Tui Motu

InterIslands

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the mystery of a fragile babe

It occurs to me that the 21st century head of Islamic State, Abu bakr al-Bagdadhi, and the first century King Herod are not much different. Both have or had an abhorrent disregard for the value of human life, and used this blatantly to create fear and terror. Compare the IS's ongoing beheadings so craftily staged for world television coverage to Herod's slaughter of the innocents. The point of this comparison is that the circumstances surrounding both men, and their versions of our common human nature, do not seem to have changed much in two thousand years. Ruefully.

Yet we believe that the baby who arrived in a stable at Bethlehem to struggling young parents has changed the pattern of our belonging and our loving human nature for ever, in such a way that we have the ability to go far beyond any horror that crass human beings can dream up and execute for their own power and control.

Paul Jeffrey's evocative cover photo of an Ethiopian mother and child speaks well of this changed pattern. The mother, who was in refugee flight from Ethiopia to the Sudan when the photo was taken, turns to comfort her crying child. This image focuses us back like an arrow to Mary and Joseph, about to become refugees, struggling into Bethlehem to give birth to a child 'who would also face hunger and suffering'. Yet both here in Jesus' manifestation as a vulnerable babe and in the mature humanity of Christ we are given a credible hope that our strangely confused world will continue to be suffused with the divine nature, and thereby changed. For this transformation, too, we were made. Remember Hildegard of Bingen's joyful mystic cry:

'With wisdom I have rightly put the universe in order… With every breeze as with invisible life that contains everything, I awaken everything to life.'

How is it that a completely vulnerable babe in a manger can bring such wisdom? Because the cry of the invisible God was made visible in the fragility of a babe so that we may identify our own lives with the full life of Christ, and live accordingly. If, as we believe, the birth of Christ encompasses his resurrection as well, we are 'baptised' with resurrection joy. It is stamped within us from the day of the first Christmas. Happy feast!

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It is hard to believe that five years have passed since I first took pen to paper as a novice editor. These years have been a rich feast, for which I am grateful. However, with this edition my editorship is complete. Sister Ann Gilroy will assume this role in January — a hearty, warm welcome to you, Ann.

I would like to thank you all, readers and staff, for the myriad ways you contribute to the life of this magazine. There is an amazing network, a web of people all over the world who keep in touch with us here at Union St. *Tui Motu* is not just a religious magazine; it is a community of people connected in Christian faith. May this continue and strengthen. **KT**

contents

welcoming the stranger

Matthew tells us that shortly after Jesus' birth, the holy family fled under cover of night into Egypt and stayed there until Herod died. 'This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I have called my son."' Jesus was a refugee. His was a family of asylum seekers. The world is awash with them. In the USA there are up to 11 million undocumented people. In the last year, the Italian Navy with its *Mare Nostrum* operation has rescued over 100,000 people on flimsy boats in the Mediterranean seeking a better life in Europe.

Mare Nostrum was instituted after two maritime incidents when 360 people perished not long after Pope Francis had visited the island of Lampedusa where many of these desperate people reach landfall. It was there that Francis said:

'God is asking each of us: "Where is the blood of your brother which cries out to me?" Today no one in our world feels responsible; we have lost a sense of responsibility for our brothers and sisters. We have fallen into the hypocrisy of the priest and the Levite whom Jesus described in the parable of the Good Samaritan: we see our brother half dead on the side of the road, and perhaps we say to ourselves: "poor soul…!", and then go on our way. It's not our responsibility, and with that we feel reassured, assuaged.'

He followed up with a visit to the Jesuit Refugee Service in the basement of the Gesu, the prime Jesuit Church in Rome. He first listened to the stories of the asylum seekers. He said:

'After Lampedusa and other places of arrival, our city, Rome, is the second stage for many people. Often —— as we heard — it's a difficult, exhausting journey; what you face can even be violent. Rome should be the city that allows refugees to rediscover their humanity, to start smiling again.'

Mare Nostrum was costing too much (114 million euros a year) and other European countries have been anxious that such generosity has provided a lure for more people from Africa to risk the journey. *Mare Nostrum* has been replaced with a more moderate joint European response 'Triton'. It will cost only 34 million euros per year and they will do rescues only within 30 nautical miles of the coast. More people will now perish, but over time, probably fewer people will risk the treacherous voyage. Meanwhile the Australian government proudly boasts, 'We have stopped the boats.' These people are still asylum seekers in flight. They are just not our problem. Tonight on the Mediterranean or on the Arafura Sea between Indonesia and Australia, there will be a baby and parents fleeing Herod. But they're not our problem. Happy Christmas.

Father Frank Brennan SJ, Professor of Law at the Australian Catholic University, Canberra ACT, is presently Gasson Professor at the Boston College Law School.

COVER PHOTO: 'I met this Ethiopian woman as I hiked with my translator over the vast expanse of dusty fields. As we spoke, her child, evidently hungry, was crying, and she turned for a few moments to soothe her child. I managed to capture one image before she turned back to our conversation. Her image has stayed with me. And I recall it in these waning days of Advent, when we remember the journey of another poor family who ventured into occupied Bethlehem to give birth to a child who would also face hunger and suffering.' *Paul Jeffreys*

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

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

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elephant in the room

Bill Mitchell's plea for open discussion about birth control is timely. ('An old question revisited', *Tui Motu*, Nov 2014). Why does the summary of October's Synod on the Family hardly mention the subject? There are a few words advocating natural family planning and the need for an 'openness to life as a requirement for married love' — and that's it!

Mr Mitchell refers to the lack of openness leading up to Pope Paul's encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*. I knew one of the theologian-consultors to the Pope's commission and he was scandalised at the way some powerful clerics organised the suppression of evidence put forward by the majority of members.

I hope the same power politics are not at play again, 50 years later. Pope Francis told the bishops to speak frankly, even if they disagreed with him. So surely the question was asked, 'Can the Church's teaching on birth control be supported by scriptural and theological arguments?' And crucially, 'Is it supported by the experience of married Catholics?'

Pope Francis invites us all to take part in open and honest discussion. We should not disappoint him.

Jim Neilan, *Dunedin*

sadness and delight

During 1960-67 I was assistant priest in the parish of Whakatane, the focus of Cynthia Piper's article 'a unique history at Whakatane' in the November issue of *Tui Motu*. I often heard bits and pieces of the Wairaka Marae story, especially when I would be asked to lead night prayers during a tangi.

It is a sad story. I was delighted that Bishop Denis Browne was able to bring some healing by his apology and leading a service of reconciliation on 1 May 2010

I wonder if Cynthia Piper could do a little research on two other church buildings that were part of the parish of Whakatane, one attached to the marae at Pahou and the other at Piripai. They were both wooden buildings and had turn about for a Sunday Mass.

And Taneatua? Damaged, I believe, but the altar in it was a typical one made and carved by one of the early Mill Hill Fathers. The last time I saw such an altar was the one in Ruawai Church, now attached to the Parish of Dargaville.

Once again, thanks to Cynthia Piper.

Brian Arahill, Remuera, *Auckland*

going to hell?

In October 2013 Pope Francis asked the universal Church to answer a series of questions about marriage. One would need a Master's degree to be able to respond. This was the best-kept secret in many years. Every church member should have been given a copy of these questions so that the Pope would know what the 'Church, the people of God' thinks.

Archbishop John states that 2,000 people replied. I expect the take-up rate would be the about the same for most of the world. This means that next year when the Synod meets, the Pope will know what around 2% of the Church thinks, and decisions will be made accordingly.

Marriage was instituted for the love and wellbeing of a woman and man. *Humanae Vitae* stated that every act of love should be open to procreation; and that contraception was a sin. The rhythm method is in use, and it is not a sin. In both cases the intention is the same: to prevent having a baby. A rose by any other name is still a rose. Seventy to 80 percent of Catholics use artificial contraception, while the rhythm method does not work in all cases, as I well know from personal experience.

Does this mean that all these people who have sinned by using contraception are going to hell, along with homosexuals, lesbians, couples in mixed marriages, and the divorced? On the last day, Jesus will be very lonely because the majority of people he died for will be in hell!

I have a homosexual son, a university professor, who spends his life working with gays and lesbians. I also have a lesbian daughter living in Vietnam. She is a nurse and has set up a charity there to teach deaf children. As well, she works with the poorest of the poor. All this is funded by her working in Australia. I have been to see her work and to me she is in the same class as Mother Teresa.

All these people are going to hell? I think not.

Paddy McCann, *Paraparaumu.*

☞ letters to the editor

We welcome comment, discussion, argument, debate. But please keep letters under 200 words. The editor reserves the right to abridge, while not changing the meaning.
We do not publish anonymous letters otherwise than in exceptional circumstances. Response articles (up to a page) are welcome — but please, by negotiation.

on responding ethically to terrorist threats

Richard Jackson

Our collective response to terrorism tends to focus narrowly on the injury and harm done to the direct victims of planned or actual terrorist attacks. Inherent in this response is a hidden assumption that there is something particularly shocking about being a victim of terrorist violence. Therefore, preventing terrorism must assume a vastly greater priority for the authorities than the prevention of any other kind of harm. In reflecting on the deaths and injuries from domestic violence, poverty, crime or preventable illnesses, for example, it is as if we are bound to exclaim: 'at least they were not killed by terrorists!' We seem to have an underlying moral hierarchy in relation to our categories of worthy and unworthy victims.

This may explain why counter-terrorism policies so often seem indifferent to the costs they impose on individuals, communities and society at large, and the mass suffering they have engendered, particularly in the Middle East. It also explains why some important ethical questions are not even asked, let alone answered, in the contemplation of how as a society we ought to respond to the threat of terrorism.

For example, in the context of the West's military campaign in late 2014 to defeat the notorious Islamic State (IS) insurgent group in Iraq, it is telling that few are asking whether the cost in lives and suffering among ordinary Iraqis that will inevitably result in is morally justified. Or will it actually result in the reduction of suffering and the prevention of further terror? This question is in turn directly related to the means the West has primarily used to fight terrorism since the onset of the war on terror in 2001, and the resulting emergence of IS itself. The United Nations estimates that a million people, including half a million children, died as a result of Western-imposed sanctions on Iraq following the 1991 Gulf War. Since March 2003, the best estimate is that more than 600,000 Iraqis have died as a direct result of the invasion and subsequent violent chaos. In short, the people of Iraq have suffered unimaginable violence from Western sanctions, military occupation, state-sponsored death squads, air strikes, mass imprisonment, torture, corruption and civil war. All of this was done in the name of fighting terrorists 'over there' to ensure there would be no more terrorist attacks 'over here'. It was a brutally simple moral trade-off: the mass suffering of Iraqis for the security of Westerners.

Faced with the scale of suffering caused by the last 13 years of the war on terror, we must ask the ethical question: what responsibility does the West hold for the deaths of 1.6 million Iraqis and the subsequent emergence of IS as a brutal response to a thoroughly brutalised society?

And, knowing for certain that air strikes will kill more civilians, as will continuing arms transfers to the region, by what moral or practical calculation can we justify causing more suffering in Iraq? Moreover, given that more than ten years of violent intervention failed to defeat terrorists in Iraq (not to mention Afghanistan) and in fact created new and worse ones in the form of IS, and given that all expert opinion agrees that military intervention in the Middle East is the primary driver of violent radicalisation, what justification is there for pursuing this particular course of action? Even by the crudest utilitarian evaluation, further military intervention in Iraq will fail to make Western (not to mention Iraqi) citizens any safer. In fact, it is most likely to cause further violent radicalisation, if it has not done so already.

These questions take on an added ethical poignancy when it is acknowledged that there are more, and more effective, ways to respond to terrorist violence than simply with massive counter-violence. The problem with using violence as a response to terrorism lies in its irreversibility: after thousands have died in counter-terrorist operations to no good effect, it is too late to try another tack. More broadly, from a just war perspective, the use of force must follow not precede the honest and sustained pursuit of alternative nonviolent efforts based on dialogue and diplomacy. In any case, no one believes that military force alone can deal with the roots of terrorist violence: a negotiated political solution is the only pathway to peace in the region.

In large part, the ethical blindness to the suffering of others at the heart of Western counter-terrorism policies derives from the persistent demonization of terrorists as inhuman fanatics, savages and evildoers, unworthy of human rights or the rule of law and without legitimate grievances. Overseas, such a rendering permits invasion, thousands of 'collateral' deaths, remote drone killings, extraordinary rendition, torture and the destabilisation of entire regions. At home, it legitimises and permits mass surveillance of citizens, profiling, the erosion of civil and press liberties, clampdowns on dissent, the diversion of resources to security and the unregulated empowerment of the state's instruments of control and suppression.

Ethically, it is incumbent upon us to ask: do the costs of such measures — in individual freedom, in the loss of privacy, in the loss of community cohesion, in opportunity costs, in innocent lives ruined by suspicion — really match the added security we purportedly obtain? Such a case would be more than a little difficult to make convincingly.

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the old shepherd's tale

A short story for Christmas

Joy Cowley

This is how it started, my friend. Some 15 summers back, I was in the hills with Joachim. I might add it wasn't usual for him to go out with the shepherds, but the poor bloke was beside himself. Some problem with a couple of members of the Sanhedrin, he said. Not that Joachim had done anything wrong. What he hadn't done was the trouble. No kids, you see. For a couple supposed to be as holy as Joachim and his missus, those big council guys reckoned they were awful sinners. Either that, or they were paying for their parents' sins. Sterility is a huge punishment from God, they said.

Before long the gossip spread through the synagogue. Joachim was black-listed by some who believed he was a sinner and others who said he wasn't a man.

Poor Joachim couldn't take it. So there he was with us, supposed to be minding his flocks, but about as useful as a three-legged camel. He spent most of the time wringing his hands and praying.

I was there the morning he had the dream. He came out of the tent, looking dazed, and said he had to return to his wife.

'The Almighty spoke to me!' he said. 'If I go back to Ann, she will conceive and bear a child.'

The rest of us looked at each other, thinking the same thing. How many times had those two consulted prophets, prayed and fasted, made big offerings? Now it was a dream. But to tell the truth, we weren't sorry to see him go. All his moaning to God was getting on our nerves.

Now don't take me the wrong way. I was as much a son of Abraham as the next man. I respected Moses and the prophets and paid my temple dues. But I had to live in the world. I wasn't a fanatic and I didn't believe in miracles.

So, when we brought the sheep down to the plains at the first frosts of winter, you can guess how surprised I was to see Ann large with child and Joachim beside her, strutting like a rooster. 'My son!' he announced. 'Praise God, we are going to dedicate him to the temple!'

We smiled when we learned the child was female. That would shut him up, we thought. But you know, it didn't make any difference. Joachim and Ann had got themselves mixed up with one of those Nazarite cults that took girls for temple training. So against all our traditions, this girl child was dedicated to God. Mary, they called her.

I lost touch with Joachim after that. He had been a generous boss, allowing us to keep a lamb if a sheep had twins. So I had enough for my own flock and as it increased I employed my own shepherds. Some years later I heard that Joachim and Ann had died, and one of the Nazarite priests was looking out for a husband for Mary, someone who would respect her vows. Rumour had it that a widower called Joseph had been chosen.

About that time, we had a difficult summer in the hills. Wolves were taking the sheep at night. We built enclosures of stones and took turns at keeping watch, but sheep still went missing. I'd stand in the gateway of the pen, stout stick in hand, looking at the stars and listening to the yelps and howls echoing in the darkness. No wolf would

challenge me. Yet in the morning a couple of sheep would be gone. We reckoned the two-legged wolves were the worst.

Not that we ourselves were blameless. Life was hard and we needed our own rules for survival. If we saw a stray lamb without a mark of ownership, it joined my flock. If it was marked, then it quickly went on a spit for supper. Tracks in the mountains were narrow and travellers few. If a man went by carrying a fat purse, we lightened his load. That's the way it was. Everyone knew that shepherds had a bad reputation and we

thought if people didn't take notice of warnings, it was their own fault they got robbed.

When we came down to the plains in winter, we had to be more careful. There were too many people! Take someone else's sheep, and chances are a tribe of men would descend on you, beat you with cudgels and leave you for dead. Yet still our own sheep went missing. We doubled our watch when we camped by the towns.

That night near Bethlehem, we were all awake, five of us sitting by a fire at the entrance of the sheepfold. It was census time and the town was filled with rogues looking for free meat. Mind you, two on watch would have been enough, but none of us could sleep that night. The stars were so bright, their light glinted on the flakes of frost on the grass, and beyond our fire, there was music that came from all directions — weird singing — like the place was full of foreigners with strange instruments. We rubbed our hands together for warmth, our breath rising like mist. One of the lads thought there was a party going on somewhere. Another said he could feel the singing inside his chest, like a wind blowing right through to his backbone. I didn't understand the words but I was sure it was some kind of celebration, and thought it might be traders who came from the far East with their spices and bundles of silk cloth. I turned away from the fire. The music was in my face. I turned again. Still in my face! It came from the full circle of the dark horizon. We were surrounded by it.

Then we saw the demon. It didn't walk from anywhere. It just suddenly appeared, a white thing in front of us. My heart stopped. I mean, human flesh can deal with human flesh, but this was something else. It was man-shape but we could see through it. Clumps of grass showed through its robes like stones at the bottom of a pool. I fell on my knees. When I looked up I saw a sky full of stars shining through its head. I admit I was terrified.

Then it spoke to us.

What our ears heard was the rushing of a wind, but in our head the words were clear. 'Go to the cave of Eliab.' And after that, the thing disappeared.

We looked at each other. Maybe it wasn't a demon. Maybe it was the kind of messenger who had appeared to the prophets, a holy being. We knew Eliab. He was the inn-keeper and the cave behind the inn was where he kept his animals.

One thing was sure, when the thing spoke to us, our fear disappeared. We were filled with an eagerness close to madness. All five of us left a large flock of sheep to the mercy of the night, and we ran with all haste to Eliab's cave, not knowing what we would see when we got there, nor how it was going to change our lives.

That's it, my friend — the rest of the story you know. ■

Joy Cowley is the celebrated author of many books, especially children's work. She lives with her husband Terry Coles in Masterton.

the ghost of christmas past

The author reflects from his own vaguely religious background and the state of Christianity within Aotearoa New Zealand in the last two centuries. Many questions arise: where and how is the incarnation experienced? Where does Christ's grace take effect? It will take root in those Christians who are prepared for the journey of bringing Christ's love to all.

Mike Riddell

In my childhood family, Christmas brought with it a sense of anticipated dread. For some bizarre reason disaster stalked us at that time of the year, usually on Christmas Eve. The specifics varied: car accidents, miscarriages, fist fights. But the general tenor was constant. Christmas Day became a fragile attempt to push back the waves of chaos for a few hours, hoping that fate would offer us respite.

The combination of heavy food, copious alcohol, and sibling resentments made such a hope forlorn. In the normal pattern of things, there would be tears before bedtime. Of course, we had the seasonal trimmings: gifts, lights, bunting, and pine needles. And that perennial instigator of jealous rows and clumsy lust — mistletoe. They adorned our dysfunction.

vaguely anglican

We were a non-religious family, apart from a vague nod in the direction of Anglicanism. The festive season was less about a Messiah than the distraction of fake snow painted on shop windows and the hanging of crepe paper chains from the ceiling of our lounge. All this at a time when the gates of summer were creaking open and the long hot drowsiness of January approached.

The scent that lingered in my childhood nostrils was not incense but mint sauce. The only carol I knew was 'Snoopy's Christmas', in which a WW1 fighter pilot refrains from shooting down a cartoon dog, in a spirit of goodwill. The Red Baron, it seemed, was as much a symbol of grace as any child in a manger. I grew up in hope of the presents Santa would bring — peace on earth was as remote as peace in our home.

saturnalia subverted

Christmas is a parasitic subversion of a pagan festival. The church colonised an existing cultural celebration — Saturnalia. This ancient holiday included human sacrifice. It was described by Greek historian Lucian as involving 'widespread intoxication; going from house to house while singing naked; rape and other sexual license; and consuming human-shaped biscuits'. So not much has changed, then.

The seasonal dusting of Christianity appears to have been as superficial as the white frosting for glass windows that comes from a spray can. It hasn't stuck. This is true for most of the Western world, but especially so in what we fondly and ironically term 'Godzone'. As we approach the 200th anniversary of Marsden's sermon on Christmas day, 1814, it is compellingly evident that *te harinui* has not found a resounding echo here.

Even in that initial preaching of the gospel to Mā ori at Oihi, Marsden admitted that 'they could not understand what I meant'. Not surprising, given that it was delivered in a foreign language, involving symbols and rites unknown to those gathered there. It was not until missionaries, including the remarkably prescient Bishop Pompallier, lived among the *tangata whenua* (the indigenous people) that a true dialogue was possible.

A deuce of centuries on, the faith of the Europeans has never really gained a foothold in the soil of Aotearoa New Zealand. Their religion is more exotic pine than native pohutukawa. Pines are shallow-rooted imports in our ecosystem. They fall over given a decent wind, unable to gain sufficient purchase in the terrain. Pohutukawa, by contrast, cling in vibrant tenacity to our coastlines. Their tendril-roots penetrate every crevice, giving them the ability to survive in the most unlikely of places. They are here to stay.

It is instructive that the pohutukawa has become known as 'New Zealand's Christmas Tree'. It speaks to us in ways that the imagery of snow-bowed pines cannot. The outrageously scarlet blooms of the pohutukawa announce our invitation to sea and sand, to bare feet and barbecue, to pavlova and pinot gris. They flirt with us, draw us into loose intimacy, tempt us to a limbo of halcyon ease.

Celebrating such an icon might be regarded as dissolving Christianity in a tepid soup of culture. But as Pompallier wrote in his *Instructions for Mission Work* (1841), '[God] is not a God foreign to this land; He made New Zealand, just as He made all other great lands… He has always been in New Zealand — it is His, as all New Zealanders should be His.' It seems the ancestor of Catholicism in our nation recognised the need for the story of Christ to be found among our peoples and our landscape, rather than imposed upon them.

enculturation

Pope Francis writes: 'Grace supposes culture, and God's gift becomes flesh in the culture of those who receive it.' (*Evangelii Gaudium*) Might we then dare to believe, alongside Pompallier and Francis, that there is an authentic voice of the Spirit blowing inside and outside the fences of this land? If so, it is as much to be found in office Christmas parties as in candle-lit cathedrals.

Neither the church nor its message touched my family in any December of my youth. The steepled buildings scattered through my neighbourhood were as strange and unknown as an Odd Fellow hall to those who have never entered one. The people we lived among were rugby supporters, members of the workingmen's club, biscuit bakers — but not churchgoers.

Perhaps, in some eyes, they were pagans. By and large, they were good and honest people, with complex and fractured lives, trying to make their way as best they could. My own parents were torn apart by alcoholism, infidelity, and finally divorce. This doesn't mean they were uncaring, incompetent, or incapable of love. It simply means they were human, looking for a salvation that the Art Union lottery couldn't provide.

ordinary fragile grace

But how could that salvation embrace their lives if there were no proximate bearers of it? Where is grace to be experienced if it is not present in the ordinary people who populate our broken existence? What if the gospel is not spoken in a language that is intelligible? What if the precious symbols of faith are locked in a sealed tabernacle, permanently out of reach of those who thirst for them?

To quote Francis once again, 'Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others, and this can happen unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey.' But first we must overcome the distance between us — to understand that while we might be people of faith, we are human. In many ways we have more in common with our neighbours than differences from them.

the incarnation

Which, hopefully, brings us back to Christmas. The incarnation is the movement of God toward the world. The overcoming of the distance between divinity and humanity, in such a way that they can never be separated again. God's love, made known in Christ, is for all the world, not just a sanctified part of it. It streams out through our planet, through our distinctive cultures, and through our hearts.

For Christmas to overcome its sectarian captivity in Aotearoa New Zealand, it needs to penetrate our peoples and their worlds. Not so much by celebration in gorgeous temples filled with sweet choirs, but in the presence of all the boisterous but broken people for whom the whole event means nothing at all. The Christ child comes, after all, to a cattle shed on the outskirts of decency.

In the end, the incarnation happens with us — the people of faith — or not at all. We now are the Christ-bearers, who must leave our place of comfort and piety for a journey through difficult terrain. God has entered our world; we are invited to enter our own communities and our unique cultures. As we carry the Christ within, we may discover the Christ without.

When the pohutukawa blooms early, it carries the promise of a long summer. We watch and wait for this sign of things to come. The tree's red blooms are generated both by the soil which nourishes them, and the light of the sun that beckons them to fullness. Here in our midst, we have the living example of how to live well in our land. ■

Mike Riddell is a writer and filmmaker, who lives in Cambridge. His current project is a screenplay about the life of the celebrated pioneer plastic surgeon, Sir Archibald McIndoe.

where no one is excluded

The meaning of Christmas takes us into the heart of who we are as human beings. It challenges us to be as simple as a child, and as strong as God in co-creating a loving, common human place where all belong.

Jenny Dawson

They were set for home, but the horse went lame
And the rain came belting out of the sky
Joe saw the hut and he went to look
And he said, "She's old, but she'll keep you dry"

So her kid was born in that roadman's shack
By the light of a lamp that'd hardly burn
She wrapped him up in her hubby's coat
And put him down on a bed of fern

Then they came riding out of the night
And this is the thing that she'll always swear
As they took off their coats and came into the light
They knew they were going to find her there.

This poem, originally called 'Epiphany' and later 'Nativity', from which these verses come, was used every year in the Nine Lessons and Carols service when I was Vicar of the Anglican Parish of Pauatahanui a few years ago. Non-traditional? Yes. But the service was 'traditional' in another way which made some people uncomfortable. Following what I had heard to be the usual practice at the famous King's College Cambridge service, we invited people from the city — rather than the local parish — to be the readers. So a school principal, deputy commissioner of police, MP, mayor, scout, and others from community groups read both the usual Christmas readings and also one or two kiwi offerings including this poem by Peter Cape. It was moving to note that Cape's daughter was often in the congregation, but even more touching to see people who were not usually at church being stirred by the home-grown language and images, alongside the formal and traditional. At those services celebrating the story of the incarnation, everyone belonged.

one with all

Words of the final reading in the Nine Lessons and Carols service, as used at King's College Cambridge, 'God became flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1), offer a very radical statement of community:

Rev Jenny Dawson

the Creator of all became one with humankind. Not one with only believers or churchgoers but with all people. The nativity plays always involve an unlikely group gathered round the manger, but we have seen them so often that perhaps we have stopped being blown away by the sight of angels and shepherds drawn together through this birth. God coming in human form creates for all time an aspirational, unimaginably soft-edged vision of community. There is no one excluded.

In October this year the Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in Rome convened by Pope Francis on marriage and family seems to have been a moment of openness and inclusion. Archbishop John Dew wrote on his return: 'To open the Synod Pope Francis called on all of us present not to be afraid, to speak boldly and honestly, to listen with open hearts, not to leave things unsaid, to speak with peace and calm and to trust always that the Spirit of God is with us and that it is the Church of Jesus Christ, not ours.' At the Synod there was a lot of talk about 'graduality', in relation to the church's attitude to very complex and difficult family situations, a term which recognises that none of us is perfect but that we're all on a journey. On this journey for the church, as for that young couple receiving surprising visitors in a roadman's shack, we cannot be sure what

will happen, but we are all challenged to move forward in honesty, openness, peace and calm, trust.

discovering true community

Every year I find myself getting excited about Christmas. I feel like a child as the weeks of Advent preparation go by and I find myself eager for Christmas. We can never be sure what will happen. This is a time of heightened awareness and hope even within the most jaded among us. Each year at the centre is the story of the baby's birth, which calls us all on a journey to discover true community. Celebrating the birth of the baby might mean we notice the new emerging in our own lives, so becoming aware that it's both natural and normal to learn, to be awkward, and to take time to be comfortable in the new reality. Can the church become a learning community in this sense? Like all toddlers, we tumble and make mistakes. Can we learn to be gentle and compassionate with one another as we grow into the practice of inclusiveness?

We as people who gather easily at the manger have much to offer our society at this time. Not necessarily by overtly calling people from materialism but perhaps in trusting whatever happens when we listen more attentively to God within. Deep inner life comes only though quiet nurturing of conditions that can seem frustratingly far away in the 'silly season': stillness, contemplation, wonder, mystery.

. . . for everyone

Deep within each of us, as in the stable, there is a place where Christ is being nurtured and birthed, and where a people are finding new ways of building relationships and unlikely friendships, in God's name. If — as we believe — Christmas is for everyone, perhaps a gift the church has to offer this year is the hope of true inclusiveness. Shirley Erena Murray's carol was another element that sometimes brought a fresh touch to our 'traditional' Nine Lessons and Carols service:

Hope-for-peace Child, God's stupendous sign,
down-to-earth Child, Star of stars that shine...
This year, this year, let the day arrive
when Christmas comes for every one, everyone alive! ■

Reverend Dr Jenny Dawson is currently beginning a new phase of ministry on the Kapiti Coast as spiritual director/supervisor/parish consultant, after serving as Regional Dean in the Anglican Diocese of Waiapu.

wormholes to the other side

A Letter from Gizo

Peter Murnane

The afternoon flight from the Solomon Islands landed me in Brisbane just before sunset. By the time I had transferred to a domestic flight to Melbourne, then taken the Skybus to the central railway station, I was just in time to catch the last train out towards our Dominican priory in the suburbs.

The contrast with the quiet island of Loga, where I live nearly 5000 kilometres to the north, was astonishing. The train was full of people returning from cinemas, theatres and parties but most of the passengers were not talking to one another: they were gazing, entranced, at the little screens of their various devices. I had just spent a year among small communities where people do love to talk to each other, and technology is still fairly simple, although mobile phones abound. This strange sight before me stirred me to wonder whether the little screens into which the passengers were peering were windows opening on to other worlds which they could not enter, but hoped to one day.

thinking of wormholes

As I watched, they seemed to confirm my suspicion: some of them were lost in the fantasy-land of a computer game or movie; others were talking on their phone to boy or girl-friend. Their searching, intent faces led me to think of the 'worm-holes' which scientists postulate as a way we might travel to worlds in distant parts of the universe. In these imaginary worm-holes the known laws of physics would not apply, so that they might provide a 'tunnel' that is a short cut to other galaxies which a spaceship would take millions of years to reach, even moving at the speed of light.

Then I understood that those little screens in the train-passengers' hands did in fact link them to a different world, where live the impoverished workers who had quite recently laboured for long hours to construct these little electronic devices.

> The helpless baby, the stable and the poor shepherds [are] deep mythic symbols of our need for the Limitless Kindness that underlies the cosmos.

My fellow-passengers on the train were mostly Australians of many racial backgrounds who could afford an i-pod, i-pad, tablet, kobo or kindle, but they had probably never given a thought to the men and women in Thailand, China or elsewhere, who had assembled their device. Nor would they know the anxiety those workers felt as they peered at their handiwork for long hours while anxiously assembling it to meet the strict standards of the supervisors. They could not afford to slacken their attention, lest it cost them their job and livelihood.

Even as I watched the people enjoying their devices, the workers who had made them were probably still trapped in an endless round of night-shifts or day-shifts, between hostel dormitory and factory assembly line. The Chinese have even coined a word to describe the not-uncommon phenomenon of workers collapsing and dying from over-exertion and lack of sleep.

looking back

Pondering these worm-holes that join people who are far apart led me to look back over my own day. Just that morning, I had searched Honiara for a shop that would print the passport photos of our novices, who hope next year to study in Papua New Guinea. Two copy shops had been abandoned recently. At the shop which had printed photos for me last year, I was told that they could no longer print in colour.

In a financially poor country it is not uncommon for enterprising people to buy new technology in the hope of earning their living from it, only to find they cannot meet the longer-term costs of maintenance and repair, so their little business does not long survive.

When I finally found a shop that could print the passport photos — perhaps the only one in town — the young woman who cheerfully promised to do the job soon found that she did not know enough about the program she was trying to use. After some delay — we had still not begun to print the photos — the manageress came to complain that my job was taking too much time on the computer. She pointed out that they had only four machines, and many people were banked up at the counter waiting to have their documents printed. I saw that they were poor people who could not afford a computer or printer of their own,

and probably not a passport, so I felt quite ashamed that I had assumed my needs to be more important than theirs and had not even noticed I was delaying them. A personal worm-hole opened up to let me see their side of the world.

a different immigration office

A few days earlier, before leaving Gizo in the Western Solomons, I had needed passport application forms for the same novices. The Gizo Immigration Office is a shed in a paddock behind the market. It has broken louvre windows and from one side is reached by negotiating a muddy path. The green slime on the path is enriched by seepage from a secluded corner nearby that men use as a public toilet. Over several days I had knocked in vain on the office door during the hours specified, before at last finding someone in attendance.

The interior, unpainted and shabby, was quite different from an immigration office in Australia or New Zealand. Only now, looking back through a new 'worm-hole', do I recall that the shelves of manila folders, although tattered and marked by black mould, were neatly and carefully stacked. The kindly woman behind the counter, working in difficult surroundings, had loaned me her only copy of a passport application form, since her office had no photocopier, suggesting that I take it to a print-shop to make my own copies. She trusted me to bring it back.

I had judged the office by its appearance only. Only after looking more carefully through the 'worm-hole' that joins me to her — short-cutting my personal prejudices — did I see a woman working in tropical heat and otherwise uncomfortable circumstances, who made her job human by the kindness with which she treated her clients.

During my time in Melbourne, as I moved around the city, lavish Christmas decorations obtruded at every turn. I normally try to ignore these, since they appear in shops and streets long before the proper time and announce the insatiable search for profits, more than the coming of a Saviour. But I had new worm-holes to explore and began to rejoice that the Christmas event [Incarnation], no matter how tawdry the symbols we use to remind ourselves of it, is itself a major worm-hole, connecting us to the unseen world of Infinite Love.

divine meaning

What can it mean, that God comes among us? From where? Born as an ordinary baby? Surely this is the most transforming event in our planet's history. Not only are the helpless baby, the stable and the poor shepherds deep mythic symbols of our need for the Limitless Kindness that underlies the cosmos. This divine coming gives us new power to create worm-holes of our own, reaching out by love across vast distances that seemed uncrossable: cutting through barriers of difference, misunderstanding and unforgiveness. ■

Father Peter Murnane is the novice master of the Dominican Friars novitiate, Gizo. This year he has been living at the Friars' formation house, Henderson, in the capital of the Solomons, Honiara.

preparing the way for jesus

This short Advent meditation takes us into a different way of looking at humanity — stepping aside, as John does, so that others may recognize Jesus — letting go of status, of striving to be the best, and entering into a more unitive inner place of being united with God and one another.

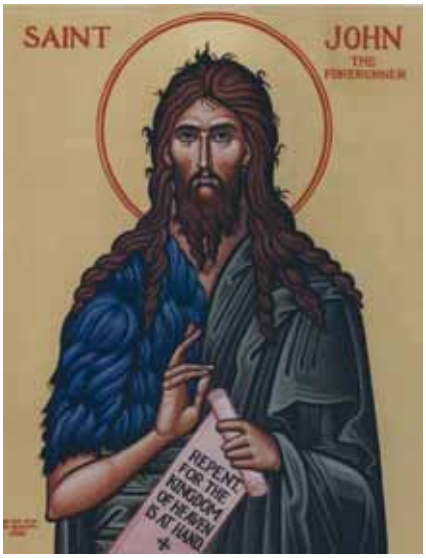
Pat Neuwelt

Normally when we prepare for something, we get busy ticking off the many tasks on our to-do lists. At this time of year, with not only Christmas but summer holidays approaching, the to-do list can become a bit overwhelming! The readings for the Third Sunday of Advent point us towards a very different understanding of preparation.

In Matthew's gospel story we learn that John-the-Baptist is in prison, where he's having a crisis of faith. From the setting of a prison cell, it's not surprising that he's beginning to doubt whether he's made a serious error of judgment regarding Jesus' messianic status! So he sends his followers to ask Jesus for reassurance. Rather than judge John as 'weak', Jesus sends John's followers back with stories of 'the stirrings of the Spirit' in the world (healing and new life), to encourage John in his struggle. And, remarkably, he then publicly proclaims his utmost respect and deep love for John as not only a prophet, but as 'the greatest among those ever born of women'.

What happens next is highly significant. Just in case anyone had put John on a pedestal in their mind's-eye, Jesus tells the people, 'Yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.' In other words, in the eyes of God no one is greater than another.

So what does this have to do with preparation for the coming of Jesus,



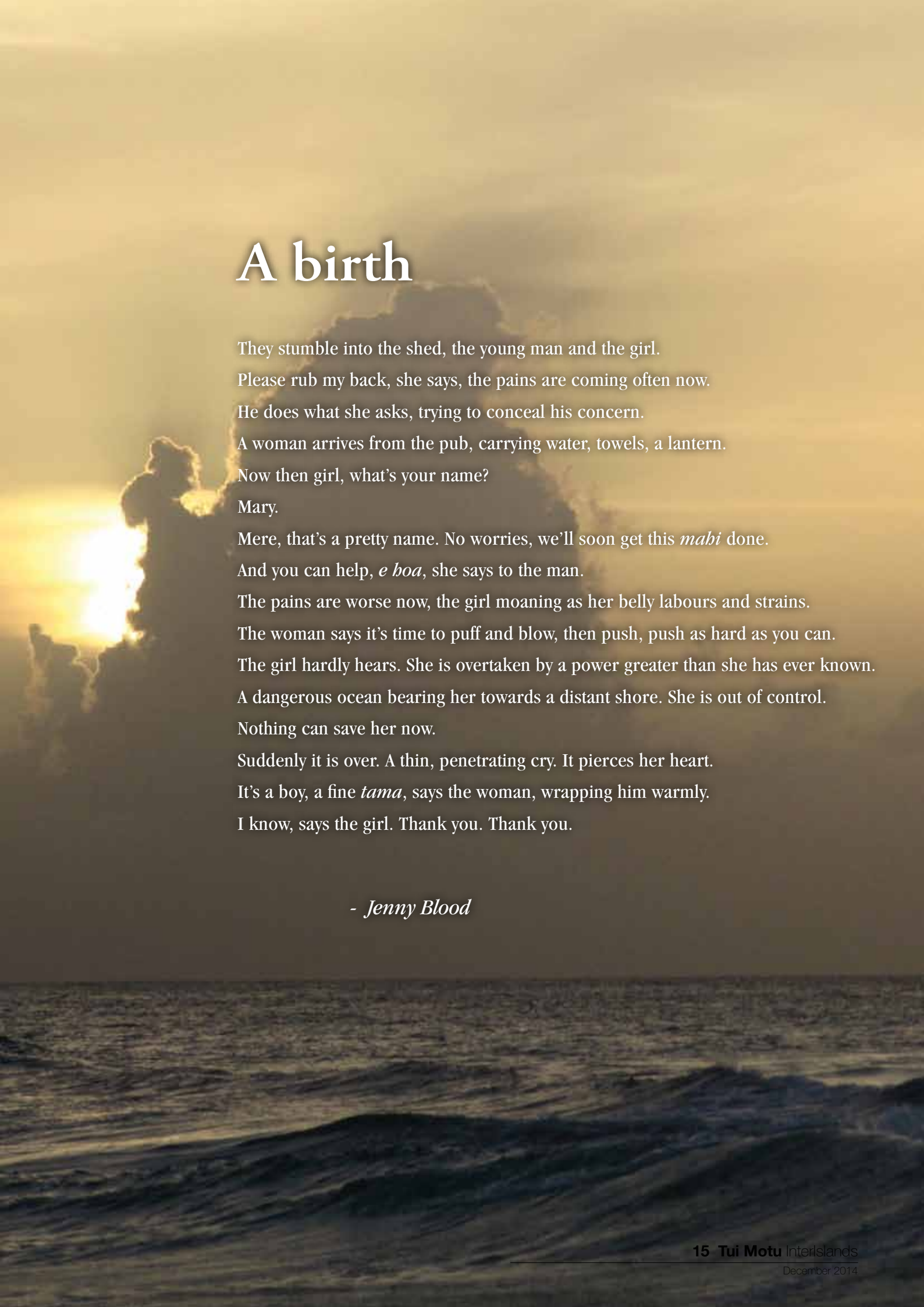
the Christ? On a pedestal, John could not have effectively prepared the way for Jesus. In fact, he has to step aside (even be imprisoned!) for Jesus to be recognized by others. John teaches us that we, too, are called to be contemplatives and prophets — which involves 'stepping aside for Jesus'. We're called to let go of our need to be noticed, to be successful, to be 'the best', etc — or, as Richard Rohr and Cynthia Bourgeault argue in their many beautiful writings, we are called to be less ego-driven and to operate from a more unitive place … the place deep within that knows that we are not separate from God. From that place of knowing, we can 'announce' (through every fiber of our being and every moment of our lives) that Jesus is not only coming but that he is, in fact, here.

We can live out of the knowledge that Jesus is always coming … every moment of every day Jesus is coming. He comes into the world through every sunset, every raindrop, every bird that sings, every cloud that passes overhead … He comes through every child born, every spring, every new day … Jesus comes through the stranger on the bus, the disenfranchised young person in the park, the taxi-driver (who happens to be a highly qualified professional from a far-off place!). He comes through the chaos of family life, through the moments of utter loneliness, through the suffering and death of a loved-one. Jesus comes through every expression of compassion, no matter how small.

How, then, might we 'prepare' this Advent? In my experience, the highlights of each day tend not to relate to my to-do list! The greatest moments seem to have little to do with how well prepared I am for anything. Instead, the best moments are the daily, unexpected encounters with 'the coming Jesus', for which the only preparation can ever really be 'an openness of heart'.

Let's open ourselves more deeply, letting go of our to-do lists … and revel in the daily comings of Jesus into our lives, into our world. Let us be an Advent people. ■

Pat Neuwelt is a public health physician and former GP, a wife, mother and lay Dominican. She currently teaches and researches at the University of Auckland.



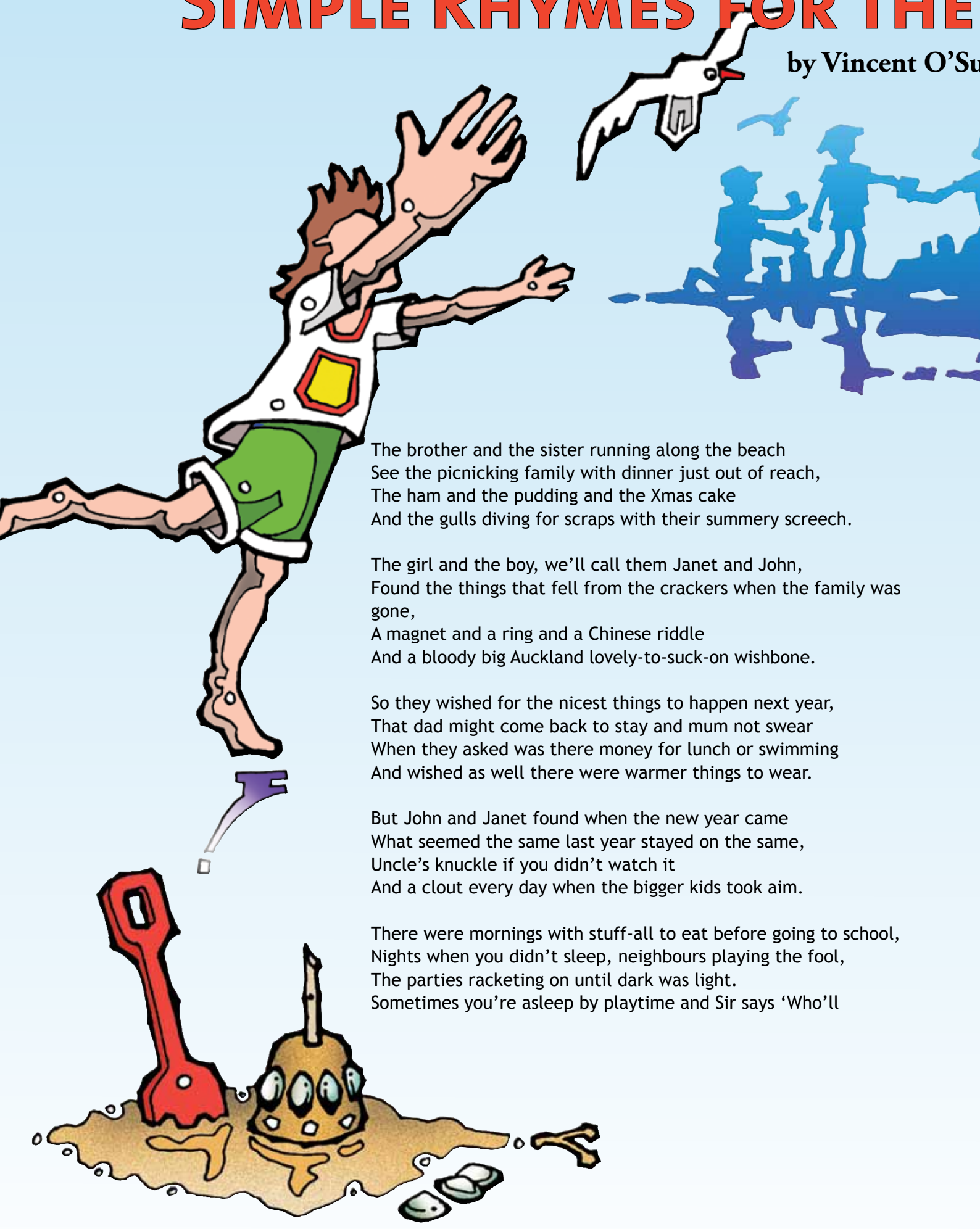
A birth

They stumble into the shed, the young man and the girl.
Please rub my back, she says, the pains are coming often now.
He does what she asks, trying to conceal his concern.
A woman arrives from the pub, carrying water, towels, a lantern.
Now then girl, what's your name?
Mary.
Mere, that's a pretty name. No worries, we'll soon get this *mahi* done.
And you can help, *e hoa*, she says to the man.
The pains are worse now, the girl moaning as her belly labours and strains.
The woman says it's time to puff and blow, then push, push as hard as you can.
The girl hardly hears. She is overtaken by a power greater than she has ever known.
A dangerous ocean bearing her towards a distant shore. She is out of control.
Nothing can save her now.
Suddenly it is over. A thin, penetrating cry. It pierces her heart.
It's a boy, a fine *tama*, says the woman, wrapping him warmly.
I know, says the girl. Thank you. Thank you.

- Jenny Blood

Simple Rhymes for the

by Vincent O'Su



The brother and the sister running along the beach
See the picnicking family with dinner just out of reach,
The ham and the pudding and the Xmas cake
And the gulls diving for scraps with their summery screech.

The girl and the boy, we'll call them Janet and John,
Found the things that fell from the crackers when the family was gone,
A magnet and a ring and a Chinese riddle
And a bloody big Auckland lovely-to-suck-on wishbone.

So they wished for the nicest things to happen next year,
That dad might come back to stay and mum not swear
When they asked was there money for lunch or swimming
And wished as well there were warmer things to wear.

But John and Janet found when the new year came
What seemed the same last year stayed on the same,
Uncle's knuckle if you didn't watch it
And a clout every day when the bigger kids took aim.

There were mornings with stuff-all to eat before going to school,
Nights when you didn't sleep, neighbours playing the fool,
The parties racketing on until dark was light.
Sometimes you're asleep by playtime and Sir says 'Who'll

Illustration: Donald Moorhead

Times

llivan

Walk these kids to the nurse to check their bruises?'
And the chaplain sighs and calls them 'beautiful losers'
And gets them singing aroha and 'Smile!'.
John hears the CYF's lady sighing, 'Beggars can't be choosers.'

But the boy and the girl weren't down just because of that.
It wouldn't be long until Janet put on the hat
She likes to keep hid for the special days
When it's summer again and they're told to damn well scat

As Mum's friend in his truck turns up and John says, 'Then praps
We'll go to that end of the beach where the high tide slaps
And the Aucklanders come for a Xmas feed.
And this year we'll beat the gulls to the lovely scraps.'

If they're down there bright and early they might even see
This joker limping towards them, feet sore from the Tree.
'G'day,' he says, 'not youse lot again?
Thought there's just the two of you, eh? Well by Christ, there's three!'

this radical grace

Our ordinary lives are touched by the divine far more than we know. Yet at certain moments the realisation breaks through vividly and perhaps dramatically, and we know for certain that God is here.

Daniel O'leary

It was dark and I was taking the washing off my line. The lights streamed into the darkness from the kitchen, where my three girls were sitting around the table, cups of tea in hand, chatting about their day. I watched the interaction between them, saw their animated discussion and knew that there, right in the heart of my home, God was too. A beautiful presence that set the place into radiance.

Paula, a friend, recognised the incarnate presence in a glance into her own home. In one ordinary domestic moment, she realised that the Christmas mystery is revealed through a kitchen window. Yet of all the revelations of Christianity, Incarnation must surely remain one of the least understood.

Incarnation urges us to look at things familiar until they become unfamiliar again, until we recognise the divine light glimmering deeply within. In *Seeing Haloes*, writer John Shea remembers a woman busy at the Christmas table.

I looked up
to catch a rim of radiance
etching her face,
to notice curves of light sliding along her shape.
She out-glowed the candles ...
When this happens, I do not get overly excited.
I merely allow love to be renewed.

As Christians, these momentary epiphanies do not leave us unchanged. They return to us, unbidden, at the most unlikely times, and, as W.B. Yeats put it, we 'hear [them] in the deep heart's core'. Shea ends his beautiful Christmas memory, '... they recede, as Gabriel departed Mary, leaving us pregnant.'

In 'The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air We Breathe' Gerard Manley Hopkins writes of this pregnancy in terms of the 'New Nazareths' and 'New Bethlems' conceived within us all. God's infinity is 'dwindled to infancy' in Mary's womb and so in ours. In this miracle, Hopkins explains that Christ,

Who, born so, comes to be
New self and nobler me
In each one and each one
More makes, when all is done,
Both God's and Mary's Son.

> Stripped of its distracting tinsel, Christmas celebrates the definitive consecration of all time and of every place.

Theologians clarify that Incarnation itself emerges from within the cradle of Creation, not from outside it. The seed of God was in the womb of humanity from the very beginning. In the Christmas Preface III (old translation) we read, 'Your eternal Word has taken upon himself our human weakness, giving our mortal nature immortal value.' This immortal value was bestowed in the first act of Creation, and, *pace* Adam and Eve, it has never been retracted.

To help us understand this dimension of Christmas more profoundly, the Church Fathers compared Jesus to a singer with a great voice and perfect pitch who joins a discordant choir and completely transforms it from within. 'It is not', theologian Richard McBrien explains, 'that Jesus gave us a completely different set of songs to sing. He helped us understand, enhance and perform our standard repertoire in an entirely new and beautiful way.'

The Bethlehem baby reveals and completes what *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) calls 'the mystery of our humanity'. God's grace, Pope John Paul II wrote in *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), 'is secretly at work within all human hearts' where it will, as Hopkins put it, 'perfect, not alter [them]'

Cardinal Avery Dulles provides an image of this understanding of Incarnation. 'Christmas does not give us a ladder to climb out of the human condition,' he wrote. 'It gives us a drill to burrow into the heart of everything that is, and there, find it already shimmering with divinity.' Flesh is inspirited and spirit is enfleshed.

The deadly dualism between Heaven and earth collapsed at the Incarnation. Nature and grace are now forever intertwined. They became inseparable in Jesus. That, in fact, is what the Church and sacraments are really for — to teach us how to recognise the everyday God who comes to us disguised as the shadow and light of our lives, to keep reminding us of the closeness of a God whose home is always here.

Theologian Karl Rahner hears God whispering to us on the night before Christmas. 'I am your life. I am your time. Tell that to everything that exists, everything that you are. Say only that one thing, and then it is Christmas for you. Say only "You are here". That is enough.'

And like metal to a magnet it is this Franciscan spirituality of Incarnation, this sacramental vision that is already drawing the world to Pope Francis. And why is this? It is because with confident hands he is once again parting the veils

of the Temple for us, and we glimpse the miracle of what reality is, and who we ourselves are, flawed but immortal diamonds reflecting the beauty of God.

Stripped of its distracting tinsel, Christmas celebrates the definitive consecration of all time and of every place, of the majestic cosmos and its evolution, but also, closer to home, of all people everywhere going about their business — on buses and in bars, in takeaways and in temples, at work and at play, in their sins and in their graces. A baby crawls through the stable door of Incarnation and transforms the fields and faces of Creation.

This revelation, this 'mysticism of ordinary life', is about how to see rather than what to see. This work of imagination is an attuned presence, a practised, contemplative awareness. Hints of Heaven happen when, as Jack Mahoney SJ put it, 'we make experience sense of faith and faith-sense of experience'. With courage and perseverance this radical grace becomes like second nature to us.

Yet why do most of us resist and refuse this free perennial offer that can transform our lives, our pain and our faith? We do not know. But this we do know. There is a touching vulnerability at the heart of Incarnation. In 'Making', poet R.S. Thomas pictures God pausing, on the fifth day, while creating the world. Something beautiful is still missing. Beyond obedient Creation, divine love must finally risk making a creature who is free to return the love — or not.

... Yet still an absence
Disturbed me. I slept and dreamed
Of a likeness, fashioning it,
When I woke, to a slow
Music; in love with it
For itself, giving it freedom
To love me, risking the disappoint
ment. ■

Father O'Leary is a priest of the Diocese of Leeds, England. His website is www.djoleary.com.
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the photographer exposed

Finding Vivian Maier

Directors: John Maloof and Charlie Siskel

Reviewer: Paul Sorrell

I watched this film with a group from my local photographic society, and there wasn't a squeak or a shuffle out of us for the whole 84 minutes. I love a good detective story, especially one that delivers the goods at the end of a long quest. *Finding Vivian Maier* delivers in spades, revealing a remarkable if flawed woman and the massive body of work she produced in Chicago in the 1950s, 60s and 70s — images that astonish and delight us by their quality, skill and exuberance.

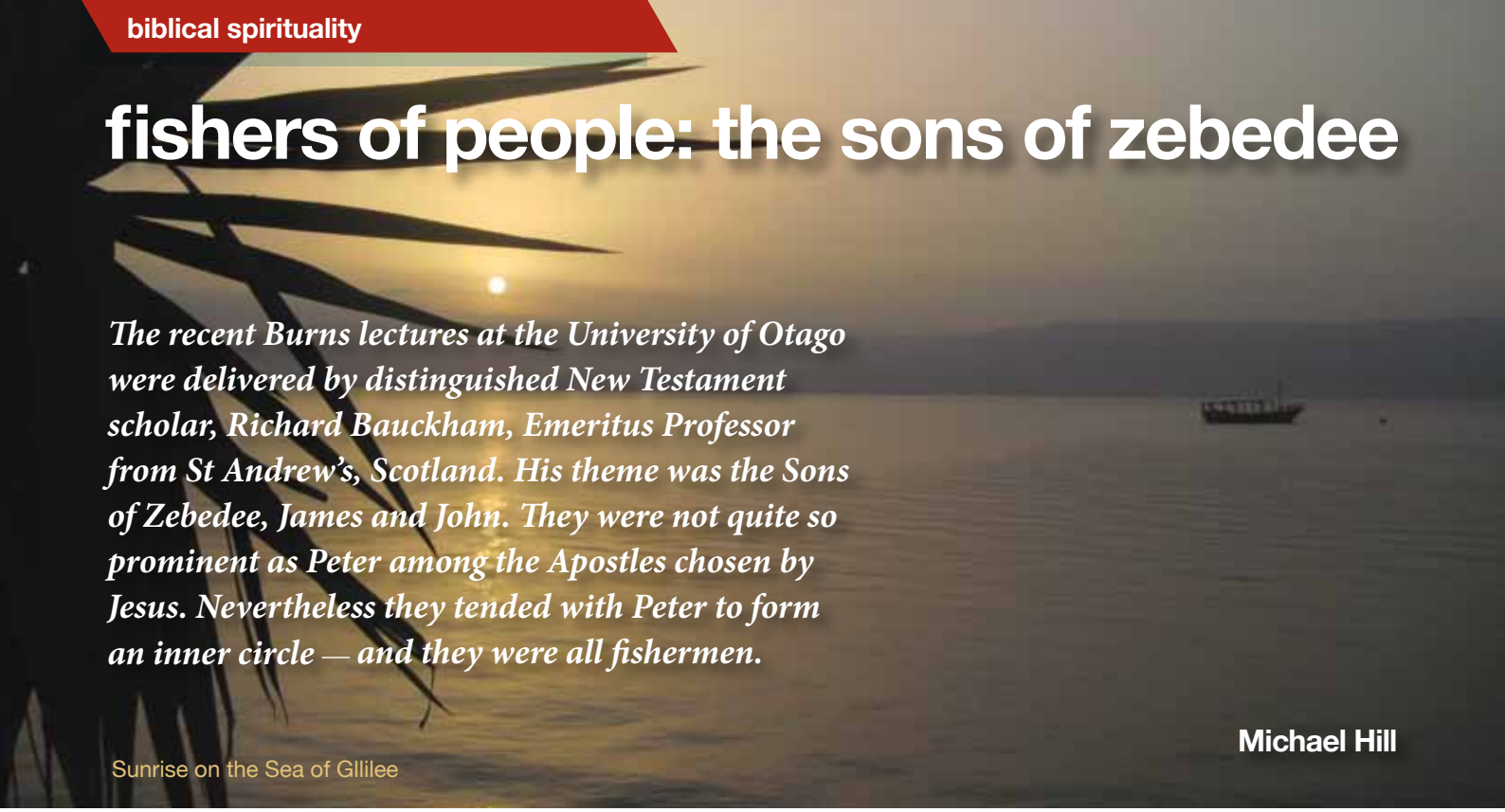
Not to mention the sheer quantity of her archive. The story begins, not with the photographer Vivian Maier, but with a bright young man, John Maloof, who bought a case full of unseen negatives at an auction. Gradually becoming aware of the treasure trove of images he has uncovered, Maloof sets out on the trail of the unknown photographer, along the way acquiring hundreds of canisters of undeveloped film and a stack of home movies.

Maloof discovers that this self-described 'woman of mystery' was an eccentric who never married, draped herself in thick coats and big hats and walked with a mannish stride. As a young woman, she worked as a nanny, an occupation that allowed her time to roam the streets of Chicago taking candid portraits of the quirky and the familiar, the sad and the ordinary — but always bringing something of the interior life of her subjects to the surface. Rarely seen without her twin-lens Rolleiflex around her neck, she is often shown artfully reflected in her own images.

Much of the film is taken up with interviews with families she worked for, revealing an intensely private woman, a hoarder and a recluse, someone who loved children but who could sometimes hurt them, too. We learn that Maier travelled the world taking photographs, and was especially drawn to her family's home village in France where she took portraits of local people. Later in the film, we see the joy and recognition on the faces of many of these folk as these works are exhibited for the first time.

Vivian Maier died a lonely recluse, eating cold corned beef from a tin on a park bench. Had she sought fame, Maloof suggests, she would have earned a place in the pantheon of American portrait photographers along with names such as Diane Arbus and Garry Winogrand. It may be that all great artists are deranged in some way; Maier's unique mix of genius and dysfunction is deftly portrayed in this low-key but absorbing film, skilfully crafted by Maloof. Top marks. ■

fishers of people: the sons of zebedee



The recent Burns lectures at the University of Otago were delivered by distinguished New Testament scholar, Richard Bauckham, Emeritus Professor from St Andrew's, Scotland. His theme was the Sons of Zebedee, James and John. They were not quite so prominent as Peter among the Apostles chosen by Jesus. Nevertheless they tended with Peter to form an inner circle — and they were all fishermen.

Sunrise on the Sea of Gllilee

Michael Hill

Professor Bauckham provided a wide context for Jesus' Galilean ministry: the Sea of Galilee where Jesus called the four first disciples, Peter and Andrew, James and John. In Mark's Gospel the whole public ministry of Jesus is centred upon it. The lake is surrounded by hills, with the distant mountains of the Golan Heights to the north-east. Like the river Jordan and the Dead Sea, it lies below sea level.

It is oval in shape being about 12 miles across — about the size of Lake Taupo. The area to the west is very fertile. In the time of Christ most of the inhabitants on the west side were Jews, and the people would have been reasonably prosperous. It was also a place of very mixed cultures. On the east side lay the Decapolis (literally 'ten cities'), predominantly Greek in culture having been settled after the campaigns of Alexander the Great. Two of these, Gadara and Hippos, were close by the lake. Hippos sat on a plateau, which made the city visible from the other side: probably the 'city built on a hilltop' described by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:14).

Magdala was the chief settlement on the western side, largely Jewish but affected by Greek culture. South of Magdala lay the new city of Tiberias, built by Herod Antipas and mostly Roman. Greek was the *lingua franca* of the Eastern Mediterranean and most educated Jews would have understood it; but it is doubtful if that included the fishermen.

Although the people of the lake formed a tight community of mixed cultures, it was not cut off from the outside world. Trading routes converged on it, and the Jewish population were in regular contact with Jerusalem, the religious centre of their world 80 miles to the south. Jesus and his disciples frequently went up to Jerusalem on pilgrimage.

the fishermen

There were lots of fish in the Lake of Galilee; in the waters around Capernaum fish were most abundant because hot springs empty into the lake nearby. People either fished from the shore using a line or they used nets, usually from a boat but sometimes standing in shallow water. The best seasons were winter and spring and much fishing from boats took place at night. It is likely that there were at least a hundred boats operating round the northern end of the lake. Using a seine net would require the cooperation of two boats — perhaps Peter's and Zebedee's.

Fishing was a physically demanding occupation: the fishermen were constantly in and out of the water. They were away from home for much of the season. It was also a precarious livelihood, and dangerous because of sudden storms which swept down on the lake. The catch had to be processed quickly because dead fish do not keep long. They must be marketed immediately, in a town like Magdala or taken to the factory for salting. Contemporary art depicts a Galilean fisherman naked and prematurely aged, worn out by the toil of a rugged profession.

Jesus chose four of these as his first disciples, and they remained the leaders among his followers. Why did he select fishermen? Bauckham suggests it was because of the very nature of fishing as a vocation. It was a complete way of life. It demanded skills and knowledge of the lake and its fish, handed down from father to son. A first century writer notes that fisherfolk were usually poor: their boat and their nets were their chief assets. Yet, rather like miners and truck drivers in a later age, they were proud of their calling.

Jesus was looking for people who would be committed, strong and

independent, who could live away from home. These four were bidden to exchange being catchers of fish to become fishers of people. Even the image of the dragnet that Jesus uses (Mt13:47-48) suggests a team effort to achieve a big catch. The idea is a large harvest, taking in every fish within range.

The Gospels describe Jesus joining them on their boat, or watching them in action from the shore, or crossing the lake by boat. He identifies himself with these strong, rugged men and on two occasions he leads them to a shoal giving them an abundant catch (Jn 21:11). Fisherfolk were seen to be on the margins of society. They were specially suited to seeking out the people 'on the edge': the poor, the sinners, the despised. It would be a dangerous vocation, a life commitment. They had to be prepared to follow Jesus and lay down their lives too.

the twelve

Jesus chooses 12 disciples to be the inner circle. They are given the name Apostles, those 'sent out', yet after the Galilean ministry they cease to be itinerant and settle in Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas become the itinerant Apostles, described in the second half of the Book of Acts and in the Epistles of Paul. But why this change for the Twelve?

In Jerusalem, the Twelve had failed to be the witnesses of Jesus' passion and death. They deserted Jesus Christ and ran away. But when Jesus rises from the dead, the Twelve are forgiven and they too witness to the Risen Christ. Jerusalem had been the centre of Judaism because of the Temple, the place where God dwelt. Now it was to become the centre of the Christian 'Way', because it was the place of Jesus' death and his rising from the dead.

Jesus chose them to be judges of the 12 tribes of Israel, hence the symbolic importance of the number 12. But it is a new Israel, signalling the end of the old one, to be replaced by the Christian community. The Temple is no longer the unique place where God dwells. God abides in the Risen Christ, who nourishes his followers with the bread of Eucharist.

The role of the Twelve is to remain as chief eye-witnesses to what Jesus did and said while he was on earth. They provide the authentic bridge to the writing of the Gospels. They are portrayed in the Book of Acts as a sort of supreme authority to whom even Paul submits. For instance they rule that Gentile converts do not have to be made into Jews by submitting to the rite of circumcision (Acts15:5-29).

Peter is singled out in the first half of Acts as the undisputed leader. The Apostle John is his companion, but Peter is always spokesman. Eventually the Apostles die, but they are not replaced — as was the case with Matthias replacing Judas the betrayer. There is no Scriptural tradition that any of the Twelve moved away from Jerusalem, although the tradition of the Early Church records that Peter went to Rome and was martyred there along with Paul in the persecution of Nero.

While the 12 Apostles remained static in Jerusalem, the Jews of the diaspora came to them. Jerusalem was the centre of pilgrimage for Jews scattered across the Mediterranean and from the East as far as Parthia (Acts 2:9-10). Peter and the Twelve preached to them, and many became followers of the Way.

Can Peter and the Apostles be regarded as the forerunners of the leaders of the later Church? There is no direct Biblical evidence, although early Christian writers such as Irenaeus (2nd Century) and Cyprian (3rd Century) testify to this.

However, Jesus clearly described the leadership role of the Apostles, and this has been applied by analogy to their 'successors', the Popes and Bishops, up to the present day. They continue to provide apostolic leadership. Jesus says to Peter: 'You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church …' These words are applied to the unique leadership of the Popes.

But equally important are Jesus' words to the Sons of Zebedee — and the others — regarding the style of leadership they must practise (Mk10:35-45). They sought positions of privilege, but Jesus says to them: 'anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant'. This model of servant leadership has not always been characteristic of popes and bishops down the ages, yet this is what Jesus taught. In Pope Francis we have an example of this style lived out today. ■

Father Michael Hill is the editor emeritus of Tui Motu. *He has just published a biography of Antonio Rosmini,* Persecuted Prophet *(Gracewing, 2013)*

yes, virginia, there is a santa claus

How do we retain the wonder and magic of childhood and transform them into a mature adult spiritual vision? Using an 1897 editorial about Santa Claus that has stood the test of time, the author explores the natural world of Richard Dawkins, and opposes to him the world as seen by CS Lewis, Jo Rowling, Chaim Potok, Manley Hopkins and others. It is a question of faith.

Michael Goodson

In 1897 an eight-year-old Manhattan girl wrote to the New York *Sun* newspaper, asking as to the truth of Santa Claus' existence. The answer, a masterpiece of kindly wisdom, is one of the very few newspaper editorials to have gained immortality. 'Yes, Virginia, there IS a Santa Claus' remains much loved in America still, and a fixture at many American Christmases. How very fortunate that a Richard Dawkins did not occupy the Sun's editorial chair at that time.

According to a recent *Christchurch Press* article, the current Most Prominent Atheist, perhaps bored with being vexed at God, is now vexed at children's fairy stories. The Grinch who stole Grimm's. It has to be said for Richard that, when arguing against God, he has a lot of evidence on his side. The most passionate of believers would have to smile wryly at Woody Allen, who said, of God, 'The worst you can say about Him is that basically He's an underachiever'. Chaim Potok in his wonderful novel, *The Book of Lights*, has a Brooklyn Jewish mother who has lost her son fighting the Japanese. Heartbroken, she can find no meaning in this disaster. Against Hitler, yes, but why the yellow people? What have they ever done to us? Railing at God, she says, 'Where is the sense? A wagon driver runs his business better than you run the world. How could you waste such a life?' It would take an exceptionally brave theologian, to argue with a Jewish mother.

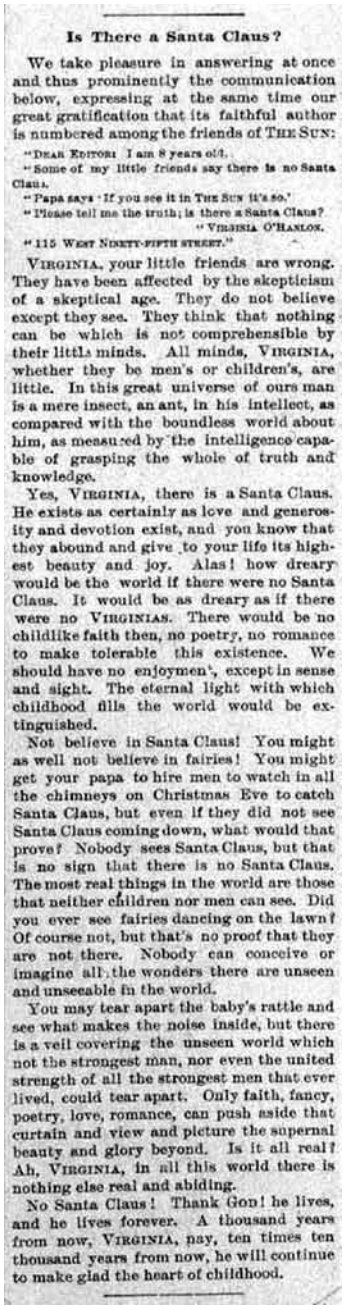
It takes something resembling bravery indeed to gaze on the waste,

The Santa that Virginia knew – a (pre-Coca Cola) Christmas postcard from 1897.

the senselessness, the notion of divine underachievement, a Being with fewer brains than a wagon driver running the world, and retain a sense of trust and faith, to say with Julian of Norwich, 'All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.' The bravery to find again the sense of childhood faith and trust as indicated by The Christ when he said, 'Unless you become as little children, you cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven'.

I think what has happened with Richard is that he has realised that Grimm represents the soft underbelly of atheism. A child automatically believes in fairies, wizards, ogres, all the fairy tale world of magic, mystery and wonder. Children expect and want frogs to turn into princes, as the dead body of Jesus turned into the resurrected spiritual body of The Christ. As the dead lion was marvellously and rapturously re-enlivened for the Pevensie girls. Given faith, and sound guidance, the fairy tales of childhood mature into angels, miracles, spirituality, God. Teach your children well, as Crosby Stills and Nash sang it half a lifetime ago. The straightest of lines exists between a childhood love of magic, and an adult yearning for the spirit. CS Lewis knew this when in Narnia he reinterpreted the core message of the gospels. Jo Rowling, with Harry Potter, wrote of a Resurrection Stone, and survival of a spiritual consciousness after death. Like Lewis, her conceptual framework and metaphysics are unmistakeably Christian. Both Narnia and Hogwarts can be understood as representing the world of the spirit. Lewis explicitly intended this, a world so close that pushing aside the fur coats in the wardrobe, or charging the barrier at platform nine and three quarters brings the seekers to Tumnus and Hagrid, who can both be seen as guides and helpers, just like the Guardian Angels. I wonder indeed what Mr Dawkins thinks of Harry Potter.

There is an unforgettable scene from the movie version of *Prince Caspian*. A river, a bridge, and all the hideous forces of darkness preparing to cross. At the other end, one small girl holding her place, her job to prevent them. She has a tiny dagger, and as the ghouls advance she, with heartbreaking vulnerability, takes it out and brandishes it at them. But behind the child stands the lion.



Is There a Santa Claus?

We take pleasure in answering at once and thus prominently the communication below, expressing at the same time our great gratification that its faithful author is numbered among the friends of THE SUN:

"DEAR EDITOR: I am 8 years old.
"Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus.
"Papa says 'If you see it in THE SUN it's so.'
"Please tell me the truth; is there a Santa Claus?
"VIRGINIA O'HANLON.
"115 WEST NINETY-FIFTH STREET."

VIRGINIA, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, VIRGINIA, whether they be men's or children's, are little. In this great universe of ours man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

Yes, VIRGINIA, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus. It would be as dreary as if there were no VIRGINIAS. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies! You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that's no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world.

You may tear apart the baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, nor even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real? Ah, VIRGINIA, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding.

No Santa Claus! Thank GOD! he lives, and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, VIRGINIA, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.

Virginia O'Hanlon (ca._1895) [Wikipedia]

Christians recognise this scene as archetypally true, and untold thousands of saints, in every religion through history, have wrought marvels on earth, trusting in the lion-god standing at their backs.

Richard Dawkins is a scientist, and to his credit he is in love with the physical world. He is passionately fascinated by the complex wonders of biology and evolution, but sees no master hand at work. The poet Gerald Manley Hopkins also had a naturalist's eye, so sharp that it could note and relish the light playing on soil fresh turned and polished by the plough. The world, he said, is charged with the grandeur of God. The world, says Richard, is charged with the grandeur of the world, a real clunker of a line, absurd, empty, explaining nothing.

Hopkins' near contemporaries were Huxley and Darwin, as passionately fascinated by nature as Richard Dawkins. Some of their contemporaries in turn sailed to Christchurch in the province of Canterbury, New Zealand, and remained certain that science and faith could still co-exist. For on the lintel of our Canterbury museum are carved the words, sadly chiding, 'Lo these are parts of HIS ways, but how little a portion is heard of HIM'.

Close to the Canterbury museum is the river. When next strolling there on a sunny day, find a mallard and look at it with Hopkins' eyes, or the wondering eyes of a child, and note the wondrous profligate richness of the luminous green, greener than all of Ireland, glowing on its head and neck. Are such unnecessary beauties just for the laying of eggs, or is there something more to their grandeur? ■

Michael Goodson is a teacher and writer living in Christchurch.

on responding ethically to terrorist threats

. . . continued from page 5

A final ethical consideration relates to the state's duty of care towards its own citizens. In other words, is criminalising so-called foreign fighters the most ethical or indeed the most effective response to the purported threat they pose? The majority of academic studies suggest that foreign fighters pose a very low risk of terrorist offending upon return home. This is perhaps why the Danish government, among others, has chosen an atypical response. Taking the view that it has a duty of care towards all of its citizens, including those who travel overseas to fight in foreign conflicts, Danish authorities try to reintegrate back into society returned fighters, many of whom return with trauma and disillusionment. Other research suggests that, in addition to rehabilitation and reintegration, such programmes can provide an opportunity for more effectively countering further radicalisation among young people. In other words, it may be that by criminalising and punishing returned fighters, most of whom are misguided idealists rather than the two-headed monsters they are frequently painted as, we are not only failing in our duty of care towards our fellow citizens, but we are also missing an opportunity to reduce the risk of violent radicalisation.

In the end, asking these kinds of questions can help us to think more clearly about alternatives to violence and how we might meet our ethical obligations to others in the context of responding to security threats. Given the suffering Western nations have caused in their response to terrorism since 2001, and their apparent indifference to causing even more suffering in the present response to IS, such questions seem entirely necessary for reaffirming our humanity as well as ensuring our security. ■

Richard Jackson is Professor of Peace Studies at the University of Otago, New Zealand, and the author of a novel entitled Confessions of a Terrorist *(Zed Books, 2014).*

the first mass in new zealand?

Fine detective work is found in unexpected places. A professor of French, great student of the explorations of de Surville in the Pacific, delves into one voyage, and sees as almost certain — that Father Antoine de Villefeix OP celebrated the Eucharist on board ship at Doubtless Bay on Christmas Day, 1769. This was so normal a Catholic event that no one bothered to make a specific note of this historic moment, the first Christian religious service celebrated in Aotearoa New Zealand.

John Dunmore

Much speculation has been aroused over the possibility that a Dominican priest, Fr Antoine Leonard de Villefeix, celebrated the Eucharist on Christmas Day, 1769 in Doubtless Bay — thus anticipating the preaching of Rev Samuel Marsden by some decades. The evidence for this claim is laid out here.

On the 25 December 1814, the Reverend Samuel Marsden, chaplain of New South Wales and the founder of the Anglican mission in NZ, arrived at the Bay of Islands and there preached the first sermon that the Māori tribes had ever heard. This was clearly the first Protestant religious service, the subject of a well-known coloured stamp which was used in 1964 for the philatelic commemoration of the 150 years of this event. But was this the first occasion that a Christian missionary had celebrated a religious service in New Zealand? There are perhaps some doubts about that, because the Reverend Samuel Marsden was preceded 45 years prior to that by a Dominican native of Périgord, Father Antoine Leonard de Villefeix.

Sadly Father de Villefeix has not left any record of his visit — at least nothing has as yet been found in the archives of the Dordogne or in those of the Dominicans, and this leaves you to fear there is nothing to find because, as we shall see, this courageous religious had suffered some setbacks.

He was chaplain on the *Saint-Jean-Baptiste*, a vessel fitted out in the French enclave in India by Jean Law de Lauriston, governor of Pondicherry, Jean Chevalier, governor of Chandernagore, and Jean-François de Surville, captain of vessels of the Indian Company. Some other individuals were interested in the expedition, including the second-in-command, Guillaume Labé.

dordogne origins

Father de Villefeix was born in 1728 probably in Étouars. His older brother was the parish priest there; another brother, Jean, lived nearby; and he himself returned there, because he died there in 1780. We note that in 1756 he obtained from Rome, through the services of the Master of the Order of Preachers, the documents necessary for the establishment of the Holy Rosary Confraternity, for which his brother had asked him. As well we note that in 1760 he is shown as being assigned to the Convent of Saint-Jacques in Paris; and he was there again in 1766, that he was described as a teacher there dating from 1770. So, until then there is nothing out of the ordinary. Father Villefeix reached his forties without a hint of scandal or any doubts about the picture of a good religious cleric which he presents to us.

But beginning from 1767 the name of Villefeix no long appears in the Paris directory; and in 1768 we find him in Pondicherry. What has happened in between? All we know is that at this date he was travelling on the *Marquis de Castries* and that at the beginning of 1769 he was preparing himself to follow de Surville who was fitting out the *Saint-Jean-Baptiste* for the China Sea.

It is necessary to say here that de Surville descended from a very pious family. His aunt, Élisabeth de Surville, founded the famous community of the Saviour in Saint-Lô. The de Surville house gave hospitality from the beginning of the century to priests who were en route to the Far East. Now we know that in 1766 Surville was in France. He left Port Louis in June 1767 on the Saint-Jean-Baptiste and reached the Delta of the Ganges in March 1768. Without too much difficulty we can assume that Father de Villefeix met de Surville in 1766 or 1767, perhaps through the good services of a missionary friend of the Surville family and that, carried away by the seafarer's stories, he decided to leave the Convent of Saint-Jacques, despite the promise of a teaching position, and become a missionary. It is possible that he glimpsed

some financial advantages, for Surville would undoubtedly have shared his hopes with him.

de surville's voyage

However that may be, at the end of 1768 de Surville was preparing for a major voyage of exploration in the Pacific. Reports — seriously incomplete — about the expedition to Wallis led Jean Law and his associates to believe that the English had just discovered a very rich island full of promise. The reports were about Tahiti, but the syndicate saw in these reports the fabled Land of David and decided to send the *Saint-Jean-Baptiste* in order to get ahead of an eventual English settlement; and to be the first to reap the benefits. This was only a dream that ended in disaster, but it is reasonable to think that Surville invited Father de Villefeix to join the expedition in order to begin evangelising the natives of the Land of David. In the previous century we saw Paulmier de Courtonne offer to evangelise the Land of Gonneville which did not exist either. Evangelisation would explain the presence of Father de Villefeix on the *Saint-Jean-Baptiste*, because we very rarely find chaplains on board merchant ships.

lauriston bay

The *Saint-Jean-Baptiste* set sail from Pondicherry on the 3 June 1769, called in at Malacca, rounded Cape Bojéador to the north of the Philippines and turned to the south, rediscovering the Solomon Islands and anchoring in Lauriston Bay — Cook's Doubtless Bay — in New Zealand on the 17 December with its crew very sick. They stayed in New Zealand until the end of the year. They were there then on December 25. We can put the question very simply: would a chaplain omit to celebrate Mass on a Sunday? (Father de Villefeix had spent three Sundays in NZ). Would he, above all, have failed to do this on the feast day of Christmas with a Breton crew which had already seen a good number of their fellows die and in which each member could anticipate, from one day to the next, dying of scurvy which was ravaging them all.

functions of a chaplain

Only a sick priest — and he was not that — or a negligent priest would have failed to fulfill his obligation to this degree. We must acknowledge that Labé who had little love for him, calls him 'a poor sort of fellow' who, some time after the *Saint-Jean-Baptiste* arrived in Peru, deserted along with the captain's young nephew (Surville drowned at Chilca), perhaps with the aim, which is not very laudable in a priest, of going in search of gold in the mines of that country. But Labé indicates that he did celebrate a requiem for the captain and came on board at Callao to say Mass. If Labé doesn't refer to a Mass celebrated in New Zealand, it is quite simply because that was one of the normal functions of a chaplain. One would not record in the log book something that is purely and simply routine. When Labé speaks of Masses that the Dominican celebrated it is because they refer to an unusual event such as the death of the captain or because he wants to underline that the 'poor sort of fellow' used to grumble when he had come to say Mass on board ship. Labé who never minces his words would certainly not have failed to mention the shortcomings of a chaplain who had neglected his duty on Christmas Day.

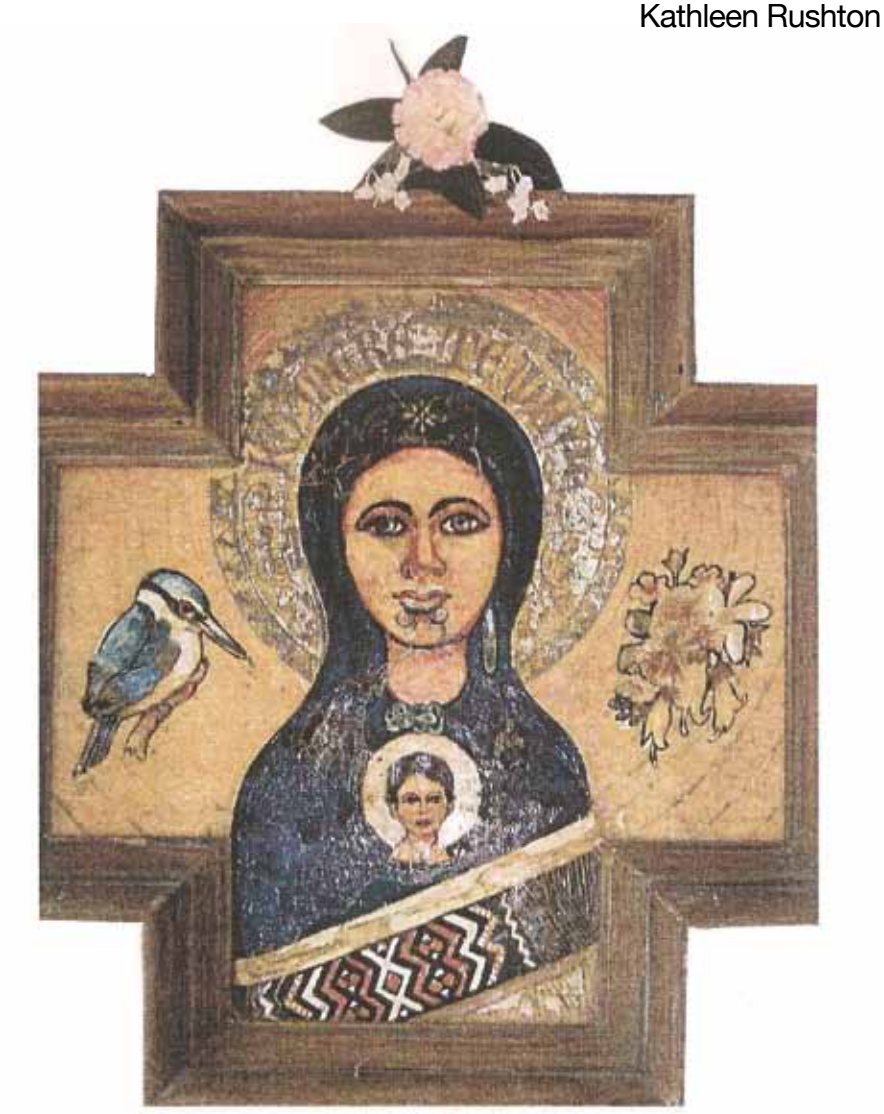
However, we can't declare with absolute certainty and with proof to hand that Villefeix was the first Christian priest to officiate in New Zealand, for none of the ship's records mention it and the chaplain himself left no mention or record. The only mention that we have found is the date of death on 27 February 1780 of 'Antoine Leonard de Villefeix, priest', which proves at least that he returned to France and remained in priestly orders. None of the officers took account of the fact that history was being made in him. Otherwise one of them would have written in his diary: 'today the first Mass was celebrated in New Zealand by a Catholic priest'. Doubt will remain always, but we can all believe that on Christmas Day 1769 Father de Villefeix, despite all his shortcomings, performed a service which would place him ahead of Marsden. ■

John Dunmore, emeritus professor of French at Massey University, has written extensively on the explorations of Jean-François-Marie de Surville. He now lives in retirement in Paraparaumu.

whakapapa of jesus

Matthew 1:1-25: 17 December and Christmas Day Vigil Mass

Kathleen Rushton



Madonna and Child, Hato Hemi Catholic Church, Matihetihe Marae, Mitimiti, Hokianga. [Used with Permission]

The *whakapapa* of Jesus born of Mary (Matthew 1:1-25) is read twice in the lead-up to Christmas. It sets the tone for this celebration, occuring on 17 December (the first of the final eight Advent days which so anticipate the Christmas feast) and again at the vigil Eucharist of Christmas Day. 'Sets the tone'? Surely not that list of unpronounceable names! The modern reader's quest for accuracy and completeness often leads to looking at the genealogies of Jesus as a list of grandparents and great-grandparents. However, if the story of Jesus did not begin with his genealogy, Matthew's original readers would have been surprised. Their interest in ancestry flowed from their tribal origins as people of Israel.

Genealogies preface the stories of Noah, Abraham (Gn 5-9; 11:10-32) and David (I Chr 1-9). Biblical genealogies had different functions. A person received only one name, so it was necessary to mention a father or grandfather. Ancestry gave identity which was like a provable passport to survival, for a tribe looked after its own. Lineage gave status to offices such as a king, priest or messiah. Genealogies structured history into epochs and gave people a collective identity. Something of the ancestors, such as traits or personality, was understood to reappear in the descendent.

In Māori tradition, a speaker begins by acknowledging God, people and creation. In Matthew's whakapapa, I recognise these relationships. Jesus' coming among us is better seen not as a noun, *whanaungatanga* (right relationship), but as a verb, *whakawhanaungatanga* which means 'make right relationship happen' with God, people and creation.

creation

The beginning of Matthew functions like the wonderful opening of John's gospel, 'In the beginning …' (1:1). Matthew's first two words, *biblos geneseos,* translated as 'an account of the genealogy' or 'the book of the genealogy,' is literally 'book of Genesis.' *Biblos* means 'book' and *geneseos* is used for 'origin' or 'beginning.' These words are together in only two places in the Greek Bible: in Gn 2:4 where they suggest the beginning of the heavens and the earth and in 5:1 to signify the genealogy of the descendants of Adam.

Matthew's phrase sets the stage for hope of new creation by evoking

Genesis, the book of origin and creation. As the Spirit hovers over the waters of creation (Gn 1:2), so the Spirit descends at Jesus' baptism (Mt 3:16). Jesus calms the storm and walks on the water (8:23-27; 14:22-33) recalling God's act of separating the waters from dry land (Gn 1:6-10) and keeping them in place. In Mt 19:3-9, Jesus speaks of the will of the Creator 'at the beginning' quoting Gn 2:24 and of a 'renewal of all things' (Mt 19:28). So 'Book of the origin' positions Jesus in a key role in God's renewal of creation.

'god saves'

Mt 1:1 establishes Jesus, whose name means 'God saves,' as the main character. He is Christ, the 'anointed' of God. His special task as 'son of David' and 'son of Abraham' is woven into the genealogy and revealed as the gospel unfolds. Matthew links Jesus with Jewish Christians for whom 'son of David' suggests the longed-for messiah of David's line who would free Israel from its captivity and rule in peace and justice over a renewed people. Descent from David establishes Jesus' credentials as messiah. The title 'son of Abraham' has a sense of ambiguity. While every Jew could claim to be a son or daughter of Abraham, this title suggests Jesus is heir to the wider promise of blessing to the Gentiles.

a history and a people

Jesus is inserted into a history and a people in a threefold story of the patriarchs (Abraham to David), the kings (David to the Babylonian Exile) and otherwise unknown people (from the Babylonian Exile to Joseph). The epochs of 14 generations do not add up neatly. Each is longer than 14 actual generations and has a different time span. Some 750 years separated Abraham from David, some 400 years separated David from the Babylonian Exile and some 600 years separated the Babylonian Exile from Jesus' birth. What is Matthew up to in his genealogy of Jesus?

Biblical scholar, Raymond Brown, suggests these epochs anticipate what follows in the gospel. In the first epoch, God chose as the ancestors of the messiah less than savoury characters who are even cheats and liars (Jacob and Judah) rather than more honest and noble ones (Esau and Joseph). Likewise, Jesus will choose sinners over the just. In the second epoch, the kings begin with David in a time of seeming triumph with the foundation of the monarchy. This period, however, leads to the Babylonian Exile, to loss of the kingdom and the destruction of the Temple. Anticipated is the reign of God where Jesus initiates the 'up-side down' notion of disciples who are not to seek power but service and where little children will be first. In the third epoch, all characters listed are otherwise unknown and too insignificant to 'make it' into biblical history. These prepare for the insignificant fishers and tax collectors who will make up the apostolic genealogy of the Church, the heirs of Jesus.

> . . . if the story of Jesus did not begin with his genealogy, Matthew's original readers would have been surprised. Their interest in ancestry flowed from their tribal origins as people of Israel.

The progression of male ancestors is broken by four women who in contrast to elite men are socially, economically and culturally marginal. In positions of powerlessness they show the faith by which God's plan is carried out when powerful males do not fulfil their duties. Widowed Tamar (1:3), the only Old Testament woman to be called righteous (a term central in Matthew), coerced her father-in-law, Judah, to provide an heir (Gn 38). Rahab (Mt 1:5) disobeyed the king of Jericho and sheltered spies (Jos 2). Widowed Ruth (Mt 1:5), a Moabite, presented herself to Boaz to ensure that the Davidic line continued. Bathsheba, in v 6 called 'the wife of Uriah,' outside the norms of patriarchal marriage becomes the mother of Solomon (2 Sam 11). These outsiders prepare for the extraordinary birth of Jesus and his mission to those outside Israel (Mt 28:19).

whakawhanaungatanga

Advent means 'coming.' The genealogy of Jesus carries the spirit of Advent and is a dynamic call to *whakawhanaungatanga*, 'to make right relation happen' with God, creation and people. Pope Francis calls for 'profound respect for the whole creation.' Mary Colwell writes of how 'our day-to-day exploitation of the earth for resources we use is having an … immediate effect on the functioning of ecosystems.' (*The London Tablet*, 11/10/14). The life that thrives alongside human persons, in forests, waterways and wetlands 'on planet Earth is not an incidental by-product of evolution; it performs the activities that keep the ecosystem working. Biodiversity, a technical but useful word, is essential for everyone's well-being.'

It is often thought that faith is about our search for God. The title given to Jesus, Emmanuel-God-with-us (1:23), however, is more about God's search for us. In the story of Jesus' genealogy, God embraces the fears, the sufferings and oppression of ancient Israel by breaking into this world. All humanity and all creation are to lean on the side of hope in setbacks, injustices and suffering, for Jesus Emmanuel-God-with-us is the longed-for One bringing the peace and justice of *whakawhanaungatanga* for a renewed creation and a renewed people. ■

Kathleen Rushton is a Sister of Mercy working in adult education in the Diocese of Christchurch.

books for holiday reading

Some fiction, some spiritual. Enjoy!

Bird Cloud

By Annie Proulx
New York, Scribner, 2011
Reviewwer: Bernadette Hall

Annie Proulx will be familiar to readers as the author of the novel *The Shipping News* and of the short story *Brokeback Mountain* which became an award-winning film. She is drawn to stories of harsh places and especially of cowboy country, what used to be called 'the wild west.' *Bird Cloud* is a memoir in which she takes us right to the heart of this kind of territory.

In 2003, Annie Proulx and her sons became the owners of a property which was to become her passion, 640 acres of Wyoming wetlands and prairie with massive yellow-stone cliffs that plunged down to the North Platte River. She named it Bird Cloud after a cloud formation she saw on her first visit.

The memoir is the tale of the house she built there, a house of unique design, constructed to withstand the vicious winds, the months of snow, the desert drought. A beautiful, stubborn house that would reflect her values and her character. A house sensitive to the beauty and the integrity of its location. A writer's house with lots of long work tables and storage for thousands of books.

The memoir tells of the years it took to complete this project. 'After Bird Cloud was finished I knew it was a poem of landscape, architecture and fine craftsmanship '.

What I found inspiring is that it is also a poem to the attention to be paid, the humility of entering the homeland of others, the awareness of history, of where we are and who was there before.

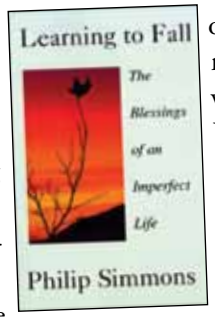
We are invited to enter into the landscape through the eyes and the fine intelligence of this very gifted writer, an invitation to look around, to see where we are, to name it and to name ourselves within it. ■

Learning to Fall – The Blessings of an Imperfect Life

By Philip Simmons
Reviewer: Michael Fitzsimons

A few months ago we gave a friend, who had been diagnosed with cancer and given just a few months to live, a copy of *Learning to Fall*. The slim volume became his constant companion in his last weeks. He appeared one morning, book in hand, enthusing "this books says everything I want to say. It says it all. I'm going to get copies for all my family to read."

Let me quickly say that Learning to Fall is not just about learning how to die; it's even more a joyous book about how to engage fully with life —with acceptance, gratitude and wonder.



Philip Simmons was 35 years old when he discovered he had ALS, or Lou Gehrig's disease, and was told he had fewer than five years to live. He was a young husband and father, an Associate Professor of English with a promising writing career ahead of him.

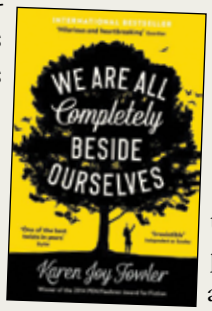
As his illness progressed, he moved with his wife and two children to New Hampshire. From his cabin in the back yard, Simmons chronicles his everyday life, mixing his own experiences and insights with those of the poets and the great religious traditions. He draws on the teachings of Jesus, Sufi and Buddhist masters, Christian mystics, and writers such as Emerson and Yeats.

Learning to Fall is a remarkable book. Simmons is a superb writer and his record of his 10-year spiritual journey is a classic, as good as this kind of book gets. Get a copy (available on Amazon) and keep it handy. ■

We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves

By Karen Joy Fowler
London Serpent's Tail, 2014
Reviewer: Sandra Winton OP

It is the winter of 1996. College student, Rosemary Cooke, is in the cafeteria when a young woman has a noisy row with her boyfriend, breaking dishes, dropping food, tipping over a table, swinging a chair. As Rosemary watches this mayhem she finds herself also dropping her crockery, spilling her milk and then smashing her glass. Summoned back home for Thanksgiving, she is presented with her mother's journals and slowly begins to unravel the mystery of her past, the things she has forgotten, the things no one speaks about, the unsolved mysteries of where her brother went, what happened to her sister and why she behaves as she does.



This leaves me wondering how I can review a book that is held together around the unravelling of mysteries. Not to give things away, suffice it to say that this is indeed a good holiday read. The central character, who narrates the story, is convincing and funny, the story itself is engrossing, the historical phenomena around which it is constructed are fascinating, and the questions raised are worth thinking about. It is written in a clever and witty style. It explores humanness, love, family, loyalty, memory, the relationships between people and between people and animals. It does all this in a moving and intelligent way.

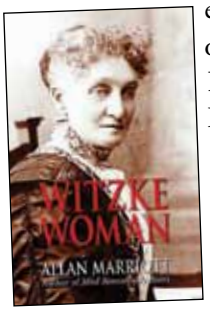
I read this book, knowing nothing about it, because I was intrigued by the title. Shortlisted for the Man Booker, it was worth the punt. ■

The Witzke Woman

By Allan Marriott,
Wiley Publication, 2014
Reviewer: Brian Turner

My interest in this novel (based on an actual Polish immigrant to NZ) was aroused by the 70th anniversary this year of some 700 Polish children and adults arriving in NZ from World War 2 ravaged Poland and being resettled in the first instance in Pahiatua.

One of the children was Eric Lepionca with whom I subsequently worked in the 1980's as members of the then Interchurch Commission on Immigration and Refugee Resettlement. At that time, I also had the opportunity to visit Poland (under Russian control) with a World Council of Churches emergency aid assignment.



Juliana Witzke (who emigrated to NZ with her family in 1876) is the novel's central character. Her story traverses childhood dislocation from Poland, attempted integration into NZ life and an enduring longing to return in some capacity to her beloved Poland whose suffering under repeated occupations tears her apart emotionally. Living in NZ also tears Juliana apart as she struggles with a dysfunctional marriage and family.

A recurring theme in the book is the difficulty of living with difference, a tension that all immigrants endure to varying degrees and one that brings to mind the Biblical lament: 'How shall I sing the Lord's song in a strange land?' (Psalm 137:4)

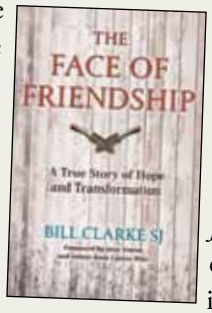
Christchurch author Allan Marriott skillfully weaves the cultural, geographical, historical, religious and relational tensions of Juliana's life and family into a compelling narrative. ■

The Face of Friendship

By Bill Clarke
Reviewer: Michael Noonan

Is it possible to love someone unconditionally? It is an important question. In L'Arche we sometimes found ourselves living with people who had been so hurt by life that their fragility and wounded history would be reactivated by any imposed conditions or rejection. Often, the slightest hint of rejection would lead to terrible distress and violence. The power of community to heal or break in such situations is immense.

Such a fragile person was Byron Dunn. In *The Face of Friendship*, the Jesuit Priest, Bill Clarke, describes how his community, The Farm, in Guelph, Canada, attempted to live an unconditional love toward Byron. The title of the book draws from the breakage in Byron's life when, in a failed attempt at suicide, he had blown away half his face with a shotgun.



The book charts their friendship as it deepened over 13 years of living together. It describes a mutual transformation and the healing which occurred for both of them.

A Christmas book? Yes! And Lent and Easter too and especially Pentecost! It is a book which gives me profound reasons for hope. It's funny and tragic and full of wisdom. It is a story which reminds me that Jesus was born in our world to live a life of healing and unconditional love for each one of us.

I first met Bill through an earlier book, *Enough Room for Joy*, in which he described his experience of living in L'Arche in its early days. He writes as he is, someone who lives and loves simply and profoundly. ■

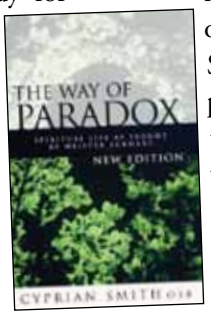
The Way of Paradox

By Cyprian Smith
Darton, Longman Todd, 2004
Reviewer: Pip Nicholls

Meister Eckhart on holiday? No way!

Well, 'no way' to opening this gem of a book in the first week. That's surely for newspapers, crossword puzzles, magazines or light novels with family chatter or cricket commentary in the background.

But when some of the stress of the weeks leading up to the break has seeped away in more mindless pursuits and some inner spaciousness that's been submerged for months gets to see the light of day, then and only then, your mind may think it's ready for some wee treasure to capture its imagination. This is what Smith, a contemporary mystic, readably brings out from Eckhart, the medieval one.



The paradox, within the many paradoxes explored in this book, is that it's not only what you're reading but how you read that's equally important. My suggestion is that on about day nine you begin by reading a maximum of three pages a day — and very much with a pencil handy to capture those insights that seize your attention. Anymore and you'll be reading mindlessly rather than for the opportunity of Eckhart and Smith leading you down the path of greater detachment towards 'the birth of God in the Soul's Ground', which Smith translates as 'the spark of awareness awakening within us'.

By holiday's end you'll have read the first chapter only, but you'll be hooked by the habit and it will take until March to finish the book … which you might pick up again next summer … ■

Crosscurrents

Jim Elliston

on the synod

Pope Paul VI established the Synod of Bishops to enable representatives of the world's bishops to gather with the Pope from time to time to examine the signs of the times. The idea was to carry on the work of Vatican II — a continuous updating of the Church's approach to its Mission. This practical idea soon degenerated into a purely advisory body that placed restrictions on the participants' freedom to speak their minds. Pope Francis has now restored the Synod to its original intent.

Fr Thomas Rosica CSB, the English language assistant to the Vatican Press Office, who served as English-language spokesperson at the recent Synod of Bishops in Rome, summed up the Synod as follows:

'Using the rich imagery of Pope Francis, I would like to think that the recent Extraordinary Synod was a golden opportunity to take the Synodal structure out of the Intensive Care Unit (some thought it was Palliative Care) of the great Field Hospital we call Church and return it to the General patient wing!'

no room at the inn

For some years I was a branch manager for IHC. The Society had begun to take people with intellectual disability from purely caring institutions like hospitals, and house them in small units that focused on assisting them to live lives as normal as possible. Part of my responsibility was oversight of several residences, where people were helped to acquire living skills. Staff members were responsible for this, as well as ensuring that lack of skills did not have a negative impact on the residents. The money saved by the hospitals was offset by State subsidies to IHC. The effect on the residents' independence, self-confidence and self-esteem was remarkable.

This is an ideal form of social housing that treats people as individual persons with dignity. It conforms to the tenets of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) of subsidiarity (devolving responsibility to a lower level) and solidarity (giving assistance where needed).

There are other groups of people with various forms of disability, (including economic); some of them, while not being obvious to the general public, are in need of various forms of assisted living. They tend to end up on the scrap heap.

The Government is involving Social Welfare in the allocation of state houses, which from a CST perspective is encouraging. The Government is also talking about devolving responsibility for all social housing to community groups and private enterprise. This involves selling off $18-plus billion worth of state housing. Of great concern is Government talk about allocating the proceeds of sales to the Consolidated Fund. Most community groups don't have the capital to purchase housing stock; developers do, of course. And what about those families living in overcrowded situations, unsafe houses etc? Where is solidarity with the needy? The 'market will provide' myth has led us to this situation; more of the same will only exacerbate the problem.

super-drones

In an item in the Jesuit publication *America*, Jim McDermott comments on the announcement that the US Air Force was to land its robotic space plane X-37B after 22 months in orbit. He writes: 'What — you didn't know the Air Force had a 'space plane'? That it was robotic? That it had been circling above us for the last 671 days? That might be because the USAF has been using it and a second 'Orbital Test Vehicle' for long-term top-secret missions.'

Since 2010 the plane, just 29 feet long and with the payload bay of a pick-up truck, has been sent into space three times for a total of 1356 days. McDermott reports that the Air Force says 'the primary objectives of the X-37B are twofold: reusable spacecraft technologies for America's future in space and operating experiments which can be returned to, and examined on, Earth.' McDermott comments 'Or translated into English, we're not telling.'

Commenting on the possibility that the plane could very well be a laboratory for testing things like the long-term endurance of materials and computers in space, he writes: 'But the fact that the program has, since 2004, been in the hands of the Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), does not instil confidence. So basically the good news in space travel is, we've got a space plane! The bad news is, it's being run by Dr. Strangelove.'

more grovelling.

More advice from the pen of Gao Lee Ji, who lived around 475 BC:

'Responsibility is a cake to be shared by many; credit is a cherry to be eaten by only one.'

'A great general obscures his true plans from others, cultivating mysteriousness to the point of invisibility. That way, if something goes wrong, he can claim that he wasn't there.'

'Know thyself, know thy enemy. A thousand battles, a thousand opportunities to flee.'

'In war as in peace, he who would seek promotion must learn to bend over in order to touch the sky.' ■

the church with wrinkles on...

Peter Norris

Today I went to the barbershop. The hairdresser was very pleasant and I got what I thought was my normal cut. What gave me room for thought was a glimpse in one of the little mirrors that is designed to let you know what tall people can see: that is the crown of my head. I suddenly realised that my hair was looking a lot like my grandfather's. I guess I had never noticed it as much before but there was a large bald patch that I could not see from eye level. I rather liked my grandfather and was not horrified, but I was quite surprised. I did not know that I was losing my hair at such a rate.

We often need help to see ourselves as others do. In this case, the strategically placed mirror helped me. Sometimes with staff at St Margaret's College we use the Myers-Briggs Personality Indicator and sometimes we use Strength Finders. Both of these are affirming tools for those who undertake them. The barbershop's mirror was not affirming for me, but I know that our student leaders learn a lot when they do the Myers-Briggs or Strength Finders.

In some ways these aids do some of the things that friends used to do, but it is probably more affirming to read a print-out saying that we have good attention to detail rather than being told that we 'nit pick'. I wonder why truth is more acceptable if it is shrouded in a print-out. Sometimes good news is better if it is delivered personally. Last week I attended a 'thanksgiving event' for the soon-to-be retired editor of *Tui Motu*. I was impressed with the crowd of well-wishers and by the good will evidenced by them. Hearing all the first hand testimony was inspiring.

In some ways community should be like that in the church. We should be very affirming of one another and not cutting with our remarks. Each one of us needs the other to help us see ourselves with our wrinkles on. We want to see ourselves generously, that is with kindness and love, because that is how we grow. Church life is about living the good news or gospel. It is not based on adherence to precepts or conformity to a number of practices. The precepts and the practices serve to keep us together as a group but they really do not measure Christian life. At different times in the church there have been different beliefs and practices but there should have been the same commitment one to another. Often times I wonder if that commitment is still there, but it normally is.

When our old history teacher, Dr John Mackey, was named as Bishop of Auckland, one of my classmates acknowledged that Dr Mackey 'helped us love the church with its wrinkles on'. As we move on through life we have to associate with people who do that to us. We should look for people who challenge us by being so affirming. We basically need people to remind us of that.

So, it is a long way from my barber and my rude awakening to my hair and lack of it. I will not look at having a hair transplant or anything like that. Instead, I will remember the reflection the event occasioned for me. Hopefully it will make me more accepting of myself and others. ■

Father Peter Norris is Master of St Margaret's College on the campus of the University of Otago.

a Mother's Journal

by Kaaren Mathias

Awake early in the morning and late at night thinking about this meeting. How will I lead us through the landmines, terrain traps and seemingly intractable positions? What if she directly challenges and confronts others in the meeting? How can I keep this group together?

Leading groups is sometimes as easy as walking down to the dairy and back. But this group at this time felt more like moving through hostile enemy territory. There had been several volleys of emails leaving bruises and feelings of disunity and unbelonging. I had talked to different parties and there were only shreds of goodwill left.

I talked through the situation with three people — all quite remote from this group, and each with very different backgrounds. Each had some useful ideas to help guide us forward. I also asked a couple of friends from far away to pray for me and for our group that day.

Meeting day — and we sat down in circle. We slowly and carefully worked our way across the landmine territory. There were no explosions. There were a couple of muted apologies that were accepted. We talked about some of our recent difficulties and resolved to meet face-to-face more often. (*Kanohi ki te kanohi* — face to face — was a phrase I'd learned many years earlier working in Tairawhiti, but I should have kept it nearer the surface of my actions rather than as a vocabulary item.) We decided collectively that we'd pick up a phone rather than send an email next time we started getting into difficult territory. We together settled

on a pathway forward. We went on to some other more logistical and administrative matters. We drank chai and ate biscuits. We said a *karakia* in closing (or *dua* as it's called in North India). We stood outside and chatted some more in the late sun and then jumped on our scooters and each headed back to our own homes.

I felt so relieved and grateful and frankly surprised. We hadn't imploded or exploded. We were still planning to work together. Reaching home I was very happy to be handed a cup of tea and to sit and listen to my six-year-old reading aloud.

From a vantage point several months later now, the greatest support was the companionship and the input of others, their thoughts and advice as I sought to find pathways ahead. A very busy executive manager sort of friend spent an hour with me talking through the situation and possible approaches. Actually listening was the main thing he did now I think about it. My husband (long-suffering man that he is) let me think aloud as we went walking one day. My boss suggested some compromises that might work. And I was also buoyed, knowing that two friends from Gisborne had promised to pray for us all that day.

Do these thoughts link to Advent as we start this month on the journey to Christ's birth? I guess this journey, physical and metaphorical of Mary and Joseph, was also a fraught and complicated venture. They got wise counsel from new and old friends (Gabriel, Elizabeth) and then set off into the landmine-strewn territory of travelling in late pregnancy, a census, a pregnancy with rather questionable origins and some bizarre prophecies. And it all worked out OK, more or less.

In surprising places and ways, God is with us. Emmanuel.

Kaaren Mathias lives with her husband Jeph and four children in North India, where she works in community health and development. Her email address is: kaarenmathias@gmail.com