the voice saying ‘You are my *beloved*’. From then on he hit the road running. Until his last second when he died on the cross Jesus is turning to god: ‘Here I come, I’m your *beloved*.’ He lived his whole life with that relationship.”

Fr Dear adds that: “In terms of the spirituality of peace and non-violence, a positive sign is claiming that as our true identity. The culture is always trying to tell you that you’re a nobody. Or you’re somebody if you vote this way, or buy this car. It’s ridiculous. But Jesus is saying your primary identity is you are the beloved of God, and God is the God of peace.” ■

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A Celebration of Community

Anna Holmes

On Sunday 26 April 2009 a wonderful celebration of community occurred in Diamond Harbour, near Christchurch. The new Community church of St Andrew was dedicated. This beautiful small church is in the middle of Diamond Harbour, next to the Fire Station.

Dominating the wall behind the altar is a set of five tapestries showing the *Parable of the Sower* set against the hills and sea of Diamond Harbour. These were designed by a local artist, Fran McFarlane, and woven by her, Sheena Lyne and Alistair Greet, together with 320 members of the community, between 2002 and 2003. The wonderful warm colours are echoed in the rest of the church. It is a marvellous symbol of community, the weaving together of so many different strands.

Diamond Harbour is a small settlement on Lyttelton Harbour across the water from Lyttelton. It has a population of 1389. The first church was the

disused Golf Club pavilion, bought in 1951 by the local Anglican Congregation and named St Andrews Church, after the famous golf course in Scotland, so the story goes.

In 1967, a porch was added, and the local Fire Station donated a bell which was hung in the porch. This bell was given by the *Lyttelton Harbour Board* to Diamond Harbour Community as a fire bell in 1949. It was made in Sydney at Russell Foundry and was probably originally a ship's bell.

In 1996, St Andrews became a community church, when the Presbyterians and Methodists agreed to work and worship there with the Anglicans. In 1997 Fr Jim Consedine and the Catholic community were invited to use the church and did so gladly. Prior to that they had used the community hall which was very large and rather cold in the winter.

In 1999, the decision was taken to sell the old church and build a hall, library and church on a much larger site donated by the Presbyterian church. Fund-raising was undertaken by all four church communities – Anglicans, Presbyterians, Catholics and Methodists.

A building committee was set up and there were long discussions about many things. I recall one meeting where those members of the committee who were moved by God in creation, were at loggerheads with those who thought the beautiful views would distract from worship. To my delight the new church has long windows which allow the contemplation both of the harbour and the hills.

The hall opened in 2002 and has been used since as a church and for community activities.

There were then problems raising enough funds to build the church. However, God provided. A sum of money almost exactly fitting the needs became available to finish the church. It was started in November 2008 and finished in time for Easter in April 2009.

The fire brigade had reclaimed the bell when the old church was sold, and rang it at their 50th anniversary in 2005. This bell has been gifted back to the new church and fitted with an electric striking device. It was handed over at the dedication and rung 12 times. The sanctuary furniture, tabernacle and sanctuary lamp were made by Richard Coop, a parishioner. On the right of the Altar is a lovely icon of St Michael made by Fr Michael Elder.

As might be expected after all the community involvement, the Dedication of this new church was also a community affair. People who had been involved at some stage came back from far and wide. There were 200 or more people packed into the church and hall. A number of previous Vicars and Ministers and the present and past Catholic priests were all there.

The church was dedicated by Victoria Matthews, Anglican Bishop of Christchurch; Fr. Rick Loughnan, Catholic Vicar General of Christchurch; Susanne Spindler, Assistant Superintendent of the Methodist Central South Island Synod; and Reverend Paul King, Moderator of the Presbytery. Prayers were led by lay members of all the congregations, and a delightful drama, of The Wise Man who built on rock and the Foolish Man who built on sand, was given by the Youth Group.

Afterwards we all feasted on a sumptuous afternoon tea provided by families bringing a plate in the time honoured New Zealand rural tradition. What a wonderful celebration it was of a true community which is welcoming and hospitable in the very best Christian tradition. It is a great sign of hope to share this Pentecost. ■

birthday behind bars

Carol Ransley

Sitting inside a small, purpose-built cell within Burma's notorious Insein prison, Aung San Suu Kyi turned 64 on 19 June. Suu Kyi, no stranger to long periods of isolation, will most likely spend part of her day in meditation: a practice that she admits sees her through the most difficult times.

For the first time, rather than being under house arrest, Suu Kyi is being held on criminal charges. She faces the prospect of spending between three to five years behind bars in the former capital's central prison. Just long enough, observers say, for the Burmese generals to keep her out of the way in the lead up to planned elections in 2010, and away from the transitional process that the elections may usher in.

Suu Kyi was due to be released on 27 May. However, the arrival of a strange and unexpected visitor, American tourist, John Yettaw, changed all that.

Yettaw made a much publicised two km swim across Inya Lake to her compound, where she was held under house arrest for nearly 14 years. Observed by policemen who, according to Yettaw, threw rocks at him, he was able to elude security personnel and enter the compound. After initially asking him to leave, Suu Kyi agreed to let him stay the night due to his apparent poor health.

Yettaw's visit was timely. Burma requires all non-family overnight visitors to be registered and forbids overnight stays by foreigners. Suu Kyi was charged with violating the terms of her house arrest. On 14 May she was ordered to stand trial in Insein prison.

As a small concession in response to international criticism, a number of diplomats and a handful of journalists were allowed to observe some parts of this trial. British Ambassador, Mark Canning, told the BBC: "all the paraphernalia of the courtroom was there, the judges, the prosecution, the defence. But I think this is a story where the conclusion is already scripted."

It is clearly in the regime's interests to prevent the *National League for Democracy* from using the trial as a political platform. So, despite all the 'bells and whistles', Suu Kyi is unlikely to receive a fair trial and will most likely spend the next few years in prison, unless there is a dramatic turn of events. This is undoubtedly happening by the decision of the Generals.

Suu Kyi's birthday behind bars is an occasion to reflect on what she continues to represent – Burma's only meaningful hope for lasting peace and reconciliation in a country deeply troubled and left derelict by decades of military rule and civil conflict. ■

Carol Ransley is a human rights advocate who has monitored the situation in Burma for 15 years



a litany of feasts

Paul Andrews writes about parties and feasts as means of humanly relating. No wonder, he says, Jesus chose this as his way of showing what he was about both in his own life and now in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

The thing I admired most about Margaret was her delight in food. She became my relation through marriage when I was in my hungry teens – and those who were adolescents in the years of ‘the Emergency’ will remember just how hungry you could be.

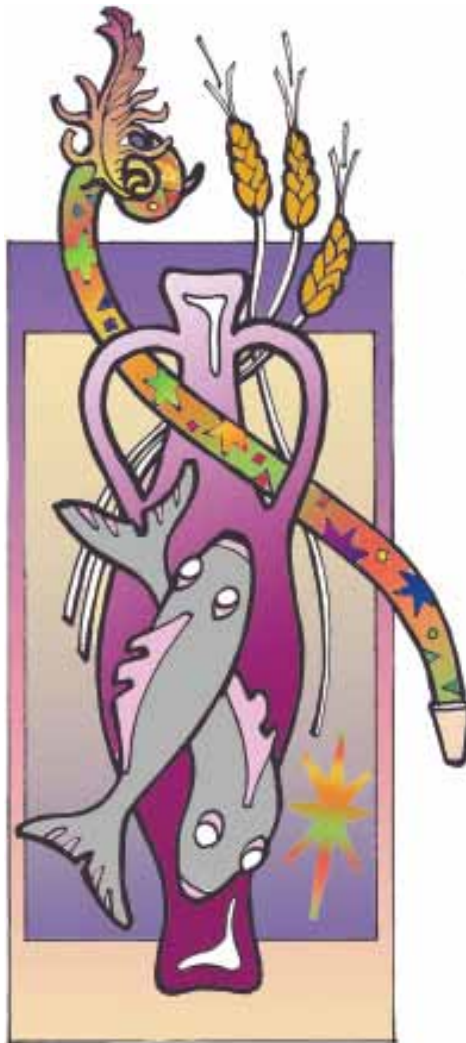
Margaret managed to feed a hard-working husband and eight children; but if you called in to her house, she would always welcome you with something to eat, and sit down with you while you enjoyed it. She lived to her mid-nineties, and relished her meals right up to her death-bed. Perhaps it was that appetite and zest for nourishment that was the secret of her long life.

She had an extraordinary memory for meals, and loved to recall them, course by course, with a commentary that had you tasting as she had tasted. If you were writing her memoirs, you could shape them round the tables she had enjoyed. And, to some extent, that is what the gospels do with Jesus.

theme of parties

You could eat your way through the gospels. The theme of parties runs all the way from the marriage feast of Cana, where Jesus supplied the wine, to the Last Supper, which he prepared carefully; and even after the Resurrection to the breakfast beside

the lake which he cooked for his disciples after their night of fishing. Story after story revolves round a meal, both the stories of Jesus’ own



life, and the stories which he told to explain his teaching.

This is not an accident. Eating together is one of the richest and

most human of activities. The Greeks and Romans recognized this before Jesus. One of Plato’s greatest works is the *Symposium*, which means ‘drinking together while you talk’, or ‘talking while you drink together’. Later on, Cicero used a bit of Roman one-up-manship on Plato. He wrote, ‘The Greek word for a meal is *syndeipnon* (which means eating together), or *symposium*. Our word is *convivium* (which means living together), because it is above all when we sit down together for a meal that our lives come closest to one another’.

important gesture

This does not mean that all mealtimes are warm encounters of peace and goodwill. All human life is there. In the parable of the marriage feast, you sense how important it is to respond to an invitation: Jesus is talking about God’s invitation to the people of Israel. The friends who refuse the invitation and make excuses are saying, ‘You do not count for much in my life’. In another parable, the man who would not dress properly to go to a wedding is also giving a message: ‘I couldn’t care less’.

The story of the prodigal son ends with a party to celebrate the boy’s return. The father is brimming over with joy, but the older brother burns with resentment and will not go in to join the party; he excommunicates

himself. There is another instance of self-excommunication at the beginning of the Last Supper, when Judas walks out into the night.

Taking your place at a table is much more than just sitting down. It means that you want to be with these people, and feel at home there. Judas knew he had either to abandon his betrayal of Christ or abandon the party; so he left.

It is striking that Jesus speaks both of the experience of those who throw a party and of those who are invited. Throwing a party can be a calculating, selfish business, a matter of inviting those who will invite you back or to whom you owe a debt. Or it can be a generous act, a case of goodness spreading itself, reaching out to those who may not be able to return the kindness.

heartfelt hospitality

Those who invite guests can be warm and welcoming, or they can be correct and critical. For the Pharisees, washing before dinner was a ritual: the water was kept in a special jar, and each washing must use enough water to fill one and a

half eggshells. It was poured over the hands, first from finger-tip to wrist, then in the reverse order. And so on. A custom that had started as hygienic had become a matter of regulation and sin. The Pharisees blamed Jesus for not going through this elaborate washing, and he recalled them to the real preparation for a party, which is that of the heart.

So the important preparation is not always in the kitchen. The best hostesses are not the fussiest, but the ones who are in touch with the feelings and needs of their guests. When Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, full of foreboding about the suffering that awaited him, he called in on his friends Martha and Mary. Martha fussed, anxious to do her best for her guest. Mary listened, realizing that Jesus needed company more than food; and he blessed her thoughtfulness when Martha wanted to blame her.

service

Of course, throwing a party is also a form of service. Peter and the apostles would never forget the moment at the Last Supper when Jesus their host rose from the table,

girded himself with a towel, and went round washing their smelly feet, reaching between the toes to clean out the dirt and unsightlinesses that we cover up with footwear. It was deliberately the gesture of a slave, one whose job it is to serve. Peter protested, and Jesus insisted: 'If I do this for you, it is up to you to do it for one another'.

Jesus loved the closeness that comes from eating and drinking together. He fed multitudes in the desert, threw a party on the lakeshore for his friends, and was criticized for eating and drinking with sinners.

So it is not surprising that his most precious legacy was a sacrament in the form of a party, what the Church calls a *sacrum convivium*, a blessed banquet, namely the Eucharist. There is the ultimate fusing of Jesus' life with ours. It has many overtones from the life of Jesus. Just as we could construct our own memoirs round the tables we have shared and the friends we have supped with, so we could learn much about the heart of Jesus by watching him at parties with his friends. ■

Paul Andrews is a Jesuit priest/psychotherapist living in Dublin

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perfection

Joy Cowley

Nothing in this world is perfect; everything is in a state of change; and yet we have within us some atavistic knowledge of unchanging perfection and a hunger for it. Where does it come from?

My guess is that we bring it with us to incarnation. I connect our longing for perfection with the knowledge of God that resides deep in our souls. It is a spiritual hunger but unless we recognize it as such, we can try to feed it with all the wrong things.

Sometimes it takes us a little while to feel comfortable with our imperfection. This is largely due to our conditioning which begins almost from birth, "Are you a good little girl?" "A good little boy?" Being 'good' is a part of our socialization, our education, and it is firmly built into our young egos.

In a context of wholeness, it is not a bad thing but it can create insecurity and a divided self. People desire to see themselves as 'good' and if they talk about 'evil' they are usually referring to someone else.

It's only when we come to value our imperfection as our growing space, that we come to see our frailty, our vulnerability through Jesus' eyes. I'm sure he didn't spend time with sinners because he sought to make them 'good'. He enjoyed their company. These were real people, their hearts and lives open to growth. They knew about mercy. They knew about forgiveness. They knew that people who don't make mistakes don't make anything.

Recently, I found this poem *Perfection* by Benedictine monk Fr Kilian McDonnell.

*I have had it with perfection
I have packed my bags
I am out of here
Gone.*

*Perfection straineth out
the quality of mercy,
withers rapture
at its birth.*

*There are hints
I should have taken –
even the perfect chiselled form of
Michelangelo's David squints.*

*The Venus de Milo
has no arms
the Liberty Bell
is cracked.*

But perhaps we can leave the last say with American poet Leonard Cohen. He celebrates imperfection with these words:

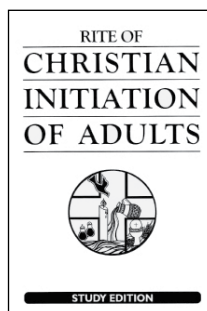
*Ring the bells that still can ring.
Forget your perfect offering.
There is a crack in everything.
That's how the light gets in.*

Presence of Mist

*Rising mist
moves up from the earth
ever so slowly
up into atmosphere
drawn into
the invisible
as if you never existed
but I witnessed
your rising softness*

Bridie Southall

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Remembering Thomas Berry

1914 – 2009

When I learned, early in the morning of June 1, that my friend and mentor Thomas Berry had died, I went to my meditation loft to feel what I had to feel. Perched among branches of oak trees and the graceful limbs of cedars, I listened to birds singing and felt the soft breezes come through the windows. I felt Thomas. I felt how he was such an embodiment of love! Not only was his mind keen, his vision far-seeing and focused but his heart was as big as the Universe he celebrated – as all our hearts are – it's just that Thomas not only knew this with his mind, but lived it with his whole life.

When I first met Thomas, it was after a wild-fire had devastated the forest where I live. The event had awakened me to all the losses happening across the planet. Casting about for the next step in my life, I called Thomas. To my surprise he returned my call and invited me to visit him at his home in Greensboro, North Carolina. When my partner and I



checked into our hotel at 9:00 at night, I gave him a call to let him know we had safely arrived. He insisted on coming to our room to take us out for some “nourishment.” Here we were, total strangers, yet he drove out into a rainy night to take us out to dinner. But really, no one was a stranger to Thomas. He was the most gracious human being I have ever met.

Thomas spoke to all of us on behalf of the rivers and the rocks and the winds. He called us to re-invent ourselves as human-beings, to awaken as the consciousness of the Universe and recognize our unity with all the wondrous diversity of life – to champion it and to celebrate it. He is one now, with the rocks and the wind. The whole Earth is his body now. And we, the loving consciousness of the Earth, are his voice and his hands,

blessed to have the companionship of his spirit as we continue on with the Great Work he so inspired.

In his spirit I offer this prayer/poem:

You Are My Body Now

*Re-membering Thomas Berry
Died June 1, 2009 at the rising of the sun*

Let all rivalry cease.
Let all delusion of separation vanish like mist
beneath the sun's rays.
Let breath rise.
Let breath be absorbed in our own lives.
May we inhale your resurrection.
May we exhale your spirit upon the world.
We know you now as the intimacy at the center of our hearts;
as the “I Am” that speaks from the center of the Universe.
The very rocks cry out.
The rivers and winds forever tell your name.
You whisper back:
You are my body now.
Yes, we say out loud.
We are your body now.
Let it be done according to your word.

Diane Pendola

Written for the beloved community of Thomas Berry © Diane Pendola, 6-1-09 - www.ecocontemplative.org

Iron statue of St Francis donated by Frederick Franck in 2006 to Green Mountain Monastery, Vermont, in honour of Thomas Berry, where he is buried. The dedication by Franck was read aloud at the funeral:
'I dedicate this steel icon to the deathless spirit incarnate in one of the most precious of my contemporaries. Like that of St Francis of Assisi, Thomas Berry's life testifies to the indestructible human spirit, the surviving triumph of human wisdom over all the follies and cruelties of our generation.'

how obama kept on winning

Hopes and Dreams: the story of Barack Obama

Steve Dougherty

Black Dog & Leventhal, New York 2009
pbk. 191 pp. \$NZ26.99

Review: Michael Hill

Once Barack Obama was congratulated on the sweeping rhetoric that had mesmerised yet another American audience. He replied simply and without boasting: "I have a gift". This book is all about that gift, and how it brought about Obama's meteoric rise from obscurity to being the most powerful man in the world.

It does not pretend to be a complete biography or even a resume of his political beliefs. But it gives sufficient incidental information punctuated with numerous 'sound bites' from his speeches, that the reader will absorb a lot of background information by osmosis.

The introductory chapter entitled *Obamamania* aims to convey Obama's star quality. It is rather a confusing selection of events and details of his career (such as his smoking habits), accompanied by some excellent photographs which often bear little connection with the text – a defect which recurs to a lesser degree throughout the book.

After this unpromising start, *Hopes and Dreams* settles into an absorbing account of his origins, education, family connections and then his extraordinary rise to political eminence. One thing you will learn all about from this book is the somewhat weird method the Americans have of finding a new President.

However, that takes nothing away from the merit of this extraordinary human being in achieving his 'rags to riches' rise to the top. What comes across strongly is not only his acute intelligence but his skill as an organiser of people and his ability to command audiences of all types.



Sharp ears to go with the silver tongue: Obama listening carefully at a meeting of Illinois nuclear weapons plant workers

Obama seems to have little personal ambition – except perhaps in the sense of Abraham Lincoln, his political hero: a burning desire to serve people, especially the American people. For that reason he seeks constantly to work with opponents as well as friends to achieve what he sees to be the common good.

Having achieved the highest academic goals at Columbia University, the world of highly paid jobs was at his feet. But he chose instead to return to his family roots in Chicago to work as a community organiser with poor people. It was an invaluable experience and prepared him well for his eventual destiny.

It also taught him that if he was to make a radical difference to the lot of the American poor, especially the poor blacks, he had to acquire a legal qualification. So he went back to Harvard Law School "to learn the currency of power in all its detail".

After graduating at Harvard, he returned to Chicago to work as a lawyer, and then decided to run for the Illinois Senate. He had just got married. His lawyer wife Michelle said to him: "I

married you because you're cute and you're smart, but this is the dumbest thing you could ever have asked me to do". Nevertheless she supported him, then and since, in his political career. As his sternest critic she is one of the elements of his success.

He was an Illinois Senator for seven years, learning the skills of forging political alliances and the craft of making laws to improve social conditions. In 2003 he decided to stand for Congress. Obama succeeded in convincing enough people that he was their man and he won. So he moved to Washington.

His arrival on the national stage was heralded by a speech in support of candidate John Kerry at the Democratic convention in 2005. The speech was a *tour de force*: America's brightest new political star was born.

From then on to 2009 it was onwards and upwards. Obama seemed to have the golden touch. He always started as the rank outsider, but in each campaign the skill of his political organising and the power of his persuasion took him inexorably to success.

the stresses of serving in the ministry

Leaving Church: a memoir of faith

by Barbara Brown Taylor

HarperOne 2007

Paperback around \$24.99

Review: Mike Crowl

Taylor had always been drawn to a life closely connected to God, and eventually attended Yale Divinity School. She was one of the first women to be ordained in the American Episcopal Church, and went on to serve as an assistant priest in a large urban parish. After a decade, however, she felt hemmed in on all sides, and went and looked for a rural church which she could lead on her own. Nearly six years later, somewhat to her amazement, the rural setting had hemmed her in as much as the urban, and one day she decided to quit the priesthood altogether and take a job teaching world religions at a nearby University.

Taylor was something of a workaholic, it might be said, and never quite felt she was fulfilling her vocation unless she was at the beck-and-call of every voice in need. But even she came to realise that only God can 'fix' everything, and human beings are called not just to work, but to rest.

In chapter nine of the book she describes her time of break-out from

all the pressures she was under and the way in which she 'rejoined' the human race. Ministry, it turned out, had made her a member of a slightly different species, and suddenly she found she had time for people who *didn't* actually need her helping hand. She also had time to take a 'Sabbath' most weeks, which often meant not going near a church, but spending time alone with the Lord.

Taylor is well-known for her published sermons, and is a gifted and stylish writer. There may be times in this book when she reflects a little too long over the small things in her life, seeing symbols in all sorts of places, but in general even these reflections are interesting – and often illuminating. She has the ability to tell a story, whether it's from her own life or another's, and often it's the storytelling that carries the reader along in this book.

It's always a bit of a conundrum for the reader when people who must have a considerable input into the writer's life appear in a book to be very much on the edge of what's being told. Thus Taylor's husband, Ed, appears in the narrative not only spasmodically, but almost without personality. It's only late in the book,

when she describes his involvement in an Indian sun dance that takes place over several days on their property, that he comes more alive. But we're given no hint as to why he might find the Indians' form of religion more connecting than his wife's.

And ironically, the Indians, who are regarded as people close to the land and to creation, no sooner arrive on the property than they're setting up huge trash containers and portaloos, making muddy ruts in the pasture, and getting out the chain saws to attack the trees for building. Taylor doesn't mention the irony; she's rather too busy attacking herself for not being as peaceful about it as she ought.

Leaving Home is best when it's describing the sheer difficulty of the minister's life, and many within New Zealand churches – both Protestant and Catholic – are similarly struggling with stress, burnout, overwork, and a lack of time to be alone with God, or even to pray and read the Bible. I believe most in leadership will find helpful things in the book. But it isn't just about ministers' difficulties: there are plenty of delights along the way to make it an enjoyable read for those who aren't in the 'business' of serving. ■

▷ His defeat of Hillary Clinton to gain the Democratic nomination is attributed to his team being far more sophisticated in its use of the electronic media. No previous candidate was ever so successful in raising campaign funds, and literally hundreds of thousands of Americans voted for change by putting up the money to give Obama the very best chance. So, on November 4, history was made when Barack Obama was elected the first black American President of the United States.

There is little or no critical assessment

in this book. It is like a mosaic of facts and quotes, which nevertheless gives the reader a satisfying and full portrait of the new President. Obama comes across as a listener as well as an orator. "I learned that meaningful change always begins at the grassroots, and that engaged citizens working together can accomplish extraordinary things."

Mark McKinnon, one of Bush's aides, describes him as a "walking talking hope machine. People see him as a reflection of what is good and great

about America. He's like a mirror of what people think we ought to be. He is successful, talented, moderate, judicious, thoughtful, and deeply human."

Finally, Obama himself: "As I look out over the crowd (the people who elected him), I feel encouraged. In their bearing I see hard work. In the way they handle their children I see hope. My time with them is like a dip in a cold stream. I feel cleansed, glad for the work I have chosen."

This book is well worth its very reasonable price tag. ■

two cheers for democracy

After enduring eight years of the American process of spreading “freedom and democracy” by conquest and force of arms, leaving tens of thousands dead and homeless in the Middle East, another blow to the system of parliamentary democracy was dealt by the expenses scandal among politicians in the ruling British Labour Party. Both Britain and America are strong advocates of democracy, but that very system has bred a ruling class of its own, an elite that circulates and regenerates, and has nothing to do with government ‘by the people and for the people’.

A besieged British PM, Gordon Brown, promised to “clean up politics”, reform the second Chamber and establish a Bill to allow public and political debate on the system of democracy. It seems that a radical programme of constitutional reform is necessary in order to restore faith in politicians, whose credibility has reached rock bottom. Once elected, politicians in all democratic countries including New Zealand conveniently forget the interests of the people who voted for them, and look after themselves. Given the fact that many areas of public policy are often under the dominion of strategically placed public figures, there is a danger of nothing ever changing.

So where is the will of the people, the foundation of democracy, when it is only ever a small number of representatives who run the bureaucratic structures? The danger of the misuse of power and even corruption is becoming more prevalent as shown by this latest debacle in the British Labour Party.

Society is a history of class struggles, but democracy itself is becoming a vast bureaucracy whose heads of departments change and who often are simply not competent to govern. ‘The people’ never rule. Parliaments simply cover up this fact, and politicians

Crosscurrents

John Honoré

profit. Why spread Western democracy to the Middle East – or anywhere else – as the cure for all ills?

Iran in turmoil

As of this writing, the re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has thrown Iran into turmoil. The opposition is questioning the result, and Western powers are increasing the pressure against his holding power for another four years. Iran is to be punished for refusing to adopt a Western-style democracy and allegedly trying to produce weapons of mass destruction. Further, its support of Hezbollah and Hamas endangers the State of Israel, a situation not to be tolerated by Barack Obama.

Relations with Iran have been strained since the overthrow of the corrupt regime of the United States-backed Shah 30 years ago, and have remained so ever since. This coup was the foundation of the modern Islamic Republic and the rise of fundamentalists such as Ahmadinejad.

The fear of further interference or military intervention by the U.S. and/or Israel in order to stop the development of a nuclear capability has led to an internal struggle between reformists and conservatives. Ahmadinejad’s populism springs from his nationalistic rhetoric about Iran’s right to nuclear power – and he has a point. However, his diatribe against Israel, saying that the main solution to the Middle East crisis is “the elimination of the Zionist regime”, leaves little room for negotiation and only strengthens the hard-liners who want his resignation.

Aggressive action against Ahmadinejad, who now represents in Western eyes all that is bad about the Islamic Republic, could have

horrific consequences for the whole of the Middle East. Not only does it imperil the very existence of Israel, but also endangers diplomatic and trade relations between Europe and the U.S. This at a time when it is imperative that Obama continue the tentative beginnings of dialogue between all parties that he initiated on his tour of the region. Let us hope that Ahmadinejad’s re-election will be accepted as the democratic right and the will of the people of Iran.

supermarket Aristotle

“John! I’ve lost my watch, and sometimes I think that I’ve lost my faith as well. Is there a God?” It was my favourite little old lady who posed the question at the check-out counter. Together we retraced her steps through the supermarket aisles and lo! next to the cat food was her watch.

What an opportunity! Thinking back to my youth a hundred years ago, I asked her the question that evoked the argument which, at that time, seemed to me to be irrefutable. What if she had never before seen or heard of a watch, and one day found this object on a track in the Rimutakas? Compare the watch to the creation of this whole universe. Would she think the watch was created and put there by accident – or by design?

The question is never far from people’s subconscious mind, and my friend was no exception. Put philosophically, the watch, a human artefact, is a means-end system. The universe is an artefact composed of numerous ‘natural’ means-end systems that only a supremely intelligent and powerful designer could design; therefore, a powerful designer exists – namely, God. That was exciting logic for a youth.

I waited with interest for a response as she peered intently at the watch. The little old lady looked pensive, bemused and finally replied, “Whatever, the watch isn’t going anymore”.

What is your answer to that, William Paley? ■

the place of women in the catholic church

One's rejoicing at an advance made can be premature. In his letter of apology for lifting the excommunication of a Holocaust-denying Lefebvrist bishop, Pope Benedict affirmed his intention to make use of the Internet in the future to keep himself better informed of what is going on the church and in the world. Fine. But an increased awareness by those in Rome as to what is on the web has its off side.

The *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith* (CDF) has recently announced it is about to conduct an investigation into the doctrinal uprightness of the Leadership Conference of Religious Women in the United States. What is under fire seems to be not the views of the leadership conference members themselves, but the fact that papers they allowed to be presented at their conferences and subsequently made available on their website dealt with the question of the ordination of women from a viewpoint other than that of the Vatican.

Now that the people in Rome have begun to surf the Net, they can more readily become aware who is putting forth views they deem unacceptable.

The norms appealed to by the CDF respecting the exclusion of women from priestly ordination were those of Pope John Paul II's 1994 apostolic letter, *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* (OS), itself based on earlier pronouncements of Pope Paul VI. JP II did not mince matters: "The Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women. This judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful".

I gather that while this is a high level magisterial declaration, it is not an infallible one. Is there any process by which it could be reviewed? A General Council (like Vatican II) could of course overrule such a non-infallible position. But such a

Council is not on the horizon. Pope Benedict could overrule it. But he shows no inclination to do so.

Popes do not, however, live for ever. Benedict is 82 years of age, and speculation as to who might be his successor is already going on. If a future pope commissioned a review of the soundness of the 1994 Apostolic Letter, what points might be made against it?

Ordinatio Sacerdotalis gives a variety of reasons for a purely male priesthood. One is that Christ chose his Apostles only from among men. Would not this argument lead equally to the conclusion that the church has always been bound to be led by 12 men of semitic ethnicity, none of whom had received the equivalent of a secondary school education, and few if any of whom could speak a second language?

Whatever of that, there is one consideration, above all, that any future review would have to take seriously. For 50 years or more, other Christian bodies in the West have been ordaining women. While there are differences among them in ability, the best of them are quite the equal of any male ministers. Women have shown that they can effectively perform leadership roles in ministry in the Christian community. Folk like ourselves who have been in contact with such women know that. Those living and working in the hothouse of the Vatican have not had the same learning experience.

Vatican II's Decree on ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio* (n.4) laid down the principle that "anything wrought by the power of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our separated brethren can contribute to our own edification.". What the Holy Spirit has effected in other Christian bodies in bringing women to front rank roles in ministry is arguably what the Spirit would effect in our church if only our leadership would allow it. ■

Humphrey O'Leary

Humphrey O'Leary is a canon lawyer and Rector of the Redemptorist community in Auckland

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A Mother's Journal...

All of a sudden our family has moved back to Himachal Pradesh in North India. It has been on the cards for months and has required large scale logistical planning, but the stealth by which we are translocated by modern airships still is startling.

We have been back for three weeks of chapattis, mangos and chaotic traffic. We arrived back at the Project in Jibhi where we had been for two years, and were welcomed by many friendly faces and friends. A new baby is a great way to quickly catch up and for many invitations for cups of chai.

However often I shift houses – and that is fairly frequently – I am still slightly surprised to find that the streets and rivers and hills are all pretty much in the same place as I left them. It's reassuring to find I can navigate around narrow and winding paths between fields of barley and garlic, and find myself at the right village or house. I also



find solace as I think that my favourite *maunga* and *awa* in New Zealand will be quietly and solidly waiting for me whenever I return.

Today we pack again, this time to head for the next five months to work in a clinic in a remote village 250 km north west of Jibhi. Packing up house and moving continents with four children brings about a certain degree of reflection on material possessions and why we have so many of them. Nonetheless, it has been a day of ferreting around in the bazaar for badminton racquets, oats,

coffee, yeast, glitter and gluesticks and some toys for the baby. None of these will be available in Lahaul. I may not go to a bank for five months.

Our school-aged children were very sad to leave their lovely school in Christchurch – and friends at church, neighbours... yet they too have been surprised at how good it is to be back in India. It helps that here

in India we are among people we have known for some time, it is a temperate climate, there are beautiful hills and forests, and a gentle traditional village life. Importantly for Shar, Shanti and Rohan, the two kittens we left here in India 18 months ago were waiting for us on our return.

Happy cats, happy children, happy parents, answered prayers. So, ahead is a new adventure. We are full of hope. We leave tomorrow at 6 am.

Kaaren Mathias

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