

TUI MOTU

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Christmas

our
200th
issue

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Escape to Egypt by He Qi [www.heqiart.com]



EDITORIAL

Celebrating Birth, Life and Family

I saw my godchild born. The memory brings a catch to my throat still. It began in awkwardness and moved through waiting, admiration and amazement, to breathtaking intensity – then horror when the midwife held a little blue body. (I'd missed the antenatal chat about expecting that.) Finally we hugged a wee pinking-up "transubstantiation" – a water creature gulping air in alarmed cries. A little "incarnation" – our hope appearing in flesh. Our baby – an exceptional and everyday miracle. Birth, like death, is breathtakingly raw and emotional.

The birth of Jesus – as of all babies – exposes us again to intense joy and reenergises us to work for a safer world. While the scriptures lend Jesus regal, adult titles – "Prince of Peace" and "Saviour of the People" – he was born a scrap of flesh and bundle of promise. As with our babies, he needed his family, extended family and neighbourhood to bring him up. It took him long years to grow into a prince and saviour – a man able to discern his part in God's mission. And during that time his family loved, protected, guided and involved him in life and relationships in their simplicity, complexity, mystery and communion.

Our December issue explores such Christmas themes particularly as found in Matthew's gospel. Bruce Drysdale writes about Joseph's dilemma when he heard that Herod intended to hunt Jesus down and kill him. Joseph bundled up his family and took off for asylum in Egypt.

Warsan Shire conveys the desperation of contemporary families forced to run from their homelands: "No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark."

Yasmina el Shebah lets us feel the poignancy of an 8-year-old Syrian boy now begging at the gates of her University in Beirut.

And Jack Derwin shares his admiration of a group living beside a railway line in Mexico, who pass packed lunches to migrants hanging off freight trains, trying to make their way to the USA.

That's just a taste of this bonanza issue – as my father would say. We realise that many of you will have read all 200 editions beginning in 1997 when Michael Hill and Francie Skelton started the magazine, through to 2014 when Kevin Toomey and Elizabeth Mackie were at the helm and up to this year with Elizabeth and myself editing.

THE GIFT OF OUR NAME

Pa Henare recalls founding editor, Michael Hill, asking for a Māori title for the newly created Catholic magazine in 1997.



Pa Henare reminds us that the name, *Tui Motu*, challenges us to stitch our geographical neighbourhoods into community using threads of discussion, dialogue, faith and interest. Your loyalty, support and contributions through the years have ensured that *Tui Motu* continues to thrive and to live into its name.

Adding to the bonanza are the new design and (just for Christmas!) extra pages. We hope you enjoy wandering through the magazine enjoying the feel of the “new look” and consulting the contents to find your favourite writers.

It's significant that the 200th issue is produced for Christmas. As Kath Rushton offers her Christmas reflection on the Word becoming flesh among us, it's not too presumptuous to think of *Tui Motu* as another incarnation — a 1997 dream that's now celebrating its 200th birthday.

We thank all the writers, poets and artists who contributed to this 200th issue, especially the children from St Teresa's School in Bluff. While we were not able to print all their paintings, they star on our website www.tuimotu.org.

May you enjoy the love of your families and friends over the Christmas season and may that love join the energy of God in bringing peace to our world. Happy Christmas! ■

offered *Tui Motu*. It was an attempt to capture the idea of the magazine's reaching out over the islands of Aotearoa, and even across to the islands of the Pacific.

At the time I was quite conscious of the *whakatauki* (proverb) often used on the marae as a *tauparapara* (introduction) to a *whaikōrero* (speech-making). I have used it myself on many occasions. The following is the Māori text with my translation and interpretation:

Whakarongo ake au ki te tangi a te manu nei, a te Mātūi;

“Tui, tui, tuituia”

Tuia i runga, tuia i raro, tuia i roto,

Tuia i waho

Tuia i te muka herenga tangata i tākea mai

i Hawaiki-nui, i Hawaiki-roa, i

Hawaiki pāmamao

ka rongo te ao, ka rongo te pō,

tihewa mauriora

I hear the cry of the bird called the *Mātūi* (the *Tūi*);

“Tui, tui, tuituia”

Tuia what is above (*runga*),

Tuia what is below (*raro*),

Tuia what is within (*roto*),

Tuia what is outside (*waho*)

Tuia with the flax fibre (*muka*)

that ties people together (*herenga tangata*), a principle of action that

which has its origins (*tākea mai*)

in *Hawaiki-nui* (the great *Hawaiki*),

in *Hawaiki-roa* (the expansive

Hawaiki)

in *Hawaiki pāmamao* (the distant *Hawaiki*)

The day-time hears the message (*ka rongo te ao*),

the night-time hears the message (*ka rongo te pō*),

let there be wellness and well-being

(*tihewa mauriora*).

“*Tui*” has a number of meanings but they have a common link — that of attaching one object to another. Thus, *tui* means to lace, to fasten, to bind, to lash together, to sew, to stitch, or to thread on a string.

“*Tuituia*” can mean the repetitive or constant action of lacing, fastening, binding, sewing, stitching — or it can mean lacing, fastening, binding, sewing or stitching many people, objects or islands together.

The title *Tui Motu* was intended to convey the idea of “stitching (*tui*) the islands (*motu*) of Aotearoa, the Pacific together ...” binding (*tui*) the different races and people and faiths together to create one Pacific people of God. I believed at that time this would be a role of the magazine.

Now that there are subscribers in Australia and further afield, they too are included in our stitching. ■



Tui photo by Paul Sorrell



Pa Henare Tate, a Māori priest of Te Rarawa Iwi descent, lives a busy “retired” life in Motuti in Hokianga. His interests are *whānau* and local history.

JOSEPH'S DREAMS & JOURNEYS



Bruce Drysdale tells Joseph's story from the nativity account in Matthew's gospel.

I'm Joseph and looking back now from the familiarity of my Nazareth workshop, those early years seem like a dream. At the time the opposite was true: dreams were as much reality as the events that unfolded about me. It was in a dream that I first glimpsed who Jesus would become. I had been in a dazed state since Mary had told me she was pregnant. The dream seemed like part of my waking. It was the name – "You are to name him Jesus" – the very name making God present among us!

Nazareth isn't Mary's or my hometown. Bethlehem was our home where we lived in the house of my father Jacob and we had been in the land of Judah for generations. I still have difficulty thinking of myself as a Galilean but we are settled here now and work is fairly steady.

My pride and joy overflowed when the midwife handed me our little, slippery bundle of humanity. For a moment I was back in the dream: "She will bear a son ... he will save the people".

When the midwife arrived with Salome, Mary certainly wasn't dreaming; her loud cries of pain kept everyone wide awake and attentive. At other family births I'd steered clear of the women calmly, but determinedly, going about their tasks. This time, however, was different. While my brother Clophas succumbed to the women's pointed remarks about the "extra" bodies overfilling the room – I was determined to stay.

I made myself useful by holding firm the birthing stool and offering Mary words of encouragement.

At first the women were uncomfortable with my presence but before long they appreciated my help, which freed them for the many and delicate tasks of midwifery.

While I tried to hide my deep concern at Mary's obvious pain, nothing could hide my relief when, finally, I heard that primal wail. My pride and joy overflowed when the midwife handed me our little, slippery bundle of humanity. For a moment I was back in the dream: "She will bear a son ... he will save the people". Was this dark, wet-curled head on such a tiny frail torso to be the Messiah? Jesus, wriggling enthusiastically (as though aware of the swaddling that was soon to come), brought me back to the moment. I placed him

on the shoulder of his exhausted mother who, forgetting her recent distress, beamed with joy at the safe arrival of our son.

Unusual visitors arrive

While we delighted in the presence of Jesus in our lives, for several months life was very normal and we had almost forgotten those dream-borne predictions of his unique place in our genealogy. Then, one morning, Jesus was crawling just a little too close to some of my tools. Mary picked him up and was about to scold me (again) for leaving the tools within his reach when she noticed some visitors arriving.

I was surprised when I went out to meet them as they were obviously not locals and their clothes suggested they were from the lands to the east – perhaps Parthians. I greeted them and they responded politely before quickly asking: “Where is the child who has been born a king?”

Mary and I had kept close counsel about what we had learned of Jesus’ future so I was formulating a guarded answer when they noticed Mary behind me with the child in her arms. To my surprise they rushed forward and bent down in homage. After a very long, awkward moment, while Mary and I exchanged confused glances, the visitors rose to their feet and with their eyes still fixed on Jesus explained that they had travelled many months to find this child and offer him gifts from their people.

Stars and learning

Our questions revealed they were *magoi* (magi) – an ancient group of wise, priestly leaders skilled in astronomy, astrology and the interpretation of dreams – and, their “people” were a small group whose Babylonian ancestors had been greatly influenced by their Judean captives during the time of exile. Some of the *magoi* had been so impressed by the faith of these Jews and their belief in a

promised Messiah that they left their Zoroastrian practices and became Jews.

Our visitors came from a long line of *magoi* who had studied all the signs of the messianic age and were convinced that the birth of our son heralded its beginning. I was excited enough at their mention of dreams, so finding out they too awaited the Messiah elevated the moment to an occasion of awe.

Everyone in southern Palestine knew about the megalomaniacal Herod and the lengths to which he would go to eliminate threats to his reign.

Our little boy in danger

We invited them to share a meal and during the ensuing conversation we asked if they had found anyone else on their journey who shared their views. When they mentioned that Herod, king of Judea, had told them he also wished to come to Bethlehem and pay homage to the new-born king, our feelings turned to dread. Everyone in southern Palestine knew about the megalomaniacal Herod and the lengths to which he would go to eliminate threats to his reign.

I was even more disturbed when the visitors told me of a dream they had interpreted as warning them not to return to Herod as planned. When it was time for them to leave I carefully explained an alternative route that would take them well away from Herod. I also made sure Mary and Jesus were indoors before dusk.

Fleeing from our country

I didn’t think I slept at all that night but I must have closed my eyes long enough to dream because when I awoke in a sweat I knew the only safe thing to do was to take

Jesus and Mary well away from Herod’s influence – to Egypt.

“Egypt?!” asked Mary with a look of utter confusion. But she needed little convincing because she’d heard the rumours about Herod’s cruelty. I hurriedly made arrangements with Clophas and a carpenter in the neighbouring village of Bethbasi to take care of our carpentry business.

We packed what few belongings we could load onto our only mule and set off, joining others also escaping from Herod’s attention. We thought it would be the longest journey of our lives.

Returning to a new region

The news reached us in Egypt that Herod, on his deathbed, had ordered the deaths of all young boys in the Bethlehem area. That night I had the most disturbing dream of our ancestor, Rachel, weeping for her children and I felt the horror and great sadness of the families. Mary and I consoled each other.

Months later I dreamt that it was now safe to return to Israel. Almost immediately we set out for our home in Bethlehem but on the way we discovered that Herod’s son, Archelaus, was as cruel as his father and we did not risk being found. So we decided to move out of his reach to the district of Galilee and there settled in Nazareth.

I am still a frequent dreamer and value this form of insight as pure, unfiltered revelation. These days, however, God’s revelations are less urgent, more consoling and filled with the new hope Jesus is for my people. ■



Bruce Drysdale is the DRS at St. Dominic’s College, Auckland. He also teaches *Te Reo Maori*, is a civil celebrant and a keen gardener.

The *Wise* Ones

Joy Cowley shares her “heart reading” of the journey of the Magi to Jesus in Bethlehem.



Illustration by
Donald Moorhead.

Some say there were twelve wise men. Our tradition claims three: Caspar of Sheba, Melchior of Arabia and Balthazar from Egypt. We have seen images of them on Christmas cards. They wear regal robes indicative of their status, and they journey on camels over desert dunes, a bright star above them.

What do we know about them? Stories vary. We're told they are astrologers who can read the alignment of stars and planets, who also know the ancient scriptures of the East: the sacred book of Persia, the *Avesta*; the writings of the Hebrew prophets; maybe the teachings from the land of the Pharaohs, and the *Vedas* of India. The Wise Ones know that all religions indicate the birth in Israel, of a great ruler and prophet of God.

From home to Herod

The journey from home is long, 800 miles or more guided by the star. No doubt the widespread Roman occupation helps movement across borders. It's also a network that spreads news. By the time the Magi are near the land of the Hebrews, Herod has heard about them and the reason for their visit. He is worried.

Every now and then one of his people gets attention by claiming to be the Messiah. Herod has ways of dealing with that. None of those, however, has gained this kind of attention. Distinguished foreigners coming to worship a new-born ruler? The thought is intolerable! It is Herod's own son who will be his successor — Herod Antipas, king of the Jews. But suppose this new-born infant is the true Messiah returned to free them from Roman rule? Herod dares not trust his own judgement. He summons a council of scribes and pharisees to be present when the strangers from the east arrive.

Herod's sense of danger increases. He sees the wise men in private and instructs them to come back when they have found the baby.

It turns out that the foreigners are well versed in the scrolls of the Hebrew prophets. They quote predictions from Isaiah, Micah, Daniel, and the pharisees are

impressed with their knowledge. Herod's sense of danger increases. He sees the wise men in private and instructs them to come back when they have found the baby. They must tell him where the child is so that he too may pay him tribute. Tribute? Ah yes, we know what he plans, just as we know the rest of the events. The Wise Ones arrive at Joseph's house to worship the newborn king. They present gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, and are warned in a dream not to return to Herod.

Mulling the story over

Matthew is the only gospel with this story, although there have always been oral versions. For a moment, let us stay with the Matthew account. We know that like all Bible stories, it has two readings — one with the mind, and one with the heart.

The first is simple: we revisit a familiar story for information.

The reading from the heart though, may be different. This type of reflective reading, *lectio divina*, is deeper, wider — a form of prayer that is intensely personal. We create an inner emptiness for the story and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to us through it.

Finding the characters in myself

As we consider the characters and actions, we feel drawn to elements that reflect our own journey. The story opens up as a parable. I cannot tell you how the story of the Wise Ones will open up for you; but I can share with you what it has revealed to me.

I am every character in this story. As a convert I have travelled from another land, drawn by what I know of Jesus' birth in the stable of my life. It has been a long journey and some of the terrain was difficult, but there is a guiding light, a bright Star of presence that lights the way. Like astronomers of today, I can't name the star. It seems beyond names. But that light has always been connected with Christ Jesus.

There have been great blessings in the journey but my life is not simply with the Magi.

I am also Herod, sitting on a throne of ego, protecting self-interest. While the Herod in me has now lost some of its power, I would be unwise to pretend it no longer

exists. In its weakness, the ego has become more devious, insisting that it too will worship the new king, but in its own way. Guidance tells me that if I do battle with Herod I will be using egoic tactics. I must love my enemy, says the star. So I acknowledge that Herod will always be a part of me. I smile at this fretful child and then leave it on its little throne. It's the guidance of the light that has real power.

Did I forget the scribes and pharisees? No, they are all in my head, and generally they mean well. They love to quote the scripture, sometimes for prayer and sometimes for argument, and they usually do so while seated on cushions. They don't have the Magi's enthusiasm for journey. I am happy to accommodate the scribes and pharisees and can enjoy their company. At times, though, all that head noise gets in the way of guidance from the star.

Eventually, the star will always bring me back to the stable and Jesus. Here, I come home. I offer

the gifts: the gold of the life God has given me, the frankincense of worship and the myrrh of the Cross. Jesus gladly accepts my gifts, is even pleased to receive my Herod and the scribes and pharisees who sometimes waste my time. The most precious gift, though, comes with the burial spice. We hold it between us in silence. Myrrh represents a bond that is beyond words and can never be broken.

That is my heart reading of this story. What is yours? Do you feel the gentle pull of the star? However you follow that light, it will bring you to the stable where a universe of love has come into creation. Offer him all your gifts. Keep nothing back. The gift you value least will be his greatest treasure. ■



NZ writer **Joy Cowley** is a wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother and retreat facilitator. She lives in Featherston with her husband Terry Coles.



Painting by Nathan MacNaughton, age 10, St Teresa's, Bluff

Vulnerability in the Face of Power

Mike Riddell reflects on the difference between power exerted as domination and oppression and power released in imagination and tenderness.

There's something compelling about human vulnerability in the face of state power. The stuff we're made of is so fragile and defenceless when confronted with organised violence. And yet the crux of our faith is the story of humanity overcoming the relentless violence of political forces bent on destruction.

Power against Love

That fateful confrontation is present from the beginning of Matthew's nativity story. On the one side we have the "soft" elements of existence: a betrothal, a pregnancy, a birth, dreams, stars, joy. These vie for life under the shadow of a petty tyrant, a ruthless empire, genocide, duplicity, exile and subjugation. It's as if the gospel writer is making clear that the context of incarnation is always a contest of power against love.

He tells of a brave young woman, a trusting husband, a baby born into poverty, adoring visitors, and the journey to find refuge in a brutal world. Ranged against these *anawim* (Hebrew for the poor who depend on God), we have Herod, the puppet ruler of the Roman Empire, in collusion with those priests and scribes who have collaborated with him to maintain rule. It may seem the outcome is destined to be dark, but that would be to misunderstand power.



I confess to interludes of despair when I look to the contemporary world. Never before in human history have governments had access to such extraordinary resources to surveil and dominate the populations they rule over. The coalition of the powerful – that alliance between the wealthy and the executive – has reached such a pinnacle of corporate might that it is hard to imagine how any subversion of it is possible.

Remarkably, it is the story of divine power capable of undermining oppressors; but a power that works through apparent weakness and insignificance.

Whispers of subversion

It is precisely in times such as these that we find resonance in the birth narratives of Jesus. Matthew is well aware that his people are subjugated by a great and seemingly invincible power. And yet he begins a tale in which the gestation of hope is carried in the womb of a young woman. Remarkably, it is the story of divine power capable of undermining oppressors; but a power that works through apparent weakness and insignificance.

As Alfred North Whitehead wrote, here there is a different force at work for change: "It dwells upon the tender elements in the world, which slowly and in quietness operate by love." These are times in which we need to hear this message again. It is the secret carried in the hearts of the broken, who dare to dream that things might be different. It is the whisper of liberation, easily dismissed but silently harboured.

Domination of commerce

The Western world is entranced by a seamless ideology that drains our society of compassion and respect. This dogma engenders compliance to monetarism as the price of belonging. The media champions its precepts, in a voice that has itself become subservient to pursuit of the dollar. Any alternative to the triumph of commerce is mercilessly ridiculed. Those who offer competing opinions are regarded as traitors.

A carefully engendered numbness has descended like a pacifying shroud over us all. We pick our way through life, titillated by distractions rather than fired

by passions. The great desires are diluted into the accumulation of possessions. All that is noble about existence becomes fodder for the advertisers, who seduce us into yet more meaningless purchases. It keeps us compliant.

Do not doubt that this is purposeful indoctrination; an education in subservience. The strategy is not new, but it is newly pervasive. The wealthy now shape the world as they see fit – determining the outcome of elections and shaping policy through “lobbying”. Any resistance is snuffed out before it has the chance to grow, through the omniscient powers of state eavesdropping – apparently to ensure our security. Citizens have become servile consumers, farmed by their overlords.

Power of imagination

Theologian Walter Brueggemann named the culture produced by this dominant coterie “the royal consciousness”; a paralysing anaesthetic that stifles the people. He explains: “Numbness does not hurt like torture, but in a quite parallel way, numbness robs us of our capability for humanity.” To disrupt the ideology, Brueggemann believes we need not conventional weapons, but hope. We must become capable of imagining an alternative.

His answer is “the prophetic imagination”: a strategy of visioning that cracks open the future. “The imagination must come before the implementation. Our culture is competent to implement almost anything and to imagine almost nothing. The same royal consciousness that makes it possible to implement anything and everything is the one that shrinks imagination because imagination is a danger. Thus every totalitarian regime is frightened of the artist.”

Buried in the heart of the gospel, but often smothered by pious overlays, is a relentlessly subversive dream. In the words of Mary, God has “pulled down princes from their thrones, and raised high the lowly”. This is achieved not through some armed revolution, but through the birth of an infant who will be executed by the political powers after a show trial. It is the alignment of God on the side of the underdogs that creates a rupture in conventional thinking.

Through history, we can see the times when this radical perspective has overcome the forces of oppression, and enabled salvation in a tangible sense. But before it can influence a generation, it must be birthed in the imagination. Our dreaming is the womb of God’s incarnation in a locked-down society. The infant Jesus is portrayed by Matthew as the new Moses, come to deliver God’s people.



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

The divine power is that of water on stone, silently making inroads against tyranny. This knowledge allows us to live freely and subversively, unashamed that our views are not those of our culture.

Power of light in the darkness

Some weeks ago I stood in an excavated chamber in Rome, where it is increasingly credible the apostle Paul was kept captive before his execution. He lived chained to a Roman soldier, to keep him under house arrest on spurious charges. I was struck by the audacity of the man, confined in the heart of the Empire, but resolute to the last that the power of the state was puny in comparison to the way of Jesus.

In these times we might well recall that the One we follow dwells among the small and discounted people of the world. The divine power is that of water on stone, silently making inroads against tyranny. This knowledge allows us to live freely and subversively, unashamed that our views are not those of our culture. We have caught a glimpse of a distant horizon, and believe it can be reached.

Advent is a time of waiting, as is the whole of human history. The darkness deepens before the dawn, but we know in our hearts that the light will prevail. The renewing of hope can at times be difficult. It depends on the willingness to host it, and to harbour the wavering flame. That gentle light is the one given to the world and will one day shine for all to see. ■



Photo by Sandy Leaitua

I HAD A DREAM

In Matthew's gospel Joseph receives crucial guidance in his dreams at night that enables him to resolve his worries in the day. Lyndall Brown told **Ann Gilroy** that like Joseph she believes every dream holds a gift for us.



I knew I'd struck a chord with Lyndall Brown about the significance of dreams in our lives when she grew excited talking about them during our interview. As a spiritual director and workshop facilitator she understands how insightful dreams can be in deepening our relationship with God.

Dreaming is natural

"We dream every night although we might not remember our dreams when we wake. They help us to get in touch with what is happening in our inner world. They come unbidden, as gift. They come to inspire, to challenge, or to bring healing – because they bring into our consciousness what we're not fully aware of in our waking lives. They also relieve emotional energy that we may not have dealt with in the previous day or days and in this way offer release and freedom. I see dreams as one way to enable us to be transformed and as an

invitation to grow into wholeness – to become more fully the person God is creating us to be.

Dreaming is personal

"Dreams are personal. No one can interpret your dream for you. As a spiritual director I listen to a person's dream but it is only the dreamer who has the capacity to find the particular meaning of the dream. I may open a window into their dream by questioning or using processes that will lead the person to make connections between their dream and their lives.

Characters are symbolic

"Dreams are not to be understood literally. They are full of symbolism and in order to break open the meaning or significance of each symbol there are a variety of dream processes.

"Jung taught that there are universal dream symbols. For example, a house can represent the inner world, water

our emotions and feelings, a car is a symbol of the self. But dreamers then need to explore the symbol for themselves so that they link what they're saying about the symbol with what's going on in their lives at that moment. It's in discovering how the dream connects their inner world with their outer world at a particular time that the gift of the dream is understood.

"What 's really important is that every person and every symbol in the dream is actually a part of ourself. I always ask the dreamer which symbol in the dream has the most energy. Sometimes the energy from a particular symbol, especially if it's negative or upsetting, dominates the dreamer's attention and they miss other symbols in the dream that might be affirming of themselves or reveal some growth.

"Aspects of dreams that we find difficult to own, often reflect our shadow but it is important to realise that our shadow holds "the gold" of unclaimed parts of ourselves.

"A few years ago I had a dream where I was in bed being cared for and was given a lemon drink. When I looked out of the window I could see a lemon tree abundant with fruit and very healthy. As I worked with that dream I felt affirmed that part of me, like the tree, was very healthy and had the capacity to offer healing. Another part of me was needing healing myself and nourishment. At the time of the dream I'd been involved in a programme of healing for other people and the dream's gift came to affirm me and to enable me to own how rich and fruitful this time had been for me. It also gave me a gentle reminder that I needed rest and healing too.

Dreams are gifts

"We can get new insights from old dreams. A Jungian analyst told me she often worked with dreams she'd had 20 years earlier. Generally when we work with our dreams we're just working with the first level but there are many layers to a dream, often connecting us with issues from the past and patterns of

behaviour that keep recurring.

"If people really want to work with their dreams I encourage them to keep a journal and pen by their bed and to say to their unconscious or dream-maker before they sleep that they want to remember their dream. Then when they wake to ask themselves if they can recall a dream, allow time for it to surface and write it down. That's a good way to begin the process of remembering dreams.

"During Retreat time dreams can become a wonderful source of God's revelation to us. Some time ago I was directing a woman on retreat who desired to deepen her appreciation of herself and to rediscover her identity. She was drawn to reflect on a quote from Thomas Merton who said that our identity is in God. As she pondered these words she sensed a growing intimacy with God. Then she had a dream where she was in a retreat setting and the Director said to her: 'I have known you ever since I've known your mother.'

"These words affected the retreatant deeply as she felt that they came from God and revealed how loved she was and how intimate God was in her life.

"For the rest of the Retreat she savoured the fullness of God's word that came to her so clearly in her dream."

Dreams help us grow

In the scriptures we find that biblical characters valued their dreams as

messages from God and acted on the insights they gained from them. These dreams were often the beginning of momentous transformations. For example, Jacob understood the significance of his relationship with God, his people and the land; Joseph heeded the Mediterranean weather patterns and stored grain; Solomon recognised that wisdom, not wealth and celebrity, was crucial for leadership and Joseph saw that Herod's politics were dangerous to his family and fled to a safer country.

Then around the fifth century dream-work fell into disrepute, probably influenced by Jerome's mistranslation of the word (*anan*) in his Latin version of the Bible, associating it with witchcraft — (in his eyes, women's evil work!).

However in the last 50 years spiritual directors, influenced by the work of Jung, have realised again the value of dreams in accessing our unconscious and so providing a significant tool for self-knowledge in our spirituality.

Like Joseph, we now have the opportunity to take notice of our dreams — the work of our nightshift. And when we say: "I had a dream" we can expect another prompt in our journey to wholeness. ■



After living around New Zealand and beyond **Ann L Gilroy** RSJ has landed in Dunedin as editor of *Tui Motu*. She's rediscovering domestic arts, loves reading and is on for adventure.

Kiwi Christmas

by Joy Cowley



Stunningly illustrated by Bruce Potter, this is a contemporary look at the Christmas Story as if it happened today in Aotearoa NZ.

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Blessings of Birth

My eyes lit up remembering the birth of my second son – it was a magical experience. I was blessed to have been introduced to the concept of hypno-birthing. Basically this means bringing yourself into a very deep level of relaxation and then breathing your baby out – going with your body's natural rhythm – as opposed to pushing.

I liked the idea so much I taught myself. For three months before the birth I practised deep relaxation with the help of a book and then listened to a CD. I'd planned a home birth just as I'd had with my first son. I'd called my midwife previously but it had turned out to be a false alarm. This night I was experiencing "surges" (a hypno-birthing term for "contractions").

By the time the midwife arrived the house was set up – relaxing music, lavender from an

aromatherapy oil burner infusing the room, fire alight – giving an ambience and feeling of calm. My hypno-birth CD played and my midwife started giving me a wonderful back and neck massage sinking me deeper and deeper into relaxation.

But nothing really seemed to be happening so just after 10pm I headed to bed to get some rest. I didn't appear to be in labour as I was making no sound at all. My partner assumed this was another false alarm and thought he'd be going to work in the morning. He was in for a big surprise!

I slept blissfully until just after 1am when I needed to go to the toilet. The surges were intensifying but I had absolutely no pain. I made my way through to the lounge and woke my midwife letting her know I thought things were picking up.

She started heating water on the stove to fill the birth pool but accidentally set off the smoke alarm. This woke my three-year-old son who called out a spritely "Hello Mum" and bounced into the lounge. His dad took him back to bed so I could concentrate. I went back to the toilet and continued my visualisation and breathing techniques before heading back to the lounge.

I had reached only the side of the birthing pool before I realised – the baby's coming!

I was in shock – this was less than an hour from when I'd woken up. Even though I knew it was possible to have a painless birth I could not believe that I was having one. My partner and son came into the lounge just in time to see our second son born.

Afterwards I sat on a kitchen chair and looked in awe at our baby. He was just gorgeous. Then I relaxed on the couch and allowed my baby to make his way up to my breast and latch on. It was simply amazing. I felt very serene. His big brother said: "He's happy now". Although I hadn't had the time to use the birthing pool my three-year-old got in and wanted his baby brother to join him. But our baby was more interested in sucking beautifully.

I had decided also to have a lotus birth, which means salting the placenta until the umbilical cord falls off, rather than cutting it. I found this deeply meaningful as there was no severing of the baby and me and the cord came off naturally.

Even now I carry vivid and precious memories of my son's birth and am sustained by the blessings of that experience.

As Christmas approaches I'm concerned for the pregnant mothers seeking asylum in our world, who won't have security and peace in which to give birth and nourish their babies. ■

When **Bernadette Holland** is not busy with her boys, nursing, or creating in the kitchen she enjoys gardening, yoga, tai chi and the outdoors.



Bonds from Birth

Baby photo by Lindy Olsen



When I was a seminarian, during the long Christmas holidays I worked in the pastoral care department of a big Catholic public hospital. At a Christmas party I met the charge nurse of the labour ward. Pleading that because I was a celibate I would never be at a birth, I enquired if I might be allowed to come and see. The charge nurse thought that would be fine.

Six weeks later I got the call. Apparently a student priest watching you have a baby is not an easy sell! But Mary was 16, had been dumped by her 19-year-old boyfriend and shunned by her family. A kindly seminarian was better than no one at all. On arrival on the labour ward, I did ante-natal class 101 in 10 minutes: hold Mary's hand, when the midwife tells Mary to "push and keep it coming, keep it coming, keep it coming" – you say it too, don't get in the way, and don't faint!

Mary and I met six hours into her labour, which was an unusual circumstance in which to meet your "birthing partner". She had very little small talk, maybe because she had no breath. From my vast experience of childbirth, I thought everything was going along swimmingly until the doctor arrived to perform an episiotomy. You may or may not know what that is, and I wish I never did. I swear before God that analgesia would have been invented centuries earlier if men had to go through all of this. We would demand epidurals from the sixth month.

The baby arrived minutes later. Mary wept, she had very good cause to; I wept for no good reason; and the charge nurse

wept because I was weeping. There is something so primal and human about the moment of birth that it bonds us to one another. Friendship born in the trenches took on a new meaning for me.

After the tears came the laughter and joy. The reality of Mary's tough situation was happily postponed. On discharge, Mary asked me to baptise the baby. I couldn't, but I arranged for a priest friend to do it. I am Benjamin Michael's godfather. I have stayed in touch with them for the last 30 years. Mary went on to have three more boys to three different fathers. Tommy, the last dad, is now her devoted husband.

When he was four, I got Benjamin into the local Catholic primary school where the principal was a Josephite sister. She was formidable but fair. She took an interest in Benny and his brothers. Sister only once had to go to Mary's home to demand that the boys got out of bed, were fed, cleaned, dressed, taken to school on time and later did their homework. It paid off.

Sister enrolled all the boys for scholarships to a Christian Brothers high school. On their own merits, each of them won a place. Sister wins a place in Heaven. Benny is a physiotherapist, Daniel is an accountant, Kai is a social worker and Noah is a nurse. He has just

finished obstetrics. Mary works at the local supermarket.

Twenty years ago, I received her and Tommy into the Catholic Church. She now volunteers at the St Vincent De Paul's local hostel for homeless women. Some of them are pregnant and 16.

From a complex conception, a messy birth, a willing midwife and a vulnerable baby, extraordinary goodness has flowed from one generation to the next. The divine working through human hands at every stage has changed lives. For us at Christmas, this story comes as no surprise. The Rev John Bell of the Iona Community tells us why:

Light looked down and saw the darkness.

"I will go there," said light.

Peace looked down and saw war.

"I will go there," said peace.

Love looked down and saw hatred. "I will go there," said love.

So he,

the Lord of Light,

the Prince of Peace,

the King of Love,

came down and crept in beside us. ■



Richard Leonard, an Australian Jesuit, is the author of *What are we waiting for? Reflections for Advent and Christmas* (2014, Paulist Press).



DESPERATELY NEEDED PEACE

Cecily McNeill explains that just as the civil war in Northern Ireland was between Catholic and Protestant traditions of Christianity, the conflicts in the Middle East are driven by different traditions within Islam.

This year has seen an unprecedented exodus of refugees and migrants mainly from Syria, where civil war has raged for the past four and a half years. About half the population has been internally displaced or has fled the country in the face of what a United Nations report described as “a conflagration of an unparalleled scale and magnitude” (*HRC Report*, Feb 2015, par 134).

Each day there have been fresh reports of atrocities by both sides against civilians — men, women and children. Last month the *Human Rights Watch* wrote that the rebel fighters opposing the Assad regime had a new “illegal” practice of keeping detained soldiers and civilians — men and women — in cages on the backs of trucks and leaving them in public places. This was an effort to deter the Syrian Assad government from indiscriminately

attacking the Ghouta area. Most of the 400 people detained were from Assad’s Alawite sect, of Shia Islam. The local *Shaam News Network* posted a video and text claiming that the rebels planned to distribute 1,000 cages, each containing seven or so people, in public places in Douma city. The city had been attacked by the Assad regime and bombed by the Russian air force.

The rise of Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL or ISIS) in the past three years, with its brutal intolerance for any diversity, has been well documented but an understanding of the political forces behind the situation in Syria is harder to come by.

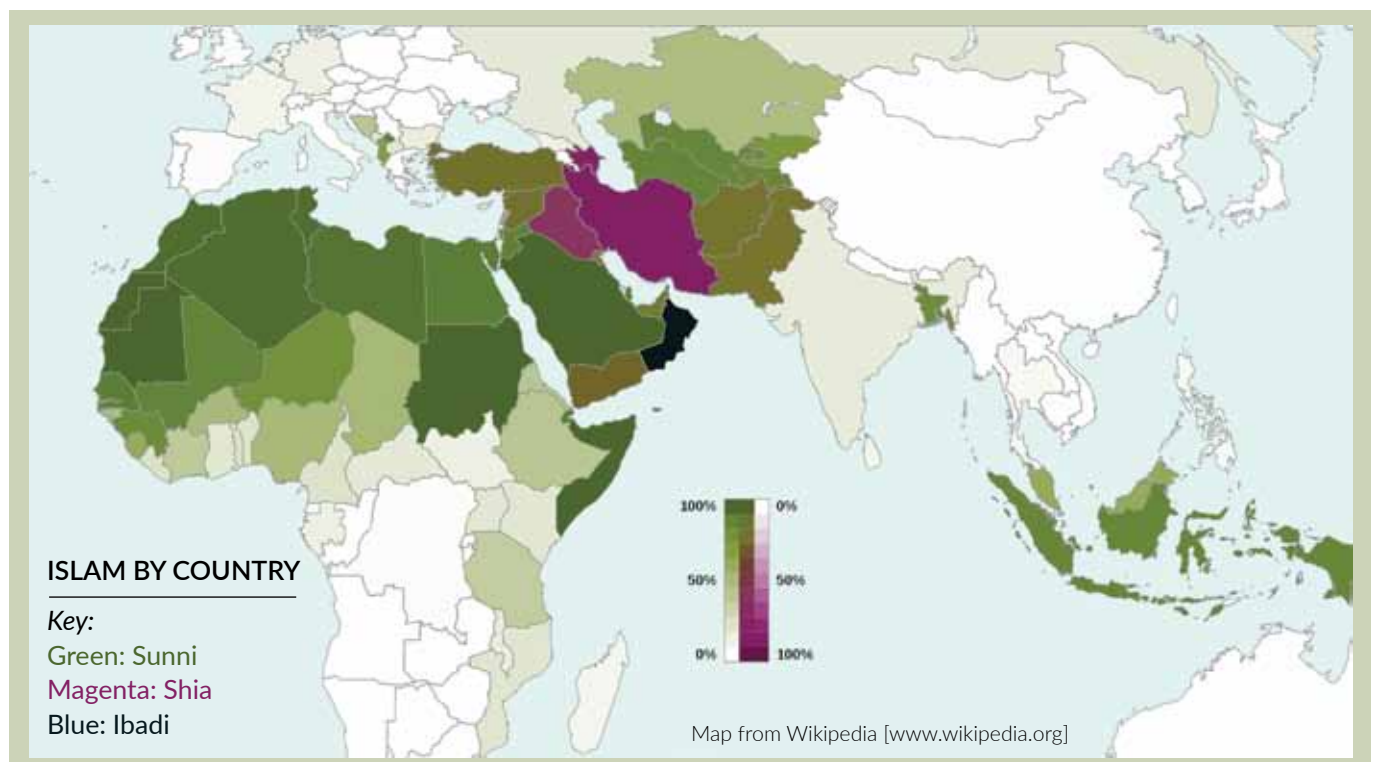
Labour MP and former party leader, David Shearer, worked for the United Nations in Jerusalem and Iraq for seven years from 2002 and spoke to me about the situation.

Shia and Sunni Islam

The Middle East is divided by different traditions of Islam, the two dominant ones — Shia and Sunni. He says you can’t look at what’s happening in the Middle East without understanding the dynamic between these two powers. “It is a bit like Protestant and Catholic branches of Christianity battling each other for supremacy.” (Remember the diplomatic struggle in Northern Ireland through much of last century to get Protestants and Catholics into the same room, let alone to the negotiating table.)

Shia rule in Syria

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is Shia but as less than 20 per cent of the Syrian population is, they are the minority. Bashar assumed the presidency in 2000 when his father died after ruling for 30 years, favouring the Shia. The family has been in power now for some 45 years.



Iran, a major player in the Middle East, supports Syria's Assad regime because it has a predominantly Shia population.

Lebanon supports Syria although its population is divided among Christian, Shia and Sunni. Hezbollah, the fighting arm of Shia in Lebanon, is helping Assad. A large proportion of Iraq's population is also Shia, including its prime minister.

Majority of Muslims are Sunni

Saudi Arabia, Iran's rival for regional dominance, is 80 per cent Sunni, the branch of Islam which is most widely represented globally. (It is estimated that between 85–90 per cent of Muslims are Sunnis.) Turkey is also predominantly Sunni. While Iran wants to see Shia influence prevail, Saudi Arabia would prefer the Sunnis to be paramount in the region.

Islamic State fanatically Sunni

The Islamic State is the most recent and brutal of a raft of extremist Islamist groups, including the Taliban, al-Qaeda and a spinoff of al-Qaeda in Syria, the al-Nusra front. Shearer says ISIS is Sunni – but “very extremist in the way it understands the Islamic religion”.

ISIS had had the support of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and “possibly Turkey, because of its success against Assad's brutal regime”. But the increasing brutality of ISIS has drawn a backlash even from Sunnis.

West's options

The West would like to see ISIS removed and the Syrian war over. But support of either side is problematic. Assad's forces backed by Hezbollah have been the most effective against ISIS inside Syria. If Assad falls there may not be an effective, military opposition strong enough to combat ISIS.

While Russia shares the West's opposition to ISIS, their solution is to support Assad, whereas the USA and the West do not want to go that route. They prefer to target ISIS without strengthening Assad's Alawite Shias. Also the USA's



experience in Afghanistan and Iraq has shown that military intervention has not provided lasting solutions. And the USA public does not support sending troops to Syria.

So the situation is delicate. Syria may see even more brutality if Assad is defeated because of a possible backlash – Russia doesn't want to lose its ally and a loss of power for the Shias “could be disastrous in terms of retribution and killing against them”.

Need to open the stalemate

Through the nearly five years of war in Syria, peace talks have failed to reach a settlement or halt the bloodshed. When the Arab League and the United Nations agreed on a set of principles on the first anniversary of the civil war in March 2012, they failed to get agreement from the Syrian government. Further peace initiatives, the Middle East Peace Conference in 2012-2013 and in Russia in November 2013, languished for lack of commitment from the warring sides.

There is hope that the Vienna talks of October and November this year may bring peace. Shearer says the most important difference is that in Vienna Iran was at the negotiating table for the first time. “Without Iran, which is the real power of Shia authority throughout the region, you are

missing an important player. The other countries have made a substantial step in allowing Iran to be there – bringing Iran in out of the cold.” That the parties agreed to meet again is also encouraging.

Shearer says the war in Syria seems to have become locked in a stalemate with neither one side nor the other being able to wipe ISIS out. If the Assad regime is overthrown, retribution may fall on the minority Shias and the even smaller Alawite sect. A negotiated settlement will need to protect the lives of all, regardless of their religious and cultural backgrounds.

Peace needed now

This offers little comfort for the millions of women, children and men who have been displaced inside their country, in neighbouring countries, or who have fled to Europe. As winter engulfs Europe and Syrians continue to board boats or stream across borders into neighbouring countries the Christmas promise of peace, love and community, is more urgently needed than ever. ■



Cecily McNeill is a Wellington journalist who has a 37-year-old passion for social justice which she delights in finding new ways to communicate.

سوريا

I can write the precious word – Syria

Yasmina El Sabeh tells the story of a little Syrian refugee boy who begs at the gates of her University in Beirut. He is one of over a million Syrian refugees who have fled to Lebanon, a country about the size of Otago with a population of four million. Yasmina changed his name for protection.

I am eight years old. Though there are lots of Syrians here in Lebanon, I still feel lonely. During this time of the year, four years ago, we would be decorating the neighbourhoods with lights and Christmas trees, no matter what our religion. But not last year – not this year – and most probably not next year either.

My name is Anas, and this is one thing, among other things, that I didn't choose. You see, I did not pick my name, or my T-shirt, look how ugly it is! And definitely did not decide to come here. I had to – we all had to.



We fled to Lebanon

Why Lebanon? Because it is close, because it is safe, and because here, despite our difficulties to

adapt, they accept us. I got used to it. But I wish I could go back home. People are nice to me, they give me food, money, and they talk

to me sometimes. But this is their home, not mine. My mother's sister lost her one-month-old baby and went with her husband to Turkey. Someone told me that we have 1.9 million brothers and sisters there.

I remember the smell of war

When it first started, I wasn't very mature. I was four years old. Now I am smart and I understand what's happening. I am not a kid anymore. You can't be a kid when they kick you out. I remember the smell of the war. It used to terrify me. Now nothing scares me. I told you, I became a man. And I stand here every day to go back home with money to feed my family. People ask me why I don't go to school. They don't know that the streets have taught me what books can't even portray. I walk around and don't even beg them for help. They are mostly students and they love me. I became part of their everyday routine. As soon as they have a break they find me on the upper gate of their university, waiting for them, to get what I need most: a smile.

I miss home

December approaches and what pains me are the Christmas ornaments I'll never get to decorate trees with. People are telling me that Santa Clause doesn't exist. I don't believe them. I know he does. I believe in magic but not everyone can see it.

What sucks about this season are the massive raindrops. I live in slums but some people live in tents, far away from Beirut's southern suburbs. It's good that I have friends. I meet them across the capital's roads, on sidewalks, and we all have the same dream: to survive.

I can write "Syria"

At times I ask my mother "why?" We were never rich but we were never poor either. I used to sit at home before Dad got killed. I don't remember him very well

but I remember how we had a TV and watched movies with him from time to time. He used to get me a gift on my birthday. I don't remember my birthday now.

Mama said my siblings and I can't go to school because we have to bring money or else we would die. Good thing is that the students that I sit with in front of the university taught me a lot. I now know how to count. I'm also learning to read. And I now know how to write the most precious word to my heart—"Syria".

Every night, when I go home, I beg God, Imam Ali and Jesus to save me. But Zeinab told me that they are busy protecting kids who live under the bombings.

I long to go back

When I grow up I want go back to Damascus, even if my mother doesn't let me. I will take my brothers and sisters. Aicha wants to become a doctor. Zeinab wants to become a teacher. Ali wants to sell toys. Fatima wants to be a singer. And Hussein wants to become President. I just want to go home.

The weather is cold so I eat the chocolate that Abou Aziz in the market gives me to keep myself warm. At home I eat onions, tomatoes and sometimes bread. I don't remember the last time I ate meat—I was very small. But I remember olives and buying buttery sweets during Christmas and Ramadan.

Every night, when I go home, I beg God, Imam Ali and Jesus to save me. But Zeinab told me that they are busy protecting kids who live under the bombings. Zeinab is very intelligent. Before coming here, she learned maths and a bit of spelling. She knows when to cross the road and when to stay on the safe side.

She also knows the difference between good and bad.

I did something bad this year. But doing bad things doesn't make you a bad person, or does it? I stole a student's lunch box when he put it down to park his bike. I felt so bad and asked God to forgive me, during a very long time, I think three days or so. The box contained a salami sandwich with cucumbers and an orange cake. It was yummy. I promised God not to do it ever again.

So many killed

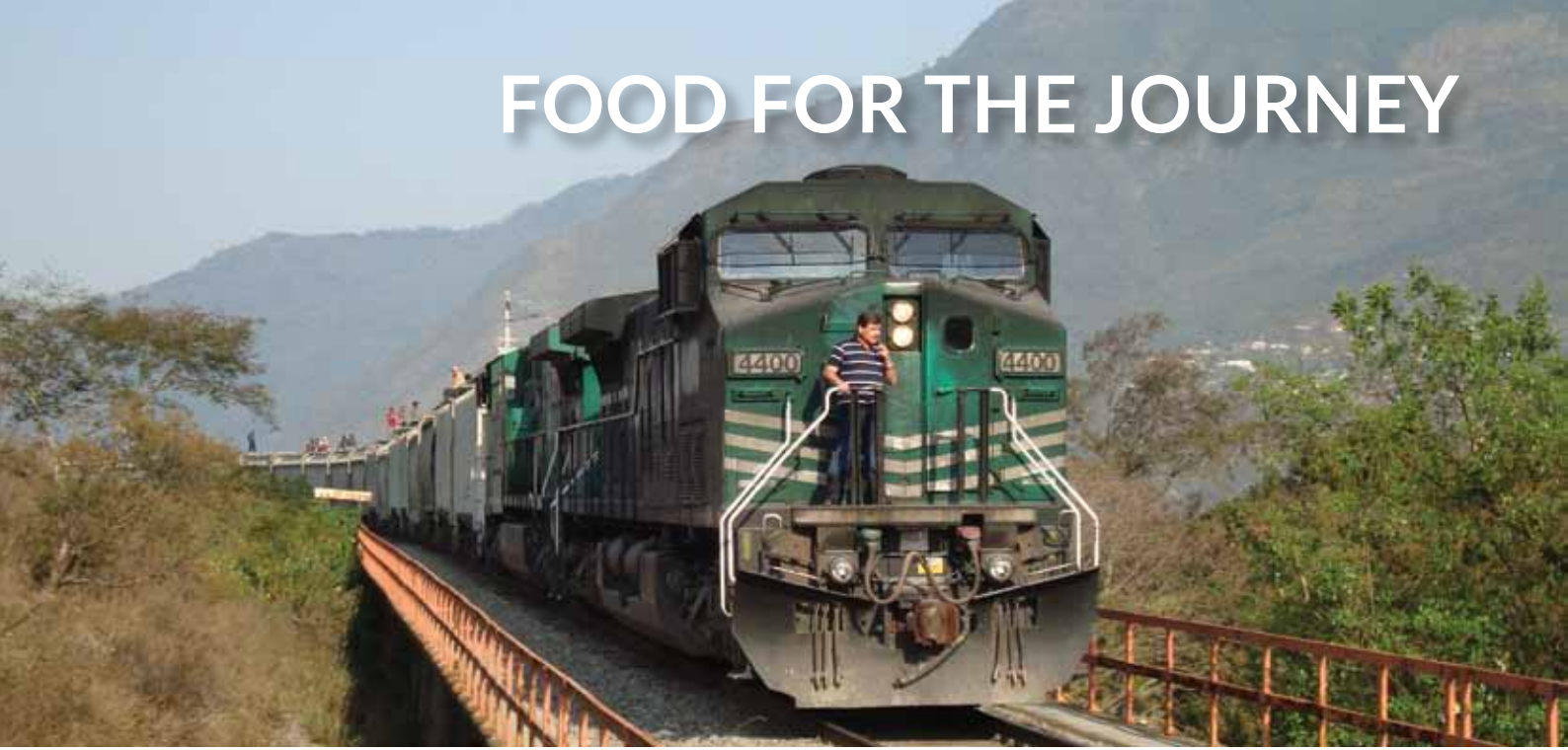
But last year I didn't sin and Santa didn't get me a gift. What if he died in Syria? Maybe that's why he's not visiting. Maybe they killed him. They kill every person who makes me happy. They killed dad, my uncle Salem, his wife, and their four kids. They also shot our neighbour Hazar when she was trying to enter her house. And they beheaded my eldest brother Adnan who was 15, because of what he wrote on the walls facing his school. He wrote things mama forbids me to say. She said: "Losing one kid is horrible. Please don't make me go through it once again." Adnan didn't know that it was bad to write "No freedom in this country. Bashar Assad must die."

I don't remember my brother, but mama says I look exactly like him. She still wears black every day and tells me that she will never wear colours ever again. Now the situation is even worse because there are terrorists. I think that any person who kills is a terrorist. But mama tells me: "God is bigger than all of our problems." ■



Yasmina El Sabeh, 20, is a student at the Lebanese American University, Beirut, journalist for *The Daily Star*, and leadership trainer at her University.

FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY



University student Jack Derwin shares his experience of a community at La Patrona in Mexico. The people at the shelter prepare food for Central American migrants making the long overland journey to the USA.

I'm sitting down for lunch with a group of Central Americans in the middle of the Mexican countryside, surrounded by not much more than fields of sugar cane.

We're eating in a migrant shelter in the town of La Patrona, although the word "town" is a little liberal for what essentially amounts to a few dirt roads and a dozen small houses by a highway.

While it may be relatively remote, the shelter is vitally positioned just metres from the train line that runs alongside the road and expedites northbound migration from the Guatemalan border.

Appropriately nicknamed "The Beast", the train network is notoriously dangerous; to USA-bound migrants its speed is as appealing as it is treacherous.

Armed with a wheelbarrow full of water bottles and precooked meals, the women volunteers who run the shelter, known as *Las Patronas*, are always ready to rush out to meet the familiar sound of a passing train.

It makes for quite a sight – as the migrants speed by, hanging from the side of the train, they reach down to claim the plastic bags of food the women hold out for them with outstretched arms. It very well could be their only meal for days, and it is received by the migrants with understandable joy.

This route is a common one and is taken by some of the estimated half a million Central Americans that enter Mexico each year, as part of the long and arduous overland journey to the United States.

My company for lunch today however has decided to take it more slowly, forgoing the trains and instead staying at the shelter while they plan their next move.

There are half a dozen Hondurans, Salvadorians and Guatemalans having lunch, a very typical representation of those making the journey, fleeing violence and poverty at home while seeking the promise of the (somewhat exclusively North) American Dream.



In doing so they find themselves vulnerable to criminal groups, opportunistic individuals and unscrupulous officials, who seek to take advantage of them.

All of this my new friends are painfully aware of as they talk hopefully of a new life in the USA and swap stories of their journeys thus far. While they all have travelled over 1,000 kilometres already, they have a much longer way still to go.

They are also part of tens of thousands of migrants the shelter has helped feed and protect since it began in 1995.

Over lunch we chat and flick through photographs taken over the years. It's extraordinary to see the lives that have passed through this tiny part of rural Mexico, as well as to talk with some of the migrants themselves.

Guadalupe, who has worked at the shelter for most of those two decades, regales me endlessly with stories.

... he had no money, no family, and no documentation. He was the same age as my son at the time. I told him not to worry and that I would take care of everything.

She points to a photograph of a young Salvadorian man who couldn't be more than eighteen, propped up in a hospital bed, smiling.

"He fell from the train and severed his leg," she recalls. "Travelling alone, he had no money, no family, and no documentation. He was the same age as my son at the time. I told him not to worry and that I would take care of everything. Twenty-one days later he managed to leave hospital, recuperated with a prosthetic leg, and returned home to his family in El Salvador."

It is evidently just one of thousands of journeys made a

little easier by the generosity of *Las Patronas*, a refuge along a road paved with great adversity.

I check my watch and, startled by the lateness of the afternoon, I announce that I must be leaving so as to not miss my bus home.

"There is always space here for you as well if you need to stay," they remind me.

As I stand up and look around at those seated at the table, Hondurans, Salvadorians, Mexicans and an Australian, I recall one of the quotes scrawled in their photo album.

Its translation: "Who can say that we are not brothers if we are all children of the same father?" ■



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



Jack Derwin with members of *Los Patronas*.



NO ONE LEAVES HOME UNLESS
home is the mouth of a shark.

you only run for the border
when you see the whole city
running as well.

your neighbours running faster
than you, breath bloody in their throats
the boy you went to school with
who kissed you dizzy behind
the old tin factory is
holding a gun bigger than his body,
you only leave home
when home won't let you stay.

no one leaves home unless home chases you,
fire under feet,
hot blood in your belly.
it's not something you ever thought of doing

until the blade burnt threats into
your neck
and even then you carried the anthem under
your breath,
only tearing up your passport in an airport toilet
sobbing as each mouthful of paper
made it clear that you wouldn't be going back.

you have to understand,
no one puts their children in a boat
unless the water is safer than the land
No one burns their palms
under trains
beneath carriages
no one spends days and night in the stomach of a truck
feeding on newspaper unless the miles travelled
means something more than journey.
no one crawls under fences
no one wants to be beaten ...



no one chooses refugee camps
or strip searches where your
body is left aching
or prison,
because prison is safer
than a city of fire
and one prison guard
in the night
is better than a truckload
of men who look like your father
no one could take it
no one could stomach it
no one skin would be tough enough ...

i want to go home,
but home is the mouth of a shark
home is the barrel of the gun
and no one would leave home
unless home chased you to the shore
unless home told you


to quicken your legs
leave your clothes behind
crawl through the desert
wade through the oceans ...

your survival is more important
no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your
ear
saying —
leave,
run away from me now
i don't know what i've become
but i know that anywhere
is safer than here.

— Warsan Shire

Warsan Shire (27) was born in Kenya of Somali parents and grew up in London. She was named Young Poet Laureate in 2013.
[Used with permission www.seekershut.org]

Rest on the Flight into Egypt by Nicholas Mynheer. From the Methodist Modern Art Collection, Methodist Church of Great Britain [© TMCP, used with permission.]



Lake Waikaremoana [Mike Fitzsimons]

SAILOR OF MY SHIP

Mike Fitzsimons reflects on beauty and kinship with the divine mystery at the heart of life.

After a stormy few days in the capital, the sun is back, the All Blacks are in town and the people are more than happy. Surely Leonard Cohen was thinking of Wellington on a day like today when he wrote: “Sun pours down like honey on Our Lady of the Harbour”.

Christmas is coming, the biggest mystery of them all (unique among the religions of the world): God is one of us. In the fully human, prophetic, glorious life of Jesus of Nazareth, we are shown how to live, where meaning and fulfilment lie. In some mysterious, bewildering way, the incarnation teaches us we have kinship with God.

The great American writer, Marilynne Robinson, talks about God this way: “Frankly I don’t know what faith in God means. For me the experience is much more a sense of God. Nothing could be more miraculous than the fact that we have a consciousness that makes the world intelligible to us and are moved by what is beautiful.”

Being moved by what is beautiful is, I think, kinship with God. And it is everywhere.

Michael Fitzsimons is a professional writer and director of FitzBeck Creative. He lives in Worser Bay, Wellington and particularly enjoys walking long distances and wine-tasting.



At Labour weekend we went for a three-day trek around Lake Waikaremoana, a walk so lush it seems like a South Island walk. We tackled the Panekiri Bluff first—a five-hour climb in strong winds. It was a push but we were fortified all the way by the sublime views over the lake to our right. We descended the bluff next morning shrouded in Urewera mist and from there it was clear skies, rolling light, swans at dawn and a forest of luminous green. A forest we felt at home in. At night we talked for hours with other trampers in the huts, surprised by their openness and our own. Where did it come from?

Back in town, looking after the grandkids for the afternoon, there was more of the beautiful to be moved by. Five-year-old Baxter and twin friends, Lena and Natasha from next door, want to “double-bounce” on the trampoline, which means Grandad must join the fray, throw his weight around, do a timid somersault. They are so easily delighted, they are so indescribably themselves, talking non-stop and singing a sunshine song from the school concert. I thought later of a Welsh proverb that a friend told me about recently: Perfect love comes with the first grandchild.

If being moved by the beautiful is kinship with God, so too is being

moved by the suffering and pain of others. The heart’s capacity to be moved by love and compassion, to live without selfishness and arrogance, is what gives life its deepest significance. “Love or perish,” wrote W. H. Auden. This kind of beauty is everywhere too.

We are surrounded by those who make sacrifices for one another, revealing the divine through their compassion. Our friend finds the courage over many months to nurse his partner with terminal cancer, another makes the daily trip, month after month, to visit his mother suffering from advanced dementia. There are legions of people who act continually to relieve the pain and suffering of others, who know in their hearts we are all in this together.

Christmas means kinship with God now. It means our humanity—our difficult, mysterious, painful, wondrous humanity—is a life shared with God. Our humanity is a privilege in all its colours. That is the mystery, wrote St Paul: “Christ among us”.

This morning, out our window, the yachts tack back and forth across the bay. The wind is up, the boats are flying. What we believe, the promise of Christmas, is that henceforth and forevermore, in a way I cannot begin to understand, someone divine is the sailor of my ship. ■

“BEST FRIENDS” FALL OUT

Jan Barnett says New Zealand is the unexpected **canary in the mine** of Australia's failed offshore detention system.

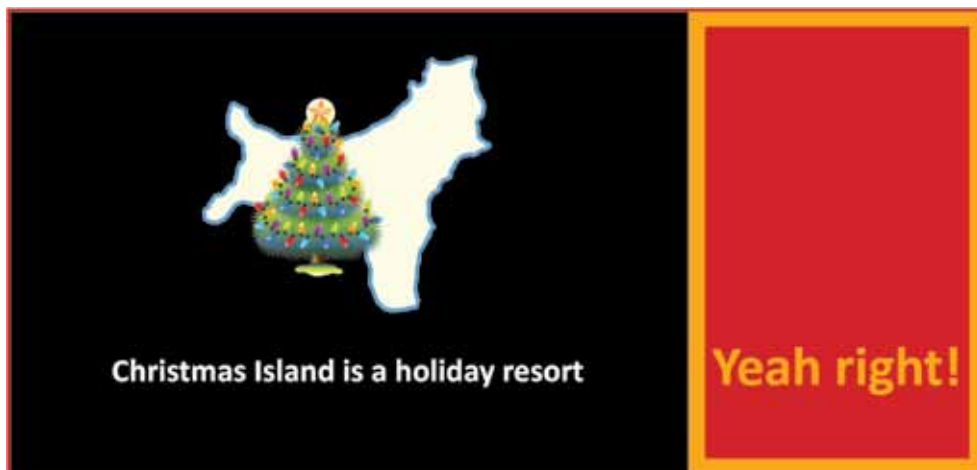
A significant number of Australians have expressed their dismay at the fact that approximately 200 New Zealanders (many of whom have called Australia home for most of their lives) are currently imprisoned in Australia's offshore detention centres. The recent tensions and riots on Christmas Island, widely predicted by observers, politicians and journalists, have brought these concerns to a head, and focused in a very real way the intrinsic and fundamental failings in the overall system.

Changes to the Australian legislation last November mean that Australia can now deport non-citizens who have been living in Australia, if they have served a gaol term of twelve months or more. Moreover, the laws act retrospectively to include older offences to meet the twelve-month threshold.

The most immediate outcome has meant that New Zealanders who have been convicted of crimes in Australia have been sent to offshore detention centres to await repatriation to New Zealand, a country many of them have not called home for years. Some have been convicted of serious crimes; but others have been guilty of only minor offences.

Instead of being released into the community after they have served their time, prisoners are deported to offshore detention centres where they await deportation. Once in detention, they have no support system, their families can't make contact with them and they have no access to lawyers.

Media reports from New Zealand say 119 people have reportedly



been deported to New Zealand from Australia so far this year. That is more than four times the number over the same period 12 months earlier. Families, journalists and opposition politicians in New Zealand have called for strong action, and the issue was a major topic of discussion during the recent visit of the Australian prime minister to New Zealand.

While the issue has not received the same degree of media interest in Australia, the Christmas Island riots gave it front page publicity for 24 hours, and have led to ongoing concern and discussion among the legal, journalistic and justice communities here.

A number of observations have been made:

- Neither of the Prime Ministers has given evidence of a strong response.
- Political leaders and officials have refused to reveal details of what is happening in detention centres.
- The concerns of New Zealanders — families and political leaders — are a telling reminder of the injustices being perpetrated by the Australian Government towards defenceless people.

- New Zealand citizens are the unexpected victims of a policy designed as a vote winner to play on the fears of the Australian people.

We in Australia have a tentative hope that the injustices being suffered by New Zealanders will not only lead to greater justice for our Kiwi brothers and sisters, but will also highlight for both our countries the widely accepted failure that is Australia's offshore detention centre system. Refugees already in offshore detention centres have in fact committed no crime at all.

We have an even deeper hope that the New Zealand Government would raise its concerns publicly. We believe that this could lead to a shift in policy. An even more effective response, we believe, would be a refusal by New Zealand to back Australia's bid for a position on the *UN Human Rights Council*.

Hope springs eternal! ■

Cartoon by Sandy Leaitua



Jan Barnett RSJ is the co-ordinator of the Josephite Justice Network. She is also a facilitator and consultant with educational, church and interfaith groups and serves with a number of social justice groups.

NO PLACE TO CALL THEIR OWN

Economic downturns have most impact on those who are poorly paid or on benefits.

Susan Smith outlines her experience in Northland and reflects on how the gospel nativity stories of the homeless Mary and Joseph are similar to the situation of many families in her region.

In recent years I've been involved with many families in Northland struggling to make ends meet. We have around 160,000 people living in Northland — that is, north of the Brynderwyn hills. Thirty per cent are Māori. In ten years time almost 25 per cent of the population will be 65 years and over and children under 14 years will be only 19.6 per cent of the total. Most disturbingly, while 20 per cent of New Zealand's population is in the lowest quintile of the deprivation index, the equivalent measure for Northland is 35 per cent. Northland's statistics can be discouraging!

Education and contacts count

I remember talking with a Mercy sister shortly after Vatican II. She and three other Sisters had made an "option for the poor", leaving their prestigious schools and positions and moving into a poor suburb. She said that while their material situation had changed dramatically when they moved to live among the poor, they still had their experience. They could not empty their heads of the knowledge, skills and contacts that educational opportunities and

respect and status in the church had meant for them. That knowledge and those important contacts could not be divested as easily as material well-being or support.

I often think of her words in my work with people in need of emergency housing here in the north.

What can I say to a man, partner and father, who has just been made redundant because China is no longer buying the quantities of logs that dominate the port scene at Whangarei? Redundancy has meant his wages drop from around \$1,000 per week to a job-seeker's benefit, a government derived income, of just over \$300 a week. His partner receives around the same amount and together with two children they must survive on around \$700 a week — of which \$350 goes on rent.

What do I say to a solo dad looking after seven children?

To the young man just out from Ngawha prison with nowhere to stay?

What do I say to the young mother who has sought out emergency housing because of violence at home?

It concerns me that these men and women who are economically and politically disenfranchised have so little control over their lives.

Pay too low

Many seeking emergency housing are employed. A University of Otago report in 2013 showed that 49 per cent of all those in inadequate housing situations were working — but usually in poorly paid jobs. And economic downturns always impact first on those workers who are poorly paid.

It concerns me that these men and women who are economically and politically disenfranchised have so little control over their lives.

They are victims of circumstances all too often beyond their control. When their income is low, even something that seems relatively minor to others may be just enough to overturn their financial management — the tyre blows out, a bad toothache, the washing machine breaks down, the school wants \$75 for a child's school trip. Such events might have nuisance value for a middle class family. For those lowly paid or unemployed, such occurrences can represent disaster. They can result in the family showing up at emergency housing centres around the country. And a family experiencing fear, embarrassment, anger, anxiety, powerlessness, vulnerability and loneliness.

Mary and Joseph homeless

Earlier this year *Tui Motu* published some articles on housing in New Zealand. I won't repeat the statistics in those articles but I want to look at what the lack of adequate accommodation at a stressful time might have meant for Joseph, a young carpenter of Nazareth and his pregnant wife, Mary.

There is nothing in either Matthew's or Luke's gospel about the birth of Jesus that mentions a donkey. So Mary and Joseph in Luke's gospel may well have been walking to Bethlehem (or in Matthew's gospel walking to Egypt).

Mary's situation is analogous to that of the expectant mothers and mothers with young children fleeing vicious civil war and worse in their countries today.

Probably, as a safety precaution, the couple were travelling as part of a group to ensure protection from robbers. Were they worrying about finding suitable accommodation at night?

Was Mary anxious that she'd give birth in Samaria, given the long-standing enmity that existed between Samaritans and Jews?

Would they be in time to be



counted in the census? If they were late would they be penalised? Was Joseph still feeling embarrassed, angry or upset about the early conception of the child?

Would they experience loneliness and alienation? What would it have been like when they arrived to find they were competing for available accommodation?

Forced to move

I wonder if the dominant emotions were vulnerability and powerlessness. Mary and Joseph were probably quite happy among their extended family in Nazareth. Some New Testament scholars suggest that Joseph may have worked as a builder at Sepphoris/Tzipori, some six kilometres north-west of Nazareth. There the small town was growing into an important city in Galilee.

The Roman Emperor Augustus's command to register in Bethlehem, Joseph's ancestral home, would have upset their lives. They had to obey. Imperial authorities were ruthless and to disobey would have invited all sorts of trouble. But travelling also created problems. Joseph may have worried about being able to support Mary and the baby when they returned to Nazareth.

Would there be support for his wife in Bethlehem? The canonical gospels are curiously silent on these matters, unlike the apocryphal gospels that may overwhelm us with detail.

Having no control

I suspect that Mary and Joseph had much in common with people feeling vulnerable and powerless, arriving at emergency housing providers.

It is not the young mother's fault that her partner has beaten her up and she has had to flee to an emergency housing refuge. Nor is it the fault of the young dad earning about \$25 per hour, who loses his job and finds that he can't pay \$350 per week in rent. He, his partner and two young children are likely to show up at an emergency housing centre.

Luke's gospel tells us that Mary "gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in the bands of cloth and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn". As current refugee crises demonstrate, today we live in a country and in a world, where there are millions who cannot find "a room at the inn".

Christmas is a time for families to celebrate their togetherness but sadly it is also a time where many find there is not enough safe accommodation for them in our country and in our world.

Maybe like the Magi in Matthew's gospel, who brought gifts to the newly born child, we are called to bring gifts to the poor in our midst, to the ones for whom there is "no room in the inn". ■



Susan Smith, lecturer emerita in theology and scripture at the University of Auckland, now gardens, walks, reads, researches and writes. She is involved with the *Tai Tokerau Emergency Charitable Housing Trust* in Whangarei.

MAKING DO AND MAKING COMMUNITY

Peter Murnane shares his admiration of Kiribati migrants who with energy and faith are creating a community of support and identity in Honiara in the Solomon Islands.



A *maneaba* is a meeting-house of a Kiribati (Gilbert Islands) community. This one is behind the Honiara airport, just 200 metres from the runway where the daily Airbus from Brisbane lands with a roar of reverse thrusters and other jets leave for Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu or Fiji; or the occasional Globemaster soars off and sets course for Australia or the USA.

Land is scarce around Honiara, and the émigré Kiribati community had to take whatever was offered when they sought refuge here during the 1970s because land was even scarcer in their central Pacific homeland. To reach the *maneaba*, I turned off the highway and followed the dusty, pot-holed road that winds among hundreds of tiny family homes on subdivided allotments.

Those closest to the Lunga River are fortunate in being able to grow a garden on the rich silt slopes, but were cursed when the river flooded in 2014, for it washed away both gardens and homes. The vast brown torrent of that hundred-year flood flowed chest-deep through the *maneaba* and removed all its furnishings, including the Mass-altar and lectern. The people were lucky to find their vital water tanks hundreds of metres away.

The *maneaba* recovered fairly easily from this disaster for traditionally it has no walls, just a high-pitched roof on poles. This design has been evolved wisely to provide a cool shelter in equatorial heat. The glare of the tropical sun bounces off the thick palm-frond roof and the heat from even a large crowd within will rise to the rafters and flow out through the vents at either end. This newer building has an insulated aluminium roof and concrete pillars, set in a slab floor, which no doubt saved it in the floods. The people simply swept it

out and replaced the cheap lino on the 30m by 15m floor.

I am here for Sunday Mass but the *maneaba* is more than the Kiribati church. Its space is used for public meetings, concerts and temporary accommodation for visitors or families waiting for a proper home. Such multi-use can become difficult: this community is already building a separate church nearby, in similar style.

I see constant reminders that these are refugees in one of the poorest countries on the planet .

Before Mass I place two plastic chairs behind the altar and sit on one of them as an invitation to any who may wish to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In the available 20 or 30 minutes people of all ages come for the simple ritual. Many choose to relate their sins in *Tok Pisin* or the Kiribati language — akin to Māori. They know it is not important that this foreigner who ministers the sacrament should understand the details of their mistakes or wrongdoing. It probably helped one young person to hear that youthful exploration into sexual intimacy is not the “commit adultery” about which Moses commanded “thou shalt not”!

What each in their own way is experiencing is that yet again through these physical gestures and prayers — kneeling, blessing, a touch on the shoulder — the Holy One is welcoming them and forgiving them through their praying community: that they are accepted into God’s infinite, merciful love.

During these rich encounters and in the brief interval between one penitent’s leaving and the next arriving I see constant reminders



that these are refugees in one of the poorest countries on the planet. Over the past half-century some have acquired wealth and become established but not the majority. Yes, they have gathered funds to build a good maneaba, but their daily lives and their search for God are of the simplest and surely the more authentic because of that.

Against the back wall there is a little shrine. The “back wall” is only a hanging cloth partition which screens off the living areas of several families. I can hear faint noises of people getting up, eating breakfast and organising children.

The shrine is a hodge-podge of popular Catholic devotions. Its main focus is a plaster statue of Jesus’ mother Mary posing as a white woman and three similar statues of Mary and others of St Joseph and the Archangel Michael conquering a devil. A dignified portrait of Jesus draws the attention and the whole shrine is outlined with single lines of artificial flowers in quite good taste. But this is a crowded public space and someone has parked a plastic ice-cream box overflowing with the old candle stubs, a tarnished chalice, a white-board cleaner and sundry other small items of junk on the table beside the shrine.

The cloth partition behind the shrine is white and decorated along the top with large triangles of draped dark-blue satin. The draping is good.

It reminds me of balconies decorated for a parade but is spoiled by one or two triangles skewed or missing. Although everyone appreciates the strong breeze that often blows through the maneaba, it can mess things around.

I can see everything being drawn together here because we hope and love.

My attention is drawn back constantly to the dignity of the penitents as they come one by one — powerful young men humbly kneeling, their hands and feet calloused by work, young women among the most beautiful on earth and older women grown worn by bearing and rearing children and the grinding daily work of maintaining a home despite poverty. At one moment I am awed as a young woman rises to leave, by the black lace hem of her dress revolving in a perfect ballerina-curve around her calf as she turns away. The next I am looking into the solemn eyes of an old woman whose dignity is not spoiled even by disastrous front teeth which she could never dream of finding the money to have straightened.

We begin Mass. The choir sings with typical Kiribati gusto. Eight young people dance the offertory

procession with swaying steps, delicately curving fingers and tiny glances that say more than spoken words about the simple mystery of bringing bread, wine and water — in a plastic bottle — for the enactment of the Mystery. I cannot but reverently receive them and the grubby offertory box with the people’s small donations.

Earlier the readings and gospel — proclaimed by the catechist — were in the Kiribati language. For the same reason I use the older, post-Vatican II wording of the *Eucharistic Prayer* to make it more comprehensible even to me. Only after the consecration, at the great “Amen” that ends the *Prayer*, do I glimpse in a new way how we are praying through Christ, with Christ and in Christ. I can see everything being drawn together here because we hope and love. Although I pray in various ways every day I see here a little more deeply than ever before that I don’t need to keep on looking and calling for God as if “He” were still at some distance. The Mystery is here, alive, in these people’s relationship with one another and with me. ■



Peter Murnane OP lives in Honiara in the Solomon Islands where he works with young men beginning their training as priests and brothers.



NOT ALL WHO WANDER ARE LOST

We often recognise that our lives have become too busy and appreciate a holiday, or even a moment for coffee. **Philomena Clare** shares some of the experiences of her long pause – her sabbatical year.

During Advent of 2014 an article in the *New Zealand Herald* captured my attention. Celia Lashlie, a former prison manager and promoter of boys' social and psychological development, had been diagnosed with terminal cancer.

She said: "The stress of the lifestyle I was living, the demands I made of myself, the demands others made of me became too great. I waited too long to look after myself and my body broke. I am now focused on the moments of magic in front of me – the beauty

and strength of my adult children as they battle anger and grief." Three months later she died.

Her thoughts captured for me that mustard seed of insight of what was important in life in contrast to what was perceived to be important.

I decided that 2015 was to be my sabbatical year, that I would leave my role as secondary school religious educator and practise focusing on "the moments of magic in front of me".

Chapter 1:1 Biblical Lands

In March I left Aotearoa carrying a 15 kilo rucksack and the word "plenty" – I had plenty of everything. I followed my passions – scripture, people and land.

First I travelled to Izniek in Turkey where the ecumenical council in 325 CE gave rise to the Nicene creed. I revelled in the challenge of navigating language, culture and geography to explore the places of the seven churches of Asia Minor named in the *Book of Revelation*. My great achievement was getting out of Turkey without buying a carpet! Those Istanbul carpet-sellers are almost irresistible in tempting you

into their shops with offers of sweet tea and wonderful wares.

Chapter 1 :2

I left Turkey for Palestine/Israel and began several months volunteering at *Ecce Homo* guesthouse on the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem. It's in the Muslim quarter of the old city and daily I observed the activities around the Temple Mount and the Western Wall.

This was my first time in the Holy Land and the fulfilment of a dream to be in the landscape of the Gospels. Bethlehem (the scriptural location of Jesus' birth), Nazareth (the place where Jesus grew up), and other biblical places like Cana, Jericho and the Sea of Galilee, were on my "must-see" list. But I encountered Herod. Let me explain.

The second temple – the Temple Mount in Jerusalem – was rebuilt by the "Jewish" King Herod just before Jesus was born. His building programme included a winter palace in Jericho and fortress palaces at Masada and Bethlehem. I visited the ruined remnants of his ambition and could imagine the power and dominance he exerted over his

people two millennia ago. And sadly, I saw how power and control are exercised in 2015. Palestinians are not able to move freely around their land. They're subjected to checkpoints and many other controls. I heard a Jewish academic acknowledge: "In the history of Judaism the Jews have never had power. However, in 1948 they got power – and my-oh-my, how they use it!" I felt that Herod's influence is alive and well when the Israelis use guns and violence on their more vulnerable Palestinian neighbours.

Chapter 2:1 Iona, Scotland

I arrived at the Abbey on the island of Iona, Scotland, once the home of St Columba and the *Book of Kells*, where I volunteered for the summer. Prayer was held daily in the Abbey church, meals were in the refectory and meetings in the chapter house!

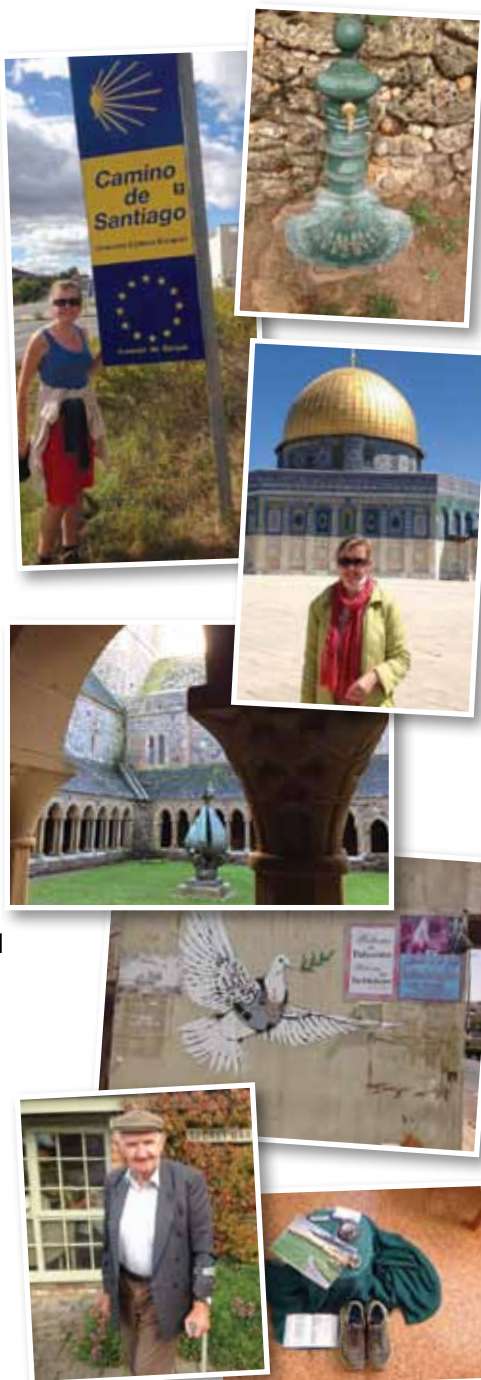
In the 1930s a Presbyterian community worked with unemployed craftsmen and rebuilt the abbey from its ruins. The group's leader, George McLeod, recognised Iona's celtic spiritual legacy as "a thin place where only tissue paper separates the material from the spiritual". I love meaningful ritual and was moved daily by the Morning Prayer when participants were invited to explore "the way I wound myself, wound others and wound the world".

Iona is also home to the liturgical Wild Goose publications. I'm bringing home with me, *Stages on the Way* (Holy Week), *Eggs and Ashes*, (Easter) and *Cloth for the Cradle* (Advent), as resources for liturgies.

Chapter 3:1 Camino across Spain

I walked *El Camino*, the ancient pilgrimage route following the Way of St James to Santiago de Compostela. I started in France, crossed the Pyrenees and walked from east to west over northern Spain. I encountered amazing landscapes and profound people.

The uphill struggle of the Pyrenees and other mountains mirrored my life hurdles. The flat land of the Meseta invited me to



Photos by Philomena Clare

strip away my façade and be open to change. The green farms and ancient woodlands of Galicia reminded me of the gift of God's creation.

It's true – a tourist travels through the land while a pilgrim lets the landscape pass through them.

I believe that you don't walk the Camino by accident. There is something transformative about the sheer grit needed for the pilgrimage in tandem with the shared life-stories of those who undertake this journey – a child's death, a broken heart, a grieving partner, a messy divorce, the challenge to let

go. What is it that makes people live communally in a way that challenges personal space, sleep in simple, crammed bunk-style accommodation, walk 20–30 kms a day and for weeks? I wonder – am I innately a spiritual being on a human journey and not a human being on a spiritual path?

Chapter 3:2

I was greeted with a surprise in Santiago. I'd journeyed with T.S. Elliot's warning in my mind: "We had the experience but missed the meaning" and so was delighted to find that two Sisters of the Faithful Companions of Jesus Congregation had started a new ministry based in the Santiago Pilgrim office. They offered pilgrims the opportunity to process their pilgrimage experience – as a way to mine its riches.

Epilogue.

Between each of my "geographical chapters" I flew to Ireland to visit my elderly parents, Annie and Kevin. This regular punctuation was a blessing because it reminded me again as an adult, of the depth of their love for me expressed in many different ways. It's particularly poignant now as our family has just received news that Dad has lung cancer. I realise that I'm experiencing golden time with him. Like Celia Lashlie, I am challenged to see "the magic in front of me". Perhaps my sabbatical year with its goal to live in the present moment was preparing me for Dad's death.

As I return to Aotearoa, Rumi's words scrawled on a hostel wall in Jordan, echo in my heart: "Goodbyes are only for those who love with their eyes, because for those who love with heart and soul there is no such thing as separation." ■



Philomena Clare is from Ireland and her passions are children, scripture and the environment. After many years teaching, she is now the Religious Education adviser in the Auckland Diocese.

Ecological Reading of the Gospel of Mark

In the final part in the series **Elaine Wainwright** looks at Mark 16: 6–7 and points us back to Galilee to where the story started.

As I came to prepare the December ecological reading of the Gospel of Mark, I was aware that our somewhat sequential reading would focus us on the conclusion of the Markan story of Jesus – his death and resurrection. This seemed somewhat out of sync with the Advent liturgical season we are entering. Further reflection turned my attention to the verses that all but conclude the short ending of Mark and which seem most appropriate to this season.

Mk 6 But he [the young man in a white robe in the tomb] said to them: “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. 7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.”

Go back to Galilee – go back to the place where this story began – there you will “see” him or even more strongly: there this powerful sense will enable you to “see again”, to see anew.

Jesus the crucified and raised one is not found in this one material space, the tomb, but also on the “open road” as scripture scholar, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, says, going back to and in Galilee – but not as when we started.

Jesus’ body killed and buried

Before we turn to this open road and toward Galilee, it seems appropriate in light of the young man’s naming of

Jesus as the one “who was crucified” to focus our ecological eyes just briefly on what was wrought on the human, the material body of Jesus.

This takes us from the time of Jesus’ receiving the healing ointment that *Murisa* poured over his anxiety-wracked body (Mk 14:3-9) to that same body being placed in a rock-hewn tomb (Mk 15:46), embraced by Earth.

Earth dangerously disrespected

Bread broken and wine poured out (Mk 14:22-25) symbolise the heart of Jesus’ ministry that will be re-encountered back in Galilee. But this bread, this wine, this body and blood of Jesus are not singular. Caught up in them is Earth that is being raped by logging, by fracking, by deep sea drilling and myriads of processes too numerous to mention.

So many human and other-than-human beings are sharing the same fate as Jesus. Their bodies are annihilated by a greed-filled human empire like that of Rome. The very cosmos is being polluted by human interventions and inventions.

Betrayal in the Garden

A garden called Gethsemane provides the place, the space for Jesus’ prayer that prepares him for a profound betrayal by one of his own beloved disciples. It is enacted through the most intimate form of touch – the kiss (Mk 14:45).

And this is followed quickly by the profound desertion: all the disciples deserted him and fled (Mk 14:56). Jesus’ very identity as teacher and friend has been shattered and he is left alone before a hostile power.



He carries in his body the abjection suffered by many among the human and other-than-human of the Earth community who are abandoned and betrayed. These include refugees fleeing violent death, earth itself, species and resources like water. We can see it mapped in and on many places and spaces in our neighbourhoods and across our planet.

Shattered hopes

Order and identity continue to be shattered as the abjection of Jesus’ body continues in the Markan story: he is beaten by the guards (Mk 14:65) and led away by the soldiers, who strip his body of his own material covering and give him instead a purple robe which mocks him (Mk 15:16-20).

Jesus' body and clothes, the manifestation of his person, are profoundly dishonoured as are all Earth's other-than-human as well as human constituents who suffer and endure such abjection today at the hands of others, most predominantly from human others and their powerful coalitions.

Cry of abjection

The very cosmos itself is caught up in Jesus' final moments as darkness covers the earth (and planet Earth) from noon until three (Mk 15:33-34).



It is as if Earth mourns the profound and absolute abjection of Jesus and carries this across time. The cry of Jesus concludes the relentless process of degradation/abjection – “My God, my God why have you (the Holy One) abandoned me.”

This cry echoes from all who suffer today, all the more-than-human constituents of Earth, all in-habitants of every habitat that is being degraded at this time, as was the body of Jesus.

Not alone

This profound abjection does not, however, leave Jesus alone as in the garden. Readers learn that there are many women *looking on from afar*, their bodies straining toward the body of their companion (Mk 15:40-51) who has died before their eyes. The narrator's description of them is that they have followed Jesus from Galilee, *doing diakonia*, the tasks of disciples of Jesus.

Also, another disciple, Joseph of Arimathea, requests the body of Jesus. Jesus' material body, that has been dealt with abjectly and that could have been left on

the cross as food for carrion birds and animals or simple decomposition, is returned to Earth in another manner – it is laid in Joseph of Arimathea's own tomb hewn from rock. The body of Jesus returns to earth as does that of all Earth's creatures.

Back to the beginning

Our journey has brought us back to where we began: the Jesus of Nazareth who had been crucified has been raised. This place, this space of the rock-hewn tomb has been rendered empty of the corpse of Jesus.

He has been raised in his body-person-self, a claim that expands our material and our corporeal understandings. To stand at the empty tomb of the crucified one is transforming, an experience that at least momentarily caused the women to be filled with terror and amazement.

The message from the empty tomb is for disciples: “He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him”. Galilee is the place of the gospel, the place of teaching and healing, the place of the call to *metanoia*, to a profound change of perspective (Mk 1:15).

Having followed the gospel story with Jesus through ministry, abject death, and quiet resurrection – listening, experiencing all with ecological eyes – we, the hearers/readers, must enter into the story again.

We have sought to repent, to change our perspective so that we might read ecologically. That we might include within our story the other-than-human whom we have so often ignored. That we de-centre ourselves as the human ones, as the only actants in the gospel narrative.

Living anew into the gospel

As suggested at the beginning of this article, the directive to “go back to Galilee” fits well with our entry into the Advent season.

At the beginning of the liturgical year, we hear anew the call to *metanoia*, to repentance, to a shifting of our perspective so that we might live anew into the gospel story of Jesus as played out in the liturgical year.

We have sought during this year to read the gospel with the other-than-human, with Earth and all Earth's processes and beings as these interrelate profoundly with the human within the Earth community. To do so is to hear a new ethic. It is to give voice to a new call to repentance.

As next year unfolds, back in Galilee, we will hear the Gospel of Luke with these new ears, new eyes, new senses and sensitivities that we have learnt from the Gospel of Mark. ■

Painting by Daniel Bonnell ©. [Used with permission. www.bonnellart.com]



Elaine Wainwright RSM is the new Executive Director of Mission and Ministry for the Mercy Sisters in Australia and New Guinea. She will continue to lecture and write in biblical studies.



THE WORD MADE FLESH

Kathleen Rushton explores the meaning of John's Prologue, 1:1-18, as a Christmas reading.

Photo by Thomas Shellberg.

Christmas carols such as *O Little Babe of Bethlehem* and *Once in Royal David's City* evoke the infancy narratives in Matthew's and Luke's gospels. The wonder, lowliness, humanity and vulnerability of the mystery of the new-born Christ child in those gospels inspire cribs, cards, and the liturgies of the midnight and dawn masses. John's gospel, heard on Christmas Day, expands this horizon:

"In the beginning was the Word ... All things come into being through him ... the true light ... was coming into the world ... And the Word became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:1-18).

While English translations capture the poetry of this ancient hymn they also obscure what it would have evoked in its first century hearers. The prologue was not anthropomorphic (human-centred) for them. Particular words in John's prologue would have evoked biblical and ancient Hellenistic cosmologies inserting Jesus into biblical and ancient understandings of the universe.

In the beginning

The prologue, like the *Book of Genesis*, opens with: "In the

beginning (*en archē*)". The opening lines of the creation account of Genesis 1:1-2:4 have been described as "geography of the cosmos".

The first five verses of John's prologue evoke other creation motifs — light, life and darkness. As God is central in biblical creation, so too, is Jesus. "Beginning" (*archē*) evoked many Hellenistic or Greek notions.

For philosophers, *archē* was what was there before anything else was there. It did not have to be explained. It was a "beginning" although it does not have a beginning itself and has a continued existence. It also surrounds and steers all that is holding the whole and, in some way, is responsible for and explains its direction. It is the basic "stuff" of the world.

The Word

"In the beginning was the Word (*logos*)."

The term for the Word expresses many Hellenistic ideas. *Logos* is not confined to the meaning "word" only. *Logos* is the main principle, the reason underlying all reality. This term enabled the writer of John to express the central truth of the life, death and resurrection

of Jesus in the context of an understanding that saw the world's wonders as living and moving images of the eternal. Later the second century Jewish writer, Philo of Alexandria, uncovered the principle of creation and gave this a Greek name that evokes a thousand resonances: *logos*. For him, *logos*, which contained the world of ideas, is the instrument of creation and the principle which holds the cosmos together.

Calling Jesus the "Word" evokes the many varied meanings of "the word of God" found in the biblical traditions. The word of God conveys energy and power. Word and deed go together. In the creation account, God creates by speaking the word. In the prophetic tradition, "the word of God came ..." (eg, Joel 1:1) challenging and propelling into action.

The word of God is a life-giving factor (Deuteronomy 32:46-47); has power to heal (Psalm 107:20); and is a light for the people (Psalm 119:105). Many times, the word is shown to have a seeming existence of its own, carrying out an independent, personal function (Isaiah 55:11).

Wisdom-Sophia

The Word theology, outlined above, would be familiar to first century hearers of the prologue. In contrast, they would have been surprised by John's particular telling of the story of Jesus because the male *Logos* (the Word) is being spoken about in the way the Wisdom Books speak of the female figure, Wisdom-Sophia. The one declared to be with God from the beginning (John 1:1), pre-existent with God and through whom "all things" (*pánta*) came to be, is named not as female Wisdom-Sophia (Proverbs 8:22-25) but the male *Logos*. The *Logos* is source of life (John 1:9) instead of Sophia (Wisdom 8:13).

All things

By Plato's time, the word *pánta*, all things, was one of several ways of naming the universe. In the Wisdom traditions it refers to the other-than-human creation (Wisdom 7:15-22). The narrator in Wisdom 9:1-2 addresses God: "you have made all things by your word, and by your wisdom have formed humankind. "Thus, the word and wisdom, along with humankind and "all things," are linked.

Sophia "pervades and penetrates all things" (7:24), and "can do all things" and "renews all things" (7:27). *Sophia*, reaching from one end of the earth to the other,

"orders all things well" (8:1).

Because "she is an initiate in the knowledge of God" wisdom is "the active cause of all things" (8:4-5).

This biblical use of the phrase, "all things", to convey a sense of the cosmos, matches a similar phrase, "holds all things together," found in ancient Stoic philosophy to express a concept for a divine bond that unified the world. In summary, in the divine *Sophia*, the Hellenistic intellectual tradition of a unified cosmos is expressed in biblical terms.

The Word became flesh

The becoming of Jesus is not expressed as a birth. Instead, "the Word *logos* became flesh (*sarx*) and lived among us" (literally pitched a tent in us). *Sophia* pitched her tent (Sirach 24:8) and "appeared on earth and lived with humankind" (Bar 3:37) but never became flesh as Jesus does. It is significant that the prologue states that Jesus became not "a man", or even "a human person", but flesh *sarx*.

In classical and biblical writings *sarx* has a range of meanings, among them a strand linking human persons with other living creatures. Often the word "all" is inserted. God's continuing relationship with creation is with "all flesh" – not just human persons. In the flood, the focus is on "all flesh" (Gen 6:13-22; 7:15-16,) and later the covenant is made with

"all flesh" (Gen 9:8-11). God sustains "all flesh" (Ps 136:25) and "all flesh" praises God (Ps 145:21).



In John's prologue the Incarnation is not a one-off event to be celebrated at Christmas. The interconnections of biblical and ancient cosmologies are reshaped in order to insert Jesus, the Word made flesh, into an evolving understanding of our incarnate, dynamic God and the universe. Creation and Incarnation are interrelated.

The French philosopher, Remi Brague, explains how ancient cosmologies link cosmology and the human person. Cosmology is linked to a wisdom in this world leading to contemplation, which leads to ethical action. Read in this way the prologue speaks of a long, enduring love story of the ever-unfolding interconnection of God, the cosmos, flesh and "all things."

The wonder and beauty of this understanding affirm and challenge the 21st-century reader to live wisely, caring for our cosmic home with its complex, evolving, beautiful, suffering and global world. ■

Composite image above by Sandy Leaitua



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

Heart and Mind

A journey with Saint Ignatius of Loyola

This five-day course is facilitated by José García de Castro Valdés SJ. José is a professor at the Pontifical University Comillas in Madrid. His area of expertise is the spirituality that started with Saint Ignatius of Loyola and his First Companions. Jose is an animated and engaging presenter who brings a contemporary freshness to Ignatian Spirituality.

Heart and Mind will help participants explore Ignatian spirituality in an experiential and prayerful environment. The material presented will be drawn from the key texts and writings of St Ignatius including: the Autobiography, the Spiritual Exercises, the Spiritual Diary and Letters. Participants will discover frameworks and practices in Ignatian spirituality, including aspects of contemporary interpretations of the Ignatian tradition.

Course Date
Monday 1st – Friday 5th February, 2016 9am-4:30pm
Open to all, limited places available.

Cost
\$859 live-in
\$440 live-out (\$540 incl Lunch)

Location
Home of Compassion
2 Rhine St, Island Bay, Wellington.

To register email: arrupenz@xtra.co.nz
or book online: www.arrupe.org.nz

Arrupe NZ is a ministry of Sentir Graduate College of Spiritual Formation Melbourne

From first to 200 issues

It is a happy coincidence that the 200th publication of *Tui Motu* magazine is the Christmas issue. Christmas is a celebration of new birth, the birth of Jesus Christ. It is the most beautiful of all Christian feasts.

Each issue of *Tui Motu* is like a new birth. I like to think that the magazine is also a thing of beauty. John O'Donohue describes beauty in these terms:

"Beauty is not a luxury—it ennobles the heart and reminds us of the infinity that is within us. Beauty is about more rounded substantial becoming. And I think when we cross a new threshold ... we cross onto new ground where we don't just repeat what we've been through before. Within the Christian tradition there are zones of darkness ... but also of great light—immense wells of refreshment and healing."

In its writing *Tui Motu* strives to bring to life again within us the Gospel message of Jesus. Good writing crosses new thresholds. It takes us into a space where we have never been before. It serves to bring light and healing into troubled lives.

One good reason why the magazine is now 18 years old is that it has provided a forum for some of New Zealand's best writers. Some instruct, others challenge, some offer criticism, others simply comment. And some, we will not necessarily agree with. But

Rosminian priest **Michael Hill** is the founding editor of *Tui Motu* magazine and lives in Dunedin. He is writing a book about the Rosminian mission in England.



hopefully they will all make us think. In that sense they are bringing us to new birth.

Think of those writers whose page you turn to first. If I mention two names it is because they belong to our history and both have gone to God. Many readers turned first to the back pages to read Humphrey O'Leary and John Honoré. Those writers challenged, informed and entertained—and were never dull.

Well-written articles are the lifeblood of good journalism. *Tui Motu* over its 18 years of life has provided such nourishment. Plato wrote: "The soul awakens in the presence of beauty and recovers her eternal wings." Good writing takes us into the realm of the transcendent. It is a thing of beauty.

Other aspects of beauty I see in *Tui Motu* are the art, poetry and the format of its pages. As time passed we were able to add colour to the magazine: at first that was prohibitively expensive. From the first we resisted the temptation to use newsprint. We wished to provide a magazine pleasing to look

at and feel—even to smell. Many people have chosen to keep their magazines over many years—some all 200 issues.

We learn by using both sides of our brain. A rich piece of writing will nourish the intellect. It is an activity of the left brain. But the context of care in choosing the font, illustration, white space and placement of the articles helps to feed the right brain. It is a balanced diet.

I have said nothing about the magazine's being one of the very few independent religious journals in the world, although that too is vitally important. This aspect was dealt with admirably by the editor of the *American National Catholic Reporter* in the *Tui Motu* August issue.

I wish to close by thanking you, our readers, our most valuable asset, for your loyalty and generosity in supporting *Tui Motu* over so many years. And I wish the present editor and staff every success in the future. ■

PEACE ON EARTH



One of my most poignant memories was during my compulsory National Service stint at Waikouaiti Military Camp. At 10pm each night as we stood to attention the *Last Post* boomed through speakers all over the camp.

As a 20-year-old I learnt a lot about life and killing during my three years in the Territorial Army.

When my term was completed I was offered the rank of sergeant to "sign on". I declined!

I'm grateful that I am part of the first generation in history not to have to fight a war *compulsorily*.

After 50 years I am still pondering why anyone would voluntarily hand their lives over to a military system as, once again New Zealand soldiers, choose to do.

All wars rely on lies. The "Gulf of Tonkin incident" triggering the Vietnam War was invented. The false claim that Iraq had "weapons of mass destruction" rationalising the USA's and Britain's illegal invasion has helped create ISIS.

Not one of the 9/11 "terrorists" came from Iraq or Afghanistan but both countries have vast reserves of minerals and natural gas. These are resource wars.

The global discourse on war

Myths about the value of going to war to defend one's country are deeply embedded.

- War makes the world coherent and understandable. The world is construed as black and white – them and us.
- The language of sacrifice plays a central role in how war is understood.
- Politicians find it impossible to admit that they were ever wrong about wars, and they posture about war at every opportunity.

War seduces not just those on the front line but entire societies. It corrupts politics, destroys culture and perverts basic human desires.

The Psychological Costs of War

Studies reveal that killing creates a world of silence. This might explain the silence of veterans. The Armed Forces teach how to kill but not how to deal with killing.

More American Vietnam veterans have committed suicide than the 58,000 who died during that war. Described as an epidemic, the current suicide rate for veterans from the Iraq war is one per day.



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

Early Christians were not permitted to serve in the military. This changed when Constantine aligned the church's interests with the Roman Empire. Ambrose, Augustine and Aquinas subsequently developed the theory that there is such a thing as a "just" war.

The alignment of the Church and state was recently reinforced with the astonishing decision of the New Zealand Catholic Bishops to support the deployment of New Zealand troops to Iraq.

The Bishops said New Zealand could no longer watch from the sidelines as ISIS inflicts immense suffering and brutality on the Iraqi people. What they fail to mention is that much of the suffering has occurred since the illegal American invasion of Iraq in 2003. Since then over one million Iraqi people have been killed.

When it comes to beheadings, ISIS has nothing over America's archaic oil friend, Saudi Arabia – 175 beheadings in the past year – one every two days.

War propaganda is kept simple and consistent: "The West is always the innocent victim of terrorism, never its perpetrator".

The challenge for Christians this Christmas is to reflect on why we call the non-violent Jesus the "prince of peace". Where is our witness and real commitment to peace? ■



Support Through Solidarity

Peace in the Middle East campaign

Show your support for the millions of refugees in the Middle East by helping us to help those in need.

Your support will provide food, shelter, healthcare, comfort and hope to thousands of refugee families affected by the ongoing humanitarian crises.



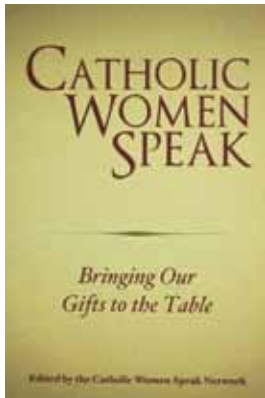
The Catholic Agency for Justice, Peace & Development

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www.caritas.org.nz





Catholic Women Speak: Bringing our Gifts to the Table

Edited by the Catholic Women Speak Network
Published by Paulist Press, 2015
Reviewed by Dianne Strevens

This publication is produced by the *Catholic Women Speak Network*—an online forum for theological dialogue and collaboration among women, about issues relating to their participation, presence and representation in society and the church. The list of contributors to *Catholic Women Speak* reads like a “who’s who” from the Catholic world of scholarship, containing voices from Africa, the Philippines, Latin America, USA and Europe, many of whom, but not all, are teaching at universities throughout the world.

The foreword sets the tone for the 40 papers in this publication. The intention is to encourage “authentic dialogue and debate, embrace difference, and affirm the equality and dignity of all conversation partners ... there are no outsiders or insiders.”

The papers are divided into

four main topics: Traditions and Transformations—looking at Catholic traditions over the past two millennia, and ways in which they might be transformed in the 21st century.

Marriage, Families and Relationships—many of the essays in this section grapple with painful and complex realities, as women of faith bring theological and personal reflections to bear on the dilemmas and challenges of modern relationships and family life. This is the largest section of the four, covering not only marriage and divorce, but also same-sex love, celibacy and the vocation to solitude.

The essays in Poverty, Exclusion and Marginalisation describe families that are far from the idealised model of the nuclear family found in official church teaching, yet each of them, in their very diversity, their struggles and

their bonds of connection and love, points the way to a more inclusive and pastorally responsive and responsible approach to families.

The fourth and final section—Institutions and Structures—exposes the many ways in which the absence of women limits the capacity of the institutional Church in God’s mission of evangelisation and pastoral care. It is here that most women are invisible and silent in Catholic life.

Catholic Women Speak: Bringing our Gifts to the Table is, I believe, a significant contribution to the discussion around the role of women in the Catholic Church in the 21st century. It is not only well-researched, but is a lively and thought-provoking read. I thoroughly recommend it, and would like to conclude this review with a quote from Ursula King’s paper, where she compares the relationship between the Catholic Church and women as being “rather like the experience with one’s own parents when one wants to affirm close, loving bonds, but is all too aware of the gaps, the shortcomings, the narrowness of vision, and limitations of achievement of another generation.” ■



Umrika

Directed by Prashant Nair
Reviewed by Paul Sorrell

The flyer for *Umrika* describes it as “a feel good movie between *Slumdog Millionaire* and *The Lunchbox*.” In reality, the film is a rather sombre depiction of Indian village and urban life in the mid-1980s that barely elicits a chortle—let alone the belly laughs associated with the current crop of “feel-good” films designed to appeal to middle-aged, middle-class audiences.

There are few if any concessions to Western tastes in *Umrika*’s portrayal of life in the northern Indian village of Jitvapur, a close



Now You Know

by Michael Fitzsimons and Philip Birch
Published by Fitzbeck Publishing 2015
Reviewed by Alice Sinnott RSM

Now You Know brings together an inaugural collection of poignant poems by Wellington writer, Michael Fitzsimons, and a series of luminous weather photographs taken by Philip Birch who was Fitzsimons's close friend and the catalyst for this collection. When Philip Birch received a diagnosis of terminal cancer in November 2013, these friends of more than 40 years decided to co-operate on a publication, which would combine some of Philip's vivid weather photographs with poems by Michael. This is an especially moving result of their creative teamwork.

Despite the sadness which triggered its creation, *Now You*

Know is essentially an optimistic book. The first series of poems, *A Slow Show*, explores and describes the spiritual underpinnings of many apparently unremarkable events and people. I mention just three of the most engrossing for me in this series, *A love I can't undo*, *Little white boat*, and *Ride in the hearse*.

The second series of poems entitled, *Now You Know* is about Philip. The initial poems in this collection including, *You saw it coming*, *The garden* and the final poem, *Now you know*, are among the gems of the whole collection.

The poems sparkle as they embrace themes of new life, life's surprises and revelations and death itself. This beautiful collection

of poems and photographs finds inspiration in the wild weather of life—its wonder, its sadness and its surprises. Wellington poet, Gregory O'Brien, describes the poems thus: "these graceful poems are poems of equilibrium, acceptance, and holding fast."

Now You Know is the stimulating and moving result of an innovative partnership. Michael Fitzsimons is a professional writer and director of the Wellington communications and publishing company, *FitzBeck Creative*. He is the co-creator of two very attractive, illustrated books: *The Wellington Book* and *The NZ Book*. He is also the co-author with Nigel Beckford of *With a Passion – The Extraordinary Passions of Ordinary New Zealanders*.

Philip Birch was a former priest, theology lecturer, counsellor, landscape gardener and a passionate observer of weather. He was a parishioner at St Joseph's, Mt Victoria, for more than 20 years and established the garden around the church. Diagnosed with cancer in November 2013 he died in October 2014. ■

community where one family's business is everyone's. For the young in all cultures such intimacy can be stifling, and we watch as the village farewells Udai, elder son of one close-knit family, as he leaves to make a new life in "Umrka" (America). When nothing is heard of him for months, his family is plunged into despair, especially his loving but overbearing mother.

Then, letters start arriving. They include weird factoids about life in the US – "bathrooms here are twice the size of our houses" – and are illustrated with magazine clippings featuring scenes that range from the iconic (the Manhattan skyline) to the bizarre (mud wrestlers). Following

his father's tragic death, younger son Ramakant (Suraj Sharma) discovers that the letter trail was an elaborate deception conducted by his father and uncle. Desperate to console his doubly grieving mother, Rama sets out to track down his missing brother. Armed with the slender information that Udai was despatched to America by a mysterious Mr Patel, Rama sets off for the big smoke of Mumbai.

From this point, the mood of the film changes sharply as Rama becomes immersed in the hectic life of the metropolis, including its brutal underworld in which Patel proves to be a kingpin. Subplots multiply, threatening to submerge the main story line in a welter of detail. Rama

is forced to grow up quickly as he battles to make a living in a hostile environment, cement personal alliances and even nurture a budding romance, all while following the trail of the elusive Udai.

This heady potpourri of urban life would make good sense if director Nair was presenting a coming-of-age story in which Rama gives up his fantasies of Umrka in order to find his real, Indian, identity. However, the film's final scene contradicts such a reading, leaving us in a mood that is anything but uplifting. Far from being a light-hearted, exotic romp, *Umrka* is a complex and contradictory film that leaves many issues unresolved. See it and make up your own mind. ■



Economy and Climate Conflicts

Two reports appeared in New Zealand in the same weekend in October. An article in the *New Zealand Herald: Business* explained how Norwegian *StatOil* is hoping to develop giant oilfields off the New Zealand coast "that would transform our economy."

And a *New Zealand Listener* article detailed a growing consensus among world leaders that the current generation is the last one able to prevent a calamitous increase in climate change. Necessary actions will include the elimination of the profligate use of fossil fuels.

Meanwhile Pope Francis, one of those world leaders, said to the United Nations: "A selfish and boundless search for power and material prosperity leads both to the misuse of available natural resources and to the exclusion of the weak and disadvantaged, either because they are differently abled, or because they lack adequate information and technical expertise, or because they are incapable of decisive political action."

Structural Change Needed in Church and United Nations

In his address to the United Nations Pope Francis said: "The contemporary world, so apparently connected, is experiencing a growing and steady fragmentation, which places at risk the foundations of social life and consequently leads to battles over conflicting interests." Francis's words also reflect the divisions apparent among the bishops at the recently concluded Synod on the Family.

The United Nations, like the Church, is composed of a great diversity of people and cultures. Francis praised the positive effects the United Nations had brought about over 70 years and added

that some structural change is needed. "Experience has made it clear that adaptation to the times is always necessary in the pursuit of the ultimate goal of granting all countries, without exception, a share in, and a genuine and equitable influence on decision-making processes."

Addressing the Synod, Francis continued the theme. As well as noting the value of Synods over the centuries, he pointed out the need for structural change. He called for a Synodal Church, with regular Synods at diocesan, national and regional levels. This inevitably means significant lay participation.

All kinds of approaches and strategies are needed to address the world's – and the Church's – myriad problems.

Francis's prophetic example of humility, kindness and concern, especially for the disadvantaged, is having a profound effect of encouragement in the Church and around the world. He is chipping away the hardened crusts of institutionalism and planting seeds of new life.

Advertising Overload

Last May a report on advertising trends in the *Financial Times* claimed: "Media advertising is about to reach a tipping point. Marketers are likely to increase their spending from \$US69 billion in 2015 to over \$US100 billion in 2016 in mobile adverts, overtaking the sum spent on desktop advertising."

In the economies of the developed world people need work in order to live. And employers need advertising for sales to keep their businesses viable and their workers employed. But is the relentless stream of advertising garbage that assails us really necessary?

A Heart that Sees

The *Associated Press* reported that on his way from the airport to the international meeting of families in Philadelphia in September, Pope Francis spotted a boy in a wheelchair. He ordered his driver to stop, "got out and walked over to the boy, put his hand on his head and kissed him, coaxing a small smile from the severely physically and mentally disabled 10-year-old as his sobbing mother looked on." ■



TUI MOTU InterIslands Independent Catholic Magazine

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

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

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

We do not publish anonymous letters except in exceptional circumstances.

NEED TO UNDERSTAND

I was very interested in Robert Consedine's article, *In our own language* (Oct 2015). The problem is not new. Thomas Cranmer wrote the original *Anglican Prayer Book* in 1662 in "everyman's" language (of those times) so that the ordinary person could be part of the Eucharist.

In a similar way the *King James Bible* made scripture available to the ordinary Christian. That was over three centuries ago however and yet some folk think it is the only true bible. Modern translations such the *Jerusalem Bible* make the truth available in a language all can understand today. Language is ever-changing.

One of my most profound Christian experiences was hearing a professor of ancient languages say the Lord's Prayer. He began in English, then changed to Latin, then Greek, finally Aramaic – as Jesus would have said it.

Dennis Veal, Timaru

LIVING WITH AN OPEN HEART

The *Tui Motu* November cover is glorious, pure joy. Open to "Life's Changes" is a wonderful and practical theme – that may have been my unconscious way since 1982. I am looking forward to taking that walk with you along the Camino Way – clearly you are a "trooper".

Gerald Della-Porta, Scotland.

WHAT I WOULD SAY

I read with astonishment Jim Elliston's extract, *It's a Tough Life* (Nov 2015). If I was part of the Indian government, I would have told all those billionaires they could buy their own land, get in the right contractor to build runways, round up many hundreds of jobless people to help and build their own airport. Then I would add: "Perhaps you could also offer, when your country needs you, to give your great *mana* to your fellow citizens, (flattery goes a long way), and use your planes for humanitarian grounds when needed." Rich men don't cry – I think God cries a lot.

Susan Lawrence, Auckland.

STORIES CHANGE ATTITUDES

I am grateful to Sarah Bradley for sharing her journey with HIV/ AIDS (TM Nov) at such depth. Her story brought back memories of Sister Paula Brett Kelly who was Education Officer at the AIDS Foundation in Wellington in the 1980s and 90s. She too discovered the beauty and goodness of people – the gays, the transgendered ones, the straight ones – who had each acquired the virus in various ways. I sense a recent shift in the attitudes of many Christians towards acceptance of the spectrum of human sexualities

and away from the millennia-old prejudices and hostility. I recently met Rev Sarah Jones, a UK Anglican transgender priest, who is also a talented singer and song-writer. Her story dissolves preconceptions and judgements. Even as a small child she had a deep sense of God, which continued through the various prayed-through steps of her transitioning. This had been completed before she applied for ordination and she was fully open about it to the hierarchy.

It's the personal stories that do it. I note that these two Sarahs share with the biblical Sarah a heritage of leaving everything and travelling to an unknown land. They have both discovered God is indeed "in the other place".

Trish McBride, Wellington

MAIL WELCOME

My copy of *Tui Motu* (November) arrived on Friday, so yesterday I had a lovely time curled up by the window watching the rain and wild winds as I read the magazine from cover to cover. Wonderful articles. I had read some articles from this issue on the web page a few weeks ago so I was waiting impatiently for the mail to arrive so that I could read everything.

Pauline Morgan RSJ, Ireland

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Looking OUT and IN

The day Pol Pot died I was living in Phnom Penh and in the ensuing weeks his photo was splashed across newspapers. I kept wondering at how this mild-looking, elderly man had facilitated so much evil and death.

Though less obviously evil, the private healthcare provider advertisement on television here in India, also presents a banal face. Kind, smiling nurses push an old lady in a wheelchair through a shiny-clean hospital.

Yet glossy healthcare providers across South Asia support and underwrite a privatised health system that ensures patients are sent for diagnostic tests they don't need and are prescribed medicines and operations that are not required. This results in many families taking on debts that may ultimately impoverish them irreversibly.

India has the most privatised health system in the world. Lack of regulation, corruption and avarice mean most healthcare providers are part of a system that is, at best, ineffective. It is often exploitative and oppressive.

Wrong. Evil. It looks so banal. Can I keep my wits about me sufficiently

to recognise it?

Reflecting during a hard-hitting sermon recently on the temptation of Jesus, I was pushed to think about what temptation for me looks like. In Luke's account of the testing of Jesus, the Evil One's invitations to him were not to do very bad things.

Satan/ the Evil One wasn't proposing Jesus set up child trafficking rings. His invitation was to turn a stone into bread after a very long time fasting. To leap off a mountain and trust that God would be there with the angels.

Essentially they were actions and attitudes to distract him from his core mission.

I too can be distracted by "wise words" from people and structures around me. Look after myself and my children. Save for the university education of our older daughters. Secure the future with a retirement plan. Keep a nest-egg for the next generation. (Your children deserve it.) Give money to an orphanage in Kenya. Subscribe to *Avaaz*. Sign a petition. Help with morning tea on the church roster. These are not bad things but they can absorb all my attention and energy. And are they enough?

In contrast St Paul talks about the "foolishness of God". The gospels present a completely inverse set of values and ways of living that are almost incomprehensible today.

As I read again the *Testing of Jesus*, it seems that his real temptation was to settle for serving his own needs and get so caught up in the busyness and niceness of that, that he would end up leaving his vocation and miss the mission of God.

Other scriptural verses point me to a radical re-jig of values. "The life you save is the life you lose." Or, as paraphrased by author Frederick Buechner:

"The life you clutch, hoard, guard and play safe with is in the end a life worth little to anybody, including yourself, and only a life given away for love's sake is a life worth giving."

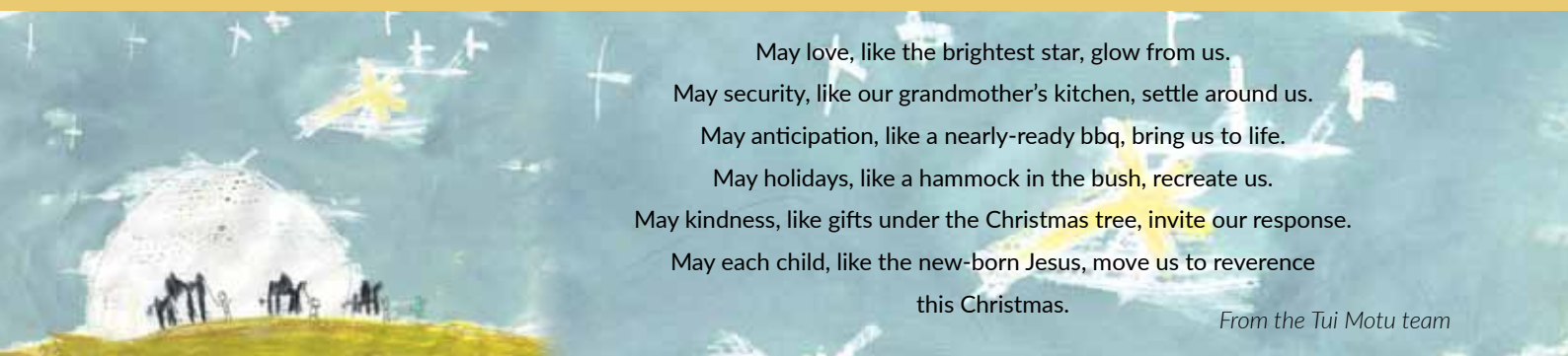
If I think that I can follow Jesus, who ended up giving his life away without a penny in the bank, without making something of a fool of myself, I am deluded.

If I settle for my life mostly attending to the normal and safe options, I risk being too busy and too distracted to support truly transformative change. To topple the globe's prevailing structures of inequality, injustice and violence needs intentional and concerted action.

So help me God — may I be a fool for Christ's sake. ■



Kaaren Mathias is the mother of four children aged 7–16 years and works in community mental health in North India.



May love, like the brightest star, glow from us.
May security, like our grandmother's kitchen, settle around us.
May anticipation, like a nearly-ready bbq, bring us to life.
May holidays, like a hammock in the bush, recreate us.
May kindness, like gifts under the Christmas tree, invite our response.
May each child, like the new-born Jesus, move us to reverence
this Christmas.

From the Tui Motu team