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WOMEN AND CHURCH

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UNDERSTANDING SAFEGUARDING

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ISRAEL AND PALESTINIAN OPPRESSION

ANTONY LOEWENSTEIN

What Can Women Do?

Ko mau nga Wahine ki te Hauru o te Rangi

INDEPENDENT CATHOLIC MAGAZINE

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Editorial

Women Hold Up Half the Sky — Ko mau nga Wahine ki te Hauru o te Rangi

JOY IS ERUPTING even amid the economic austerity in Aotearoa and Australia. It rolled in on a tide of women athletes here for the FIFA Womens' World Cup. Most often when international competitions are held in this country, our teams are favoured to lift the trophy. That's not the case for this World Cup. Women's soccer here does not have the profile of women's rugby, but just as in the Rugby World Cup, the athletes and their supporters are creating a spirit of enthusiasm for their sport. Our low-ranked football team stunned us by playing out of their skins to win the opening game of the tournament. They claimed that the support from the stands lifted them and kept them focused on everything they'd practised in the months of their buildup. It was such a sweet win!

The women players are open in sharing their delight at winning, their disappointment at losing and their acknowledgement of the winning side's prowess. And they behave generously — as if they like one another. We're being treated to another show of women's capability — and another challenge to the inequality of the resources allotted to the men's and the women's codes. It's "time" for even-handedness because it symbolises the value of respect and it undoes the erroneous but entrenched belief that men are more important than women.

From around the world, too, we're hearing women asking the Synod on Synodality to take seriously their concerns at the ways the Church devalues them — this from women of many cultures and of every continent, socioeconomic reality, educational level and age group. Their concerns call for an examination of the Church's theological and Scriptural interpretations that entrench the belief that male superiority is somehow God's design. Pope Francis spoke of the world facing a "change of era". Women are reminding the rest of the Church that the change of era is for the Church, too. We have to discern the Gospel's challenge and guidance for living in this world now. We have to discern which riches of tradition will continue to focus us on the Spirit's action now, and which we will leave aside because they distract, exclude, inhibit or stonewall our participating in God's mission at this time.

This examination is critical in a change of era. If we're unconvinced, we have only to compare the number of families enrolled in Catholic schools with their involvement in parish to understand that the Church — not the Gospel — is becoming irrelevant in daily life for many. It requires more than fiddling, like reintroducing holy hours, dedications to Our Lady and dressing the "high altar" in medieval pomp as if Vatican II never happened. This is to be a hopeful, enthusiastic, commitment to the full inclusion of women in Christ's Church.

We thank all of our contributors whose research, thoughtfulness, faith, artistry and craft make this issue one that the late founding editor Michael Hil IC would be proud of.

And as is our custom, our last word is of blessing and encouragement.

The Power of Kindness



I CAME ACROSS A video clip of Madhukar Pai, Professor of Epidemiology and Global Health at Montreal's McGill University, delivering a graduation address to hundreds of students at Northwestern University in Illinois.

The video was captioned and something about it caught my eye. I clicked to listen. This is what he said:

"The best way to spot an idiot is to look for the person who is cruel.

"When we see someone who doesn't look like us, or sound like us, or act like us, or love like us, or live like us, the first thought that crosses almost everyone's brain is rooted in either fear or judgement or both.

"That's evolution. We survived as a species by being suspicious of things that we aren't familiar with.

"In order to be kind we have to shut down that animal instinct and force our brain to travel a different pathway. Empathy and compassion are evolved states of being. They require the mental capacity to step past our most primal urges.

"Somewhere along the way, our society has come to believe that weaponised cruelty is part of some well-thought-out master plan. Cruelty is seen by some as an adroit cudgel to gain power. Empathy and kindness are considered weak.

"Many important people look to the vulnerable only as rungs on a ladder to the top. When someone's path through this world is marked by acts of cruelty, they have failed the first test of an advanced society. They never forced their primal brain to evolve past its first instinct. They never forged pathways to overcome their own instinctive fears.

"And so, their thinking and problem-solving will lack the imagination and creativity that the kindest people have in spades.

"Over my years I have found one thing to be universally true. The kindest person in the room is often the smartest."

His words have stayed with me. The notion that empathy and kindness are indicative of higher evolution is compelling. I have always pondered why some people are

cruel to others. I see this especially online, and especially during election campaigns, where we hear the usual cries for harsher penalties for crime, when government assistance to the vulnerable is recast as "handouts" and diversity-focused policy is described as "favouritism". This kind of talk divides our communities.

Professor Pai's speech also reminded me of the critical role Jacinda Ardern played in our country. She swept to the role of prime minister on a platform of kindness. Despite what some people say and write, that platform was authentic. Her kindness reinforced and warmed us as we faced a harrowing act of terrorism on Aotearoa soil and through those first years of a frightening pandemic. For many of us, indeed for most of us, kindness really helped us get through.

In 2020, the first year of the pandemic, we learnt a new concept: lockdown. On my daily walks I would carefully step into the road to make way for another family group to pass at a safe distance. Others did the same for me. We made eye contact, smiled and felt connected. In those months I got to know all my neighbours better— indeed, all the people in my street — because of kindness. We looked out for one another. Now I have to consciously remind myself to keep that momentum going and continue to keep tabs on my neighbours. But I do it because it felt good to be in a real community.

As we enter the 2023 election campaign where public discourse becomes more fractured and frenzied, let's approach the debates, within families, workplaces, online, at public meetings and eventually at the ballot box with conscious kindness. It's the smart thing to do. ✦

Photo by Caftor/Shutterstock.com

Clare Curran, former MP, is a committed advocate and representative on social justice issues and writer of novels.





LIFT UP THE LOWLY FEED THE HUNGRY

Susan Smith
discusses the Feast of the Assumption and Marian devotions yesterday and today.

THE COUNCIL OF EPHESUS (431) was primarily concerned with unity of Christ's divine and human natures, and so this inevitably led to discussions about Mary. Should Mary be called Theotokus ("God-bearer" or mother of God) or Christotokus ("Christ-bearer" or mother of Christ). Theotokus it was and from the 5th century onwards, liturgical celebrations to honour Mary began to multiply.

By the 6th century, Mary's bodily assumption into heaven was being celebrated. Though there is neither biblical nor patristic evidence to mandate such a celebration, it was widely believed that Jesus would

have saved Mary from the bodily corruption that was the lot of us lesser mortals. By the 11th century, belief in Mary's Assumption and her Immaculate Conception were strong.

PRE-VATICAN II MARIAN DEVOTION

Marian devotion continued to grow in importance, particularly in 19th-century France, and our early French connection, here, perhaps explains why Marian devotion was such an important part of pre-Vatican II Catholicism.

In 1830 Catherine Labouré claimed to have had a vision of Mary as immaculately conceived, standing

on a globe. I certainly remember wearing the Immaculate Conception medals to save me from a multiplicity of physical and moral dangers that would come my way. In 1854, Pius IX ruled that belief in the Immaculate Conception was a dogma of faith. Appearances of Mary continued — La Salette (1846), Lourdes (1858), Knock (1879), Fatima (1917) — and were an important part of catechetical formation prior to Vatican II.

Nor did Vatican II alter this for many Catholics. Pius XII, John Paul II and Francis emphasised devotion to Our Lady of Fatima. Indeed, in May 2017 Francis canonised the three shepherd children to whom Mary

appeared. I must admit that long before 2017 I had stopped worrying about Lucia's message, although I do wonder if Putin is better or worse than Russia's former Communist dictators. Putin does not emerge as an answer to prayer about the evils of Communism.

ASSUMPTION OF MARY

In 1950, Pius XII gave us yet another Marian dogma — Catholics were to believe that Mary had been bodily assumed into heaven. The *Catholic Catechism*, quoting *Lumen Gentium* 59, teaches that “Finally, the Immaculate Virgin preserved free from all stain of original sin, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory. And exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, so that she might be more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of Lords, and conqueror of sin and death.” Both Pius IX and Pius XII taught that failure on the part of Catholics to believe in these two Marian dogmas meant they had “abandoned the divine and Catholic faith”.

After celebrating the first Mass in Hokianga on 13 January 1838, Bishop Pompallier dedicated the country to Mary under the title of her Assumption. In 1988, New Zealand's bishops declared the feast of the Assumption of Mary the patronal feast of Aotearoa, and a holy day of obligation.

BINDING FORCE OF MARIAN DOGMAS

The binding force of these Marian dogmas, none of them with any scriptural mandate, can be problematic for some Catholics today and here American theologian Richard McBrien (1936-2015) is helpful.

McBrien, following the *Decree on Ecumenism* (par 11), writes of a hierarchy of truths and argues that no one could reasonably hold that “the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption are so central to Christian faith that the faith itself would disintegrate without either or both. Such would be the case, on the other hand, if one were to deny the divinity of Jesus Christ or the redemptive value of his life,

death, and resurrection” (McBrien, *Catholicism*, 1980, 887-888).

Those Catholics who look to the Gospels, particularly Luke's Gospel, to understand and appreciate better Mary's role in God's salvific plan, may find McBrien's insights more helpful in their lives as disciples than messages via Mary from Lourdes, Fatima or Medjugorje. Before looking at two gospel texts, something else needs to be remembered about Pius XII's teaching about the Assumption of Mary.

HORROR OF WWII DEATH TOLL

First, this feast that celebrates Mary's glorified body, points to the transformation of our bodies because of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Second, World War II was still fresh in the minds of many in 1950. Who could not forget the tens of millions of men, women and children exterminated in concentration and prisoner of war camps, the hundreds of thousands exterminated in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the millions of military personnel who lost their lives, and the millions of civilians killed whether in Luftwaffe bombings in England or later Allied bombings in Hamburg or Dresden?

It is estimated that some 85,000,000 died altogether and, in many instances, the dead bodies were never honoured in any way. Perhaps Pius XII was thinking of these many desecrated bodies when instituting this feast which honoured and celebrated the human body after death.

MARY'S DISCIPLESHIP IN SCRIPTURE

The New Testament tells us nothing about the Assumption of Mary but Luke's readings for both the vigil and feast of the Assumption warrant attention as they focus on Mary's humanity. The vigil reading highlights Mary's maternity when

one of the crowd acclaims the womb that bore Jesus and the breasts that nurtured him. Jesus complements this anonymous acclamation by affirming that those who hear the word of God and observe it are even more blessed. In Mary the seed that was planted surely bears fruit a hundredfold (see Luke 11:27-28).

In the reading for the feast of the Assumption, soon after Mary learns that she is to conceive and bear a child, she leaves Nazareth and makes her way to Judea to be with her older cousin, Elizabeth, who is also pregnant. Both these women are key players in God's saving plan. Elizabeth's son, John the Baptist, proclaims that Jesus, son of Mary, has come to bring the good news of the Kingdom of God.

We recall the pregnant and Spirit-filled Elizabeth's greeting to Mary when we pray: “Hail Mary, full of grace, blessed are you among women...” Recognising God's Holy Spirit at work in herself and in her cousin Elizabeth, Mary breaks into song, praising God's actions in their lives. Mary understands well that the God of Israel is a God who will scatter the proud in the conceit of their hearts, bring down the powerful from their thrones, lift up the lonely, fill the hungry with good things and send the rich away empty (see Luke 1.51-53).

When we look at our fractured world today, Mary's song alerts us to what discipleship requires of us — lifting up the lowly and filling the hungry with good things. Pentecost, celebrated some weeks ago, meant that like Mary we, too, have been overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, empowering us to continue the mission of Jesus by our outreach to the poor and marginalised. When this happens, we bring healing to our broken world. ✠

Mary — Mother of Mercy (2015)
by Janet McKenzie © Used with permission
www.janetmckenzie.com
Collection of Carlow University, Pittsburgh, PA USA

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Women **Hope** Against **Hope**

Mary Thorne writes that the questions raised in the working document for the October Synod offer a glimmer of hope for women in the Church.

THERE IS A LONG history of Catholic women's struggle to communicate their perspective to the institutional Church. The Church's unwillingness to listen has led to disillusionment and weariness. Some women have formed new communities in which they worship God and live their faith. Because they take care in the way they image God, use inclusive language and create meaningful liturgies, these communities are nourishing the spiritual hunger of many women and men. So, when Pope Francis convened the whole Catholic Church in Synod, and spoke of "journeying together" and being "a listening Church", many women felt cautious hope that the promise of the Second Vatican Council might come alive again.

Diocesan Stage of Synod

Be the Change Catholic Church Aotearoa, with communities in Auckland, Hamilton and Wellington, was one of the groups which responded to the invitation to participate in the Synod gatherings. Members met face-to-face and on-line over many months to formulate a submission for the first diocesan phase of the synodal journey. They described their vision of a renewed, inclusive Church, keen to work for social and ecological justice in this place at this time.

From the outset, many women were concerned that the strength of community submissions would be diluted in the synthesising processes during the preparation for the Synod in Rome. We were pleased, therefore,

to see that the submission from the Catholic people of Aotearoa New Zealand contained the statement: "This lack of equality for women within the Church is seen as a stumbling block for the Church in the modern world. There is a collective feeling that the institutional Church has failed to recognise the level of alienation of women that has taken place" (*National Synod Synthesis*, NZCBC par 45).

Working Document Published

The synodal journey has continued around the world and the syntheses of submissions have been drawn together at diocesan, national and continental assemblies. The General Secretariat of the Synod, For a Synodal Church: Communion,

Participation, Mission, has used this material and drafted its third document, a working document for the Synod, *Instrumentum Laboris*. Its publication marks the end of the first “listening” phase and it opens the second phase which will be composed of two sessions, the first in October 2023 and the second in October 2024.

Lay People at Synod

This XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will take place in Rome. Pope Francis has extended the membership of the assemblies from exclusively bishops, to include some leaders of women’s and men’s religious congregations and 70 non-bishop members, which will include lay people. The Pope asked that 50 per cent of the non-bishop members be women and that young people be included. This group will have voting rights. Manuel Beazley, Vicar for Māori in the Auckland diocese, and Dennis Nacorda, parish priest in Levin, Wellington Archdiocese, will go from Aotearoa. There is no woman representative in this group from New Zealand.

Instrumentum Laboris Asks Questions

Instrumentum Laboris (IL) is designed as a practical aid for the conduct of the first Synodal Assembly in October. It contains insights, tensions and priorities that have emerged from listening to the People of God and, skilfully, expresses them as questions addressed to the assembly.

IL at 63 pages begins by reflecting on what the synodal journey to date reveals about synodality as an identity and mode of being Church. It identifies characteristic signs and describes “conversation in the Spirit” as a way to draw closer to one another and discern what action is to be taken as the Church moves into the future. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can move from “cacophony to symphony”.

It is encouraging for those who long for renewal in the Church. It recognises that a synodal Church must be humble and penitential. It celebrates the catholicity of the combined response and sees

“the synodal dynamic as a way to appreciate and enhance this rich diversity without flattening it into uniformity”.

Significantly, IL is not the first draft of a final document. Rather it presents the distillation of the worldwide conversation as questions and “an opportunity to walk together as a Church capable of welcoming and accompanying, accepting the necessary changes in rules, structures and procedures” (IL par 15).

Prime Questions

The first questions in the document concern care of Earth and care for the most vulnerable in Earth. These are the big questions of our age, encompassing issues like poverty, migration and ending colonisation.

Questions Concerning Women

There is the slightest glimmer of hope for women that IL will open conversations leading to a pathway of genuine equality for them in the Church. But, even though the document says “numerous contributions highlight the need ... to renew the language used by the Church” (par 60), there is no effort in IL to image God differently— God is “Father”, Jesus is “Lord” and the Holy Spirit is “He”. This is discouraging.

The second section is “Co-Responsibility in Mission”. Highlighting that the Holy Spirit is the protagonist of the Synod and the baptismal dignity of the whole People of God, the questions refer to the relationship between ordained and baptismal ministries and eligibility to enter the permanent diaconate.

A further question in this section asks: “How can the Church of our time better fulfil its mission through greater recognition and promotion of the baptismal dignity of women?” (IL, B2.3) It notes: “The Continental Assemblies call for deeper reflection on the ecclesial relational failures,

which are also structural failures affecting the lives of women in the Church.” There is “desire for a greater presence of women in positions of responsibility and governance as crucial elements in the search for more synodal ways to live the Church’s mission.”

Because women have different experiences and perspectives around the world — they are not a homogenous group — we hope there are enough women at the Synod to promote women’s increased participation in the Church.

Hold Fast to a Glimmer of Hope

The long story of God’s people contains challenge, restructuring and renewal. For many women feeling worn out by the Church, a glimmer of hope is better than none.

I can’t help but think of Black, lesbian feminist writer Audre Lorde’s question: “What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy?” She responds: “It means that only the most narrow parameters of change are possible and allowed.”

More than ever women and all those in the Church who resist patriarchy and clericalism, need to hold to the Gospel and our hope that this walking together will bring real reform.

Our Judeo-Christian tradition urges us to prioritise care of the most vulnerable, welcome the stranger and live gently in Earth. We, women and men, must commit our energy to this work. And we want to trust that the Holy Spirit, spurring on prophetic voices, will rattle the ecclesiology of the Church enough for women to have full participation in our time. ✦

READ: *Be the Change* submission:
bethethechangecatholicchurchaotearoa.wordpress.com

In and Out of Time by Odelle Morshuis © Used with permission www.odelle.com @odellemorshuis

Mary Thorne lives on the Manukau Harbour, is a former prison chaplain and is enjoying time with family and her granddaughter.





About Women Deacons

Phyllis Zagano asks if in synod discussion of women's ordination the diaconate is being neglected.

THE SYNOD ON SYNODALITY is exploding ideas all over the Church. Some on the extreme right hope for Tridentine Masses. Some on the far left hope for changes in teachings on sex and gender. Folks in the middle just want more respect for and better recognition of women.

To no one's surprise, the working document for the synod's Continental Phase recognised women as the backbone of the Church. It also noted that many women feel denigrated, neglected and misunderstood, symptomatic of narcissistic clericalism infecting clergy.

Many national synod reports sent to the Vatican from bishops' conferences around the globe presented the desire for women to be present in church governance, certified as preachers and in the diaconate.

Pope Francis's comments last year about women are not helpful. Yes, on the aircraft returning from Bahrain in early November, he decried treating women as "second-class citizens". But in a 24 November speech before the International Theological Commission (27 men, five women) Francis took aim at dissident Old Catholic

Churches that ordain women — he did not distinguish whether as priests or as deacons — while at the same time saying he would like to increase the number of women on that very commission.

Petrine and Marian Principles

Speaking with *America*, the Jesuit magazine, a few days later, Francis used the theology of Swiss priest Hans Urs von Balthasar to seemingly cancel the idea of women in ministry, while approving of women in management.

Von Balthasar, a close associate



of Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), presented two principles that put women in their place: the "Petrine principle" which defines ministry as masculine, and the "Marian principle" which defines the Church as female.

As Francis told *America's* interviewers: "And why can a woman not enter ordained ministry? It is because the Petrine principle has no place for that. Yes, one has to be in the Marian principle, which is more important. Woman is more, she looks more like the Church which is mother and spouse. I believe that we have too often failed in our catechesis when explaining these things."

Management for Women?

Toward the end of his comments on women, he recommended a "third way": Increase the number of

women in administrative positions, in management.

So that is that. Management, but not ministry.

Except.

The Petrine theory is the root of the so-called argument from authority against women priests: Jesus chose male apostles, and the Church is bound by his choice. Only priests can have governance and jurisdiction; they are ordained *in persona Christi capitis ecclesiae* — in the person of Christ the head of the Church. That rules out women in positions of genuine authority.

Church is dangerously close to losing more members when it states ... women are not made in the image of God.

Women Should Be Deacons

The surprise in the Marian theory is that older documents say the diaconate is and acts "in the name of the Church." So, if the Church is female, then ordained deacons should mirror that fact.

To complicate matters, the priesthood came about some two centuries after the diaconate. History records ordained women deacons up through the 12th century, with bishops ordaining women as deacons using liturgies often identical to those for male deacons. The bishops invoked the confirmation of the Holy Spirit and placed a stole around the ordained women's necks. Most importantly, the bishops called these ordained women deacons.

Diaconal Ordination a Sacrament

For too long, theologians battled over whether diaconal ordination was a sacrament, but that was apparently first resolved at the 16th-century Council of Trent. So, women were sacramentally ordained as deacons. It will not take a third Vatican Council to reaffirm that.

Or will it? Lately, the question

of ordination for women seems restricted to the growing requests for women priests. Even Francis uses that shorthand. But the tradition of ordaining women as deacons could easily be restored. Benedict XVI even changed canon law in 2009 to emphasise the fact that the diaconate is not the priesthood.

So, which is it? The Document for the Continental Stage seemed to indicate the tide turning against women in ministry. Did the working document's call for "a diaconate of women" mean ordained women deacons, or something else? If it

means something else, why? Is it because the deacon is ordained to act and to be "in the person of Christ, the servant?"

No doubt, the theological hair-splitting is lost on the people of God. But the Church is dangerously close to losing even more members when it states — or seems to state — that women cannot image Christ — that is, that women are not made in the image and likeness of God.

Now, the *Instrumentum Laboris* or working document for the October Synod notes "Most of the Continental Assemblies and the syntheses of several Episcopal Conferences call for the question of women's inclusion in the diaconate to be considered." The working document then asks: "Is it possible to envisage this, and in what way?"

Ordination? Or something else? Time will tell, but it may be too late.✎

A version of this essay appeared in the *Religion News Service*, 14 December 2022.

Procession of Women Saints Detail of mosaic in the Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna
Photo by Lawrence OP

Phyllis Zagano holds a research appointment at Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York. Her most recent book is *Just Church: Catholic Social Teaching, Synodality, and Women* (Paulist, 2023).





HEALING A BROKEN CHURCH

Robert Mickens writes that Pope Francis has invited both supporters and critics to the Synod in his efforts to reform and re-energise the Church's sense of communion, participation and mission.

WHAT DO CARDINAL Gerhard Müller and the Reverend James Martin SJ have in common? They are both members of the Catholic clergy who tend to be polarising figures in the Church.

The first is a hero of traditionalists, while the second is a champion of those who want reform. And now the German cardinal and the American Jesuit are both voting members of the upcoming meeting of the Synod — by direct appointment of Pope Francis.

The Synod's secretariat in June published the full list (naturally, only in Italian) of those who will be participating in the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which will take place between October 4-29 at the Vatican.

And while most of the prelates who are listed have either been elected by national or regional episcopal conferences, or (as in the case of the heads of Roman Curia departments) will be participating in an ex officio capacity, the pope has hand-picked more than 50 others.

He's selected 10 people from 20 candidates — among laity and clergy — that were proposed by the bishops of each continent (the Synod lists seven). The 70 people the pope chose all participated in the continental synodal gatherings that were held several months ago.

Striking a Balance

What's interesting about "*Bergoglio's List*" — to borrow the title of a book

that came out in 2013 and sought to tell "the untold story" of "how a young Francis defied a dictatorship and saved dozens of lives" during his native Argentina's so-called "dirty war" — is that our now much older Francis is trying to use the synodal process, in defiance of widespread cynicism and indifference, to save the Church from internal polarisation.

It's a high-wire act, to be sure. And his decision to invite both Müller and Martin shows that he's well aware that Catholics of all points of view must be part of the synodal process, his audacious project to reform and re-energise the Church's sense of communion, participation and mission.

Most people have focused on the people Francis has chosen to be at next October's assembly (and likely at the one in 2024), some complaining that he's actually stacked the deck in favour of reformers and has invited only a handful of folk like Cardinal Müller who have been critics of this pontificate and/or the synodal process.

Actually, the pope has done an impressive job of trying to strike a balance. He has answered episcopal conferences (like the one in the United States) that elected delegates who have been hostile or lukewarm towards his pontificate by personally appointing delegates from those same regions who are his supporters.

On the other hand, Francis has appointed more "traditional" participants to the Synod assembly from places like Germany where the so-called "progressives" were elected by the bishops' conference.

Who Can Preside at a Synod Assembly?

Francis has also introduced another complete novelty to the Synod's structure, which has largely gone unnoticed or has been dismissed as something of little significance. And that has to do with who presides over the Synod meetings.

The Bishop of Rome is the president of the Synod of Bishops, but he usually appoints three cardinals to serve as "presidents delegate" during the general assemblies.

Why cardinals? Evidently, because they are the men on the highest rung of the hierarchy. Only cardinals can elect the pope and the one who gets elected is almost always a cardinal. So, naturally, popes choose cardinals as their legates and, in the case of the Synod, their stand-ins to run the working sessions. That's the way it has been since Paul VI instituted this modern day version of the Synod of the Roman Church and held its first assembly in 1967.

Presidents of 2023 Synod

But Pope Francis has now shattered that 56-year-long custom and has appointed nine presidents delegate — and only one of them wears the red

hat, Cardinal Carlos Aguiar of Mexico City.

Among the other eight is an Eastern Church patriarch from Egypt, three other bishops (from Ecuador, Australia and the United States), an Italian priest, a religious sister from Mexico and a female lay missionary from Japan.

The message here is that any member of the People of God (both ordained and non-ordained) can preside over the Synod assembly as the pope's delegate.

This is a radical step forward that most people seem to have missed.

FRANCIS HAS MADE AN IMPORTANT STATEMENT BY ALLOWING MEMBERS OF THE LAY FAITHFUL TO PRESIDE AT THE SYNODAL PROCEEDINGS.



Perhaps that is because the duties of a president delegate have been viewed as merely ceremonial. But ceremony and symbol in the Church almost always signifies a deeper or greater reality.

Francis's innovation in this regard should not be passed over quickly. He's made an important statement by allowing members of the lay faithful to preside at the synodal proceedings.

We've Only Just Begun

Certainly, there is more to be said about the list of participants the pope has put together for the October gathering.

There are 364 members with the right to vote, including 52 women — only two fewer than the number of cardinals who will be participating.

There are also a number of young people who are voting members, some of them still doing undergraduate studies in university.

Francis's inclusion of Cardinal Müller is extremely significant, given that the pope did not renew the German theologian as the head of the then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2017, but left him — at only 69 years of age — without a job.

But Müller, who has been quite critical of the revamped synodal procedures, is not the only former doctrinal chief — or "retired" head of a Vatican office — that the pope has called to the upcoming Synod assembly.

Cardinal Luis Ladaria SJ, who succeeded Müller and retires in September, will also be a voting member.

Francis has also made Cardinal Marc Ouellet a member of the October assembly. The French Canadian, who served 13 years as head of the Dicastery for Bishops, is a disciple of the theology of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI. And the list, as they say, goes on...

But the synodal process, to be perfectly honest, has only just begun. And no one can be sure where it will lead, especially with the hundreds of participants who will be bringing different experiences, passions, hopes, fears and expectations to this first of the two gatherings.

By launching the Church on this unclear journey, Francis — who will be 87 in December — has either created a process that will lead to the Church's rejuvenation or he has opened a Pandora's box that will only hasten its implosion.

We'll have a better idea of which it is at the end of October. ✎

Read more: www.tinyurl.com/ws8628ke

Robert Mickens is Editor in Chief of *La Croix International*. He has lived in Rome for 30 years and regularly comments on CNN, the BBC and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. He writes the "Letter From Rome" for the London *Tablet*.



EACH PERSON HAS HUMAN DIGNITY



Michelle Egan-Bitran writes that for the Church to recover from its history of abuse we must demonstrate respect and love for each person in every aspect of church life.

"EVERYONE IS BORN with mana. Everyone is sacred. No one was created to be abused. No one." We want everyone to believe this statement because it is a fundamental principle of a well-functioning community. It is a foundation for justice and inclusion. But we have found that violence and abuse, including child abuse, occurs not only in society but in our Christian congregations, and both victims and perpetrators of violence are often members of the same congregation.

Abuse and violence distort and destroy relationships. In church communities they go against everything that the Gospels show us about God's heart of love, compassion and grace towards us. They undermine opportunities for communion and peace.

The Catholic Social Teaching principle of the promotion of peace

— te whakatairanga i te rangimārie — views community peace as the fruit of justice and love. Respect for human life is a fundamental requirement for just interpersonal and community relationships. So safeguarding the dignity and freedom of everyone in a community, including church communities, is essential.

Abuse Has No Place in Church

Religious institutions and congregations are in powerful positions of moral authority — they speak of God. Their teachings, developed over time in texts, traditions, doctrines and practices, as well as the roles within the institutions, have the potential to protect and nurture the spiritual well-being of everyone in the community. They could provide direct support, guidance and instruction and encourage discussion of issues arising in Church and society.

It's in Scripture we find that Jesus challenged the misuse and abuse of power and challenged that behaviour in religious authorities. He walked alongside those who had been oppressed, showing them God's unconditional love. He attended to and healed those wounded by harsh and unjust treatment.

In a 1995 statement on restorative justice processes, the New Zealand Catholic Bishops reminded the Church of our responsibility in society: "We are called to act responsibly and peacefully towards our neighbour. Violence of any form towards another is a denial of the teachings of Christ, and an affront to the dignity of people."

By seeing it as our responsibility in community, we can help stop abuse — we all have a part to play. To do this we need to recognise and name the abuse and stand up for and in solidarity with those who are

being abused. We need to challenge structural inequalities. We need to share understandings of what constitutes healthy relationships, what contributes to equality in relationships and inculcate attitudes and behaviours that uphold human dignity. And we need to provide spiritual and emotional support and practical guidance.

However, some religious institutional, congregational, and pastoral responses enabled perpetrators to continue abusing.

Facing the Reality

Survivors' accounts to the New Zealand Abuse in Care Royal Commission of Inquiry highlight a misuse of power, an abuse of trust and a blatant disregard of human dignity.

"Often many victims and survivors of such abuse come from the most disadvantaged or marginalised segments of the community. They are the children, young people and vulnerable adults of Māori, Pacific and lower socio-economic families, as well as disabled people, members of the Rainbow community, those struggling with mental distress, as well as women and girls."

Unfortunately, victims and survivors who disclosed abuse or sought help were often not supported, were silenced, and the abuse has been covered up to protect perpetrators or religious institutions. Most victims and survivors did not receive the help they needed.

Impact of Abuse in Faith Settings

The Church's misuse of the spiritual authority to care for God's people is a betrayal of the Spirit of Christ, goes against biblical principles of servant leadership and has a devastating intergenerational impact on individuals, families, communities and the wider society.

The Royal Commission of Inquiry noted how abuse in a religious setting negatively affects the intertwining of spirituality with the person's identity and worldview.

"Many of the survivors we heard from told us that they had been sexually abused. Victims of religious



abuse may believe that any form of sexual expression, whether thought, word, or deed, is sinful. This leads to moral confusion when a religious figure leads the survivor into a forbidden sexual act. The survivor may experience shock, confusion, guilt and shame. People in some faiths are taught that homosexuality is unnatural, and that homosexual people are 'fundamentally disordered'. If the abuser is the same sex as the victim, this is likely to lead to further distress and harm."

"An abuser's perceived closeness to God intensifies the emotional, psychological and spiritual impacts of the abuse, and can make disclosure extremely challenging ... Some survivors were left feeling responsible for the spiritual downfall of their abusers."

"Survivors who experience religious or spiritual abuse can have a shaken sense or complete loss of faith and spirituality — things that are sometimes central to the survivor's sense of identity prior to the abuse. They may stop participating in religious observances and practices all together. This can contribute to an intense sense of loss of the spiritual dimension of identity, which previously provided a source of strength, support and meaning."

Victims may often feel ashamed and isolated. They may suffer silently, hoping and praying that somehow God will intervene, stop the abuse and help them heal.

Silence is not the answer. And it is not the responsibility of the ones abused to continually break the silence. The Church is responsible for respecting the human dignity of each person, for doing justice and for redress — so that there is a possibility of healing.

Need a Deeper Look at Safeguarding

Beginning in 2017 the New Zealand Catholic National Office for Professional Standards has developed a suite of national safeguarding policies, documents and guidelines to prevent and address violence and abuse. Diocesan safeguarding officers have been appointed to oversee this work within each diocese.

In my doctoral research I found that there is a great need for training, supervision and a more inclusive, courageous and consistent leadership and governance to drive the development of a safeguarding culture within Churches and congregations.

At present, while structures, policies, procedures and resources may be in place, there are significant issues within the Catholic institutional culture and practices that are creating barriers against this work — in fact, they can perpetuate abuse. These include clericalism, the inadequate formation of clergy and Church workers, a lack of transparency in processes, lack of accountability and an attitude of protecting the institution more than the human dignity of each person.

If the Church is to show love for each person as God loves each person, justice, redress and informed practice is needed. ✦

Sculptures (L-R): *My Miracle*, *Parent/Caregiver/Caretaker*, *Lets, My Child our World* by Robin Ranga © Used with permission www.robinranga.nz

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Safeguarding *People* before Institutions

Christopher Longhurst *discusses why the Church can be safe only if all the members are safe.*

IN THE REVOLVING OF society's wheel there is a natural relationship between people and institutions. When it comes to safeguarding, there is a tension in that wheel. Where must the focus lie in order for safeguarding to be real and effective?

Journalist Allen Faulton's blog *The Modern Survival Guide #86* explains how institutions give meaning to our lives. Many people dedicate their entire life to preserving them. They are the products of our values, convictions, viewpoints and behaviours which converge for a common purpose.

Institutions are usually guided by set policies and procedures. They have management processes to ensure that what is set in policy is practiced and, if not, that corrective actions are taken.

Institutions are comprised of people, though they are not persons. However, without people they would obviously not exist. Therefore, the interplay between individuals and institutions in the wheel of society is complex.

Here's the tricky part: Institutions do not exist in a vacuum. People create institutions that produce a culture that creates the kind of people who preserve or potentially harm the institution.

Given this wheel, the question as to where the focus must lie in order for safeguarding to be real and effective is a vital one. I believe the answer lies in the issue of primacy. Given that institutions do not come first, but are non-sentient and inanimate entities constructed to serve a purpose, primacy must

be given to people. After all, it is people who are capable of creating and changing institutions, and even destroying them.

Key, therefore, is the wellbeing of the institution's members. When this is compromised, as once abuse of the members occurs, then the correct process must be to own up to it, hold those responsible to account, and set up measures to not only reduce the risk of abuse happening again, but change the structures and culture that caused the abuse in the first place.

However, when management's response to abuse is to downplay or minimise or deny and coverup the abuse, then deception is occurring. Institutions that fail in this regard eventually get found out. Then trust in them is seriously eroded. The institution itself is harmed and,

consequently, all members are at risk.

To protect the institution, its leaders must always ensure the wellbeing of their members is at the forefront of any safeguarding response. An institution cannot be safe when its members are unsafe. Nor can there be safe people in an institution that is unsafe. Therefore, placing the good of the institution before its people does not make sense.

A Safe Church

As institutions, Churches can only be safe to the extent that their members are safe — when systems, laws and practices produce a culture that fosters the care and wellbeing of their members.

A safe Church would identify the systems and culture that allowed abuse to occur, such as harmful laws and teachings, and work towards making the necessary changes.

A safe Church is one whose members speak out against abuse, report offenders and work to provide justice and healing for its survivors of abuse.

A safe Church would teach about what types of protections are right and wrong, correcting persons who speak and act in ways that put members at risk. For example, telling a victim that her disclosure of abuse risks bringing the Church into disrepute would be an unsafe practice.

Also, placing the cause of abuse in persons alone would be unsafe as this would amount to institutional unaccountability. While it is not wrong to say that abusers are to blame, such a claim is incomplete to the extent that people create the systems and, to borrow the name of a documentary on clerical abuse, participate in “Manufacturing the Clerical Predator”.

What Makes the Church Unsafe?

Focusing on safeguarding the institution, and not its people, creates an unsafe Church because you cannot have a safe institution when the people in it are not safe because of it.

A lack of safety results from such things as not acknowledging

wrongdoing in actual cases of abuse when victims come forward to report what happened to them. This creates an unsafe Church because when there is no admission of wrongdoing, then there is no justice, and when there is no justice, then no one is safe.

Consequently, it is an unsafe practice for church leaders to publicly apologise for abuse while denying cases of abuse behind closed doors. Such denial of actual wrongdoing not only brings the institution into further disrepute, but it also keeps the people unsafe.

An unsafe Church is one whose leaders ignore their own safeguarding standards. Claiming a zero tolerance for abuse while not enacting safeguarding procedures when

A safe Church is not one that provides justice and healing but rather one that does not abuse.

complaints are filed, not only makes the Church unsafe, but it also makes its leaders hypocrites. You cannot have a safe Church in theory and not in practice.

It is also unsafe for church leaders to publicly acknowledge that their systems and culture allowed abuse to occur and that they must change, but then not make the necessary changes. Such failure keeps the institution unsafe and thereby places its members at risk of further harm, irrespective of all talk of safe practice.

Also, a Church whose members shield abusers, or remain silent in the face of abuse, or refuse to report abuse, create an unsafe institution for themselves.

Further, an unsafe Church is one whose leaders cannot receive criticism or become defensive when questions are raised. Faith-based communities in which criticism and questions are treated as threatening are not safe environments for anyone.

Understanding Safeguarding

Safeguarding people must be at the forefront of every faith-based institutional response to abuse because the good of the institution is realised only in the wellbeing of its members. In other words, when the people are safe, then the institution is automatically a safe place for them.

There can be no real safeguarding when the response to abuse is one of institutional preservation without regard for the fundamental care of each member. Therefore, safeguarding the institution and not its people is meaningless.

Fundamental to a safe Church is the absence of abuse. A safe church is not one that provides justice and healing but rather one that does not abuse.

Nevertheless, the provision for justice is vital. When church leaders do not acknowledge actual wrongdoing in cases of abuse, and fail to provide real justice to their survivors, then they keep an unsafe Church.

A Church whose members do not hold their leadership to account also keep an unsafe Church.

However, until the institutional processes that caused abuse and enabled abusers and those who covered for them are addressed and reformed, then church members can never be safe. ✦

IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW NEEDS SUPPORT:

Call or Text: 0223440496

Email: aotearoa-newzealand@snapnetwork.org

Web: www.snapnetwork.org

Christ Blessing the Children by Lucas Cranach the Younger Wikimedia Commons

Christopher Longhurst is a Catholic theologian and founder of SNAP Aotearoa New Zealand, a peer-support network for women, men and non-binary persons and their whānau, who are victims and survivors of clergy, religious and faith-based institutional abuse.



Tangihanga

Through the mists
below sacred Whakatere
the karanga carries our grieving
from maunga to trodden valley

With reverence
With the surety of eternal life, muffled feet
and bowed head we rise in prayer towards Otatara
the beating heart

From outside the wharenui
sounds of mokopuna calling to each other
making patterns in the dust
on parked cars

While manuhiri watch
shielding from the sun
joining snatches of waiata
from where they sit and wait



To Waima — when waiting is done
place your feet on the whenua
wash yourself clean in the awa
breathe in your place, be as one

As above, is here below

Greg McNeill ©



Image by TL on unsplash.com

Focus on the End of War

Kevin Clements writes that the world needs to focus on bringing the mortal combat between Ukraine and Russia to a negotiated end.



"AT LEAST SIX PEOPLE were killed after a Russian missile slammed into a residential building in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv, far from the front line of the war. The youngest was 21 years old and the oldest was a 95-year-old woman, according to Lviv province governor Maksym Kozytskyi. Lviv's mayor, Andriy Sadovyi, called the attack the biggest of the war on civilian areas of Lviv since Russian troops invaded Ukraine last year."

It's a symptom of how this war has dragged on that, by and large, we are numb to such atrocious news. Six people, like all the other casualties of war had names, identities and relationships.

Grief and Senselessness of War

The term "collateral damage" glosses over and fails to capture the immense tragedy of each one of these deaths.

It is extremely difficult to get precise and accurate civilian and military casualty figures, as both sides inflate the casualties of their opponents and underestimate their own. Even at a gross underestimate, however, 29,000 deaths and millions forced to flee Ukraine, are a major affront to humanity and a calamity for Ukraine. On the other side, Russia has lost 74,000 men and is dealing with 243,000 wounded. They too have names, families, hopes, fears and dashed aspirations.

Practice Human Solidarity

Because we have difficulty understanding what all these deaths and casualties mean for ourselves and for the loved ones of those who are grieving, we are left with the statistics, which keep growing as the war drags on. So one of the first

tasks of rediscovering our humanity in the middle of such inhumanity is to do what we can to personalise the statistics, so that we can share the grief of others — even at a distance — and work to minimise suffering, provide shelter and humanitarian assistance as an act of human solidarity.

Ensure War is Fought Fairly

Since the war looks as though it is continuing, the second thing we must do is make sure that it is being fought fairly. The Red Cross and others interested in International Humanitarian Law have provided clear guidelines for the conduct of the war on both sides.

International Humanitarian Law

The main purpose of International

Humanitarian law is to maintain some humanity in armed conflict, by focusing on saving lives and reducing suffering. This means that those of us in more privileged positions must ensure that the different wars around the world are being fought fairly, with clear distinctions between combatants and civilians and with all parties treated with a semblance of dignity.

Prisoners of war are to be protected and treated with respect. To enable this accountability there are representatives of the international community in NGOs and in the Red Cross, documenting war crimes on all sides as they occur.

It also means that the weapons being used are proportional to the task of national defence in the face of international aggression. Thus, nuclear threat has no place in this war, the bombing of dams and the flooding of towns and villages has no place in this war, the random launching of missiles against civilian targets has no place in this or any war.

Cluster Bombs Kill Indiscriminately

The decision by the United States to provide Ukraine with more cluster munitions also has no place in this war. Both Russian and Ukrainian forces have already used cluster bombs in the war. These bombs break apart in the air and release large numbers of smaller bomblets across a wide area. The bomblets are designed to detonate on hitting the ground, but do not always explode, posing a risk to civilians for years afterwards. The weapons, first used in WWII, were banned by more than 120 nations under the Convention on Cluster Munitions in 2008. Russia, Ukraine and the US all declined to sign this Convention.

These weapons are “inherently indiscriminate” and therefore should not be used in this conflict. Russia’s use of cluster bombs in Ukraine has already resulted in the deaths of scores of civilians. The United Nations Human Rights Council has documented the use of such bombs by Ukraine as well.

The Council has warned that the

use of cluster munitions in areas with civilians is indiscriminate and in violation of international humanitarian law, and possibly even a war crime.

What Can We Do?

So when we are asked what can we can do about a bloody war on the other side of the world, even though it seems a bit oxymoronic, we can ask that the killing be in accordance with international humanitarian law and protest when it is not.

Focus on End of War

Third, we need to be directing the best minds in Russia, Ukraine and the rest of the world to thinking about the end game of this conflict. Simply expanding the numbers of weapons on both sides is not going to generate ripe conditions for peace.

The forthcoming NATO summit, for example, should be directing as much attention to the war’s end as it does to NATO military solidarity with Ukraine. Volodymyr Zelensky asked his Czech counterpart recently for a “clear signal” that NATO would extend an invitation to Ukraine to join the alliance. Such calls need to be resisted by the summit, as NATO expansion was one of the precipitants of the war.

On the other hand a group of former senior US national security officials have held secret talks with a number of prominent Russians, including foreign minister Sergei Lavrov, aimed at laying the groundwork for potential negotiations to end the war in Ukraine. These sorts of informal initiatives need to be encouraged.

Three Possible Outcomes of War

There are three possible outcomes for this war. The first is a Russian victory. Despite its military power this seems an unlikely prospect because of internal tensions and divisions within Russia. The fault lines were

made clear by Yevgeny Prigozhin, the maverick head of the Wagner mercenary group. It is also apparent that many Russian combatants fail to see the point of the Russian invasion and their morale is low.

The second is a Ukrainian victory, which seems equally unlikely. The current counter offensive, for example, has stalled and is being delayed by millions of mines and military traps along the front lines. It also seems likely that NATO backing for Ukraine at existing levels will not be sustained on a permanent basis.

The third is a war of attrition, with neither side winning, more or less along the lines of WWI. This seems the most likely prospect and will eventually result in a mutually hurting stalemate with both sides forced to the negotiating table to discuss a ceasefire and a negotiated peace settlement.

This will involve a compromise solution which will not satisfy the hawks on either side but will generate some time to rethink Ukrainian Russian relations into the future and hopefully secure borders for both parties in the short term.

Those of us worried about the prolongation of this bloody mess need to be identifying doves and amenable hawks on both sides in order to prepare for negotiations that will generate some stable peace in the region. But we should also be linking with and supporting progressive Ukrainian political leaders, opinion shapers, academics and others about what sort of state will have the capacity to guarantee Ukrainian independence, democracy, security and reconstruction. A viable vision for the political future of Ukraine is a precondition for successful peace negotiations. ♦

The Two Thousand Yard Stare (1944)
by Thomas Lea The Army Art Collection
US Army Center for Military History

Kevin P Clements is the Director of the Toda Peace Institute and Emeritus Professor, National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, Otago University.





It's Time to Speak Up

Antony Loewenstein talked to **Ann Hassan** about Israel's systematic oppression of Palestinians.

"WE HEAR SO MUCH in the Western media about Muslim extremism and sometimes Christian extremism, but we don't often hear about Jewish extremism. People feel uncomfortable or awkward or nervous talking about it and to some extent I understand that, because of the history of the Jewish people in the 20th century. But I think we need to call it what it is: a strain of Jewish supremacism and extremism which does not believe in the right of any non-Jews to live in that land. And that to me is something that's very disturbing.

"We should not be nervous to be critical of a self-described Jewish state if it's oppressive against non-Jews. Israel is proudly Jewish and proudly discriminates against non-Jews, and it is incumbent on us to call that out. I'm equally opposed to a

Muslim majority state that oppresses non-Muslims, or a Christian majority state that oppresses non-Christians, or a Hindu majority state that oppresses non-Hindus.

"Israel would definitely describe the conflict as self-defence, but I wonder how you defend a Jewish pogrom. A key part of Zionism and the main ideology underpinning the establishment of Israel in 1948 was this idea that there needed to be as few Arabs as possible. In 1967 [after the Six-Day War] that was accelerated with the birth of the settler movement [Israeli communities built on lands occupied by Israel since 1967]. Now here we are, 56 years later — you now have 750,000 Jewish settlers, all there illegally, both in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem. Can you imagine someone saying in America:

'There's too many black babies'? But that's literally what is happening: the Israeli government is saying there are too many Arab babies. Now, as someone who is Jewish myself, I think Jews have the right to live peacefully, undeniably so, but not at the expense of other people.

"It's interesting that a lot of settler colonial states have a lot of empathy and support for Israel — I don't think that's accidental. I'm talking about Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the US: key allies of Israel. It's not accidental — international support for Israel doesn't simply go along colonial lines, but it's definitely a part of it."

An Oppressed People

"There's no doubt that historically Jews have been an oppressed people. There's no doubt that many Jews feel [because of the Holocaust] a sense of

not victimhood but grievance, that we as Jews have the right almost to do what we want and settle the land. I do think there is clearly a psychological issue here where too many Jewish people, in my view (although I think it's changing), are unwilling or unable to see Palestinians as human beings and as equals.

"I see Israel as it's currently constituted as a threat. Palestinians in the Gaza are an occupied people who live in the world's largest open-air prison, and Palestinians have no real safety anywhere they live. But Israel is also a threat to Jews. The growing extremism within Israel towards Palestinians is increasing antisemitism around the world. There's no doubt about that for me. And that's a threat to Jews in any civilised society, including here in New Zealand.

"I think there needs to be a really clear distinction between anti-Zionism and antisemitism. An antisemite is someone who hates Jews. An anti-Zionist — and I call myself an anti-Zionist — is someone who does not believe in the concept of a Jewish state. Over the years there's been a deliberate campaign to say there is no difference between the two — to say that if you're an anti-Zionist you're an antisemite. But growing numbers of Jews are fighting that and saying: 'I can support the right of Jews to live peaceably but I do not accept my Jewish faith being hijacked by an extreme minority that has somehow become the acceptable form of Judaism.' The legacy of the Jewish people, 75 years or so after the Holocaust, is a people that proudly occupies and oppresses Palestinians. It's the most shameful legacy imaginable and so I think people need to stand up and say: 'The Jewish legacy cannot be pogroms, the Jewish legacy cannot be abusing and occupying Palestinians.'

"There's still a lot of shaming that goes on within the Jewish community — that somehow your duty as a Jew is to either be silent or support Israel uncritically. But that's breaking down now. So many Jews are seeing what Israel is doing in our name. Israel claims to speak for all of us: [Israeli prime minister] Netanyahu regularly

speaks about being the head of the Jewish world — it's an absurd title that, of course, I reject entirely, but Israel claims to speak for all Jews. Many Jews now are trying to build a much more critical Jewish identity which is not solely tied to Israel.

"Israel didn't exist 75 years ago — the idea that Judaism has to exist solely through Israel is absurd. It makes no sense historically, and as someone who speaks out critically I want to encourage not just Jews but others to not be silenced by this

The legacy of the Jewish people, 75 years or so after the Holocaust, is a people that proudly occupies and oppresses Palestinians. It's the most shameful legacy imaginable.

threat of antisemitism, which is a weapon used against critics of Israel.

Antisemitism is real and it worries me deeply, but the idea that one can't criticise Israeli occupation or Israeli pogroms or fascism or supremacism without being accused of antisemitism is ridiculous."

What Can We Do?

"Change ultimately will not come from within. On the current trajectory, if there's no international pressure, if there's no shift, Israel will be an increasingly Jewish supremacist state. We are moving towards a situation where you have Israeli government ministers today openly talking about

the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, openly saying things like 'we need to finish what we didn't finish in 1948' — namely, kicking Palestinians out.

"That's a global threat, and I think the global community, including here in New Zealand, needs to be alive to that. I think unless there's a similar campaign against Israel as there was against South African apartheid, it's probably only going to get worse.

"There needs to be a more open discussion here in New Zealand about New Zealand's role in Israel and Palestine. New Zealand can play a key role if it chooses to. New Zealand could be involved in trying to hold Israel to account in the United Nations. It could call out illegal settlements far more. Senior ministers could visit Palestine and show solidarity with Palestinians.

"New Zealand citizens could be far more aware of what, if any, Israeli products from the settlements are sold here. They could support, and back their politicians to support, the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement.

"What's happening in New Zealand and in other countries is that there's a growing openness to these conversations. I've been writing about Palestine, among other issues, for more than 20 years and I've definitely noticed a growing willingness to have these conversations.

"The response to my book, *The Palestine Laboratory* — the idea that I would be on US mainstream primetime TV talking about these issues — is a sign of a shift. I don't want to exaggerate that shift, but there is a shift." ♦

Image: Ryan Rodrick Beiler/Shutterstock.com

Antony Loewenstein is an Australian-German freelance investigative journalist, author and filmmaker. His latest book is *The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation around the World* (Verso, 2023).



Ann Hassan is the Administrator and Assistant Editor of *Tui Motu* magazine. She has a PhD in English and lives with her sons in Ōtepoti/Dunedin.



Three Strikes Doesn't Work



For law and order to be effective, David More says, policies need to be based on best practice within a society that is working for the common good.

THE OLD FAITHFUL, law and order, will again be an issue at the upcoming general elections. It is one on which there is a clear divide between the Labour and National parties. National accuses Labour of being “soft on crime”, a meaningless expression. They really mean soft on the punishment for crime.

National is promising to bring back the three strikes provisions repealed by Labour in 2022. In this, National is supported by the Act party, who were responsible for the introduction of the three

strikes regime in 2009. National is using principles of retribution. As MP Judith Collins said in the third reading of the Bill introducing the three strikes: “Parole is a privilege that will not be available to those who fail to take heed of warnings and continue to commit serious violent offences. This bill ensures that the rights of victims and their families are put before the rights of offenders who choose to continue to offend in this way.”

Labour is more attuned to principles of rehabilitation.

Three Strikes for Serious Crimes

The three strikes provisions were predominantly, but not exclusively, concerned with serious violence. On a first strike the offender was sentenced as usual.

On the second, if imprisonment was imposed, the offender served the full term of imprisonment without parole. On a third strike, except in the case of murder, the offender was sentenced to the maximum sentence for the crime, again to be served without parole.

Does Not Deter Reoffending

The concept is fundamentally flawed for several reasons. It is based on a widely held but mistaken belief that repeat offenders are deterred by the prospect of a lengthy term of imprisonment if they are caught.

Take an example. A young man received his first strike at the age of 18 when he was convicted of having consensual sex with a 14-year-old girl. (It's a non-violent crime, but still a strike offence). Four years later when drunk with three others, he

robbed another young man of his mobile phone. The last thing on his mind when he committed the robbery was that he would serve his prison sentence without parole if he were caught, which he was. To suggest he was deterred by his first strike warning is ludicrous.

While the statistics vary depending on age, ethnicity and the particular crimes, generally 30 per cent of persons sentenced to imprisonment for the first time will reoffend. It is this 30 per cent who may become subject to the three strikes regime. It is the same 30 per cent who are not deterred at the prospect of further sentences of imprisonment.

There is no evidence that in the 12 years it was in force, the three strikes regime reduced offending, and this is indicated by the number of offenders who received second and third strikes.

Does Not Consider Circumstances

The mandatory prison requirements prohibited sentencing Judges from considering the particular circumstances of the offence, or the personal circumstances of the offender. This led to offenders receiving sentences which were manifestly unjust.

The most egregious example is that of Mr Fitzgerald. The Impact Summary of the Ministry of Justice on the repeal Bill said in respect of his case: "In 2020 in the case of *Fitzgerald v R* the offender's third strike offence was an indecent assault that the original sentencing judge considered to be on the lower end of seriousness and would normally not lead to a jail term."

The Court of Appeal found that the sentence of seven years imprisonment imposed on Fitzgerald "goes well beyond excessive punishment and would in their view shock the conscience of properly informed New Zealanders who were aware of all the relevant circumstances including Mr Fitzgerald's mental disability" and that Fitzgerald "should be receiving care and support in an appropriate

facility, not serving a lengthy term of imprisonment". The Court held it could not disturb the sentence.

The Supreme Court set aside the sentence, holding it was in breach of the Bill of Rights Act.

While their judgment was objectively correct, arguably the Court was refusing to apply the statute, which Courts are not permitted to do.

Prohibition on Parole

A further reason is the prohibition on parole. With the exception of minimum non-parole periods, persons sentenced to more than two years imprisonment are eligible for parole after serving one third of their sentence.

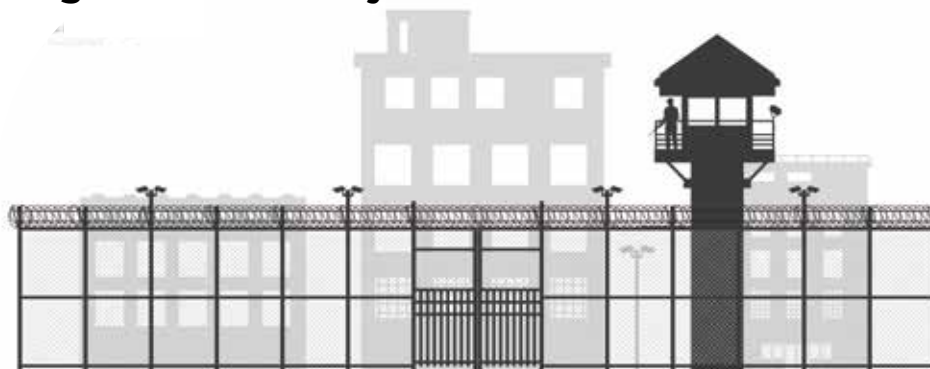
undertake rehabilitative programmes. It limits the ability of the Parole Board to impose realistic conditions on ultimate release, conditions which can only last for six months in any event. It can lead to prisoners offending in prison. It makes it more likely that the prisoner will reoffend on release.

Increases Prison Budget

It currently costs \$151,000 a year to keep a person in prison in New Zealand. The reintroduction of the three strikes regime will unnecessarily increase the total cost of running the prison system.

More importantly, it will have the opposite effect to what is intended,

The three strikes regime is not an effective policy for rehabilitation. We need policies that promote the good of all society.



The importance of this is that prisoners are encouraged to undertake courses while in prison. They are encouraged to turn their lives around so they can be released before their sentence end date.

Prisoners are released on parole when they no longer pose a risk to the community. They can remain on parole for up to six months after their end sentence date.

While on parole they may be recalled to prison if they breach parole conditions or further offend.

The prohibition of parole eligibility removes the incentive to

and will increase, rather than decrease, the likelihood of prisoners subject to the regime of reoffending.

The three strikes regime is not an effective policy for rehabilitation.

We need policies that promote the good of all society and work from Christian principles of justice and mercy.

It is to be hoped that in the event of the election of a National/ Act coalition government on 14 October, they can be persuaded not to implement this policy. ✦

Images by Mehaniq/Shutterstock.com & Shain East/Shutterstock.com

David More has practised law for 53 years, the last 26 as a barrister. He is married to Susan and they attend St Francis Xavier Church, Ōtepoti/Dunedin.





Take Up the Cross and Follow

Kathleen Rushton discusses *Jesus's reminder in Matthew 16:21-28 that discipleship means bearing the cross.*

IN HIS GALILEE ministry, Jesus is interpreter, healer and reconciler on behalf of burdened humanity (Mt 4:12-10:42). Later, he encounters opposition (Mt 11:1-16:12). In Matthew 16:13-20 we see Jesus laying the ground for “my church.”

“My Church” Is an Alternative Society

When Peter proclaims Jesus as the Christ, his is a two-part confession:

“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Mt 16:16). The “Messiah” and the unique relationship which Jesus has with God, are held together. Australian biblical scholar Brendan Byrne says that Jesus is ensuring that ecclesiology (the Church) flows from and rests on a distinctive Christological insight.

The word “church” (*ekklesia* in Mt 16:18; 18:17) was used for the assembly of the people of God (Deut 9:10; Josh 8:35; 1 Kings 8:65). In Greek cities the *ekklesia* was a duly summoned civic and political assembly of citizens along with a council. Its role was to gather, administer and reinforce the status quo of the reign (*basileia*) of Rome. Jesus speaking of “my church”

suggests an alternative community that under God’s guidance, continues the reign of God in their time and place.

Formation of Disciples

A turning point occurs at this part of the Gospel: Jesus is not the Messiah the people were expecting. He moves from Galilee to focus on the formation of disciples who are “my church”. This new direction leads to Jerusalem which is under the control of religious and political elites.

Jesus says: “If anyone wants to be my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mt 16:24). “Followers” means literally “to come after/behind me” — it’s a continuing way of being. Jesus is telling Peter

that to become a follower is to keep learning what discipleship is all about.

Take Up the Cross

"To deny themselves" and "follow" is to "take up the cross." (cf., Mt 10:38). Here, "cross" refers to how Jesus will be killed (Mt 16:21). His death and the way of discipleship are interconnected.

What does it mean for Jesus's followers to "deny themselves"? "To deny" Jesus would be to choose not to follow him, not to "come after/ behind" him, not to be faithful to God's ways (Mt 10:33; 26:34-35, 75). It doesn't mean to be so intimidated by political and religious authorities and their power over life and death, that they renounce their commitment to Jesus and seek self-interest by siding with the authorities. Jesus's followers "deny ourselves" by turning from all that hinders faithfulness in entrusting themselves to God's way. It is this self-denial and trust in God that led Jesus to suffering and death.

Over the centuries Christian religiosity has obscured the radical nature of Jesus's invitation to take up "the cross". In the Roman world crucifixion came with various forms of torture and humiliation, such as making victims carry their crossbeams to the public place of execution, being stripped naked and leaving the bodies for wild beasts and birds of prey.

Thinking about the Cross

Crucifixion is a harsh reality, and so the cross is no easy thing to "take up". German historian Martin Hengel believed that reflecting on the brutal reality of the cross "may help us to overcome the acute loss of reality which is found so often in present theology and preaching."

While we no longer crucify as a punishment (though the death penalty, and torture, are still very much in our world), humans as a species are crucifying peoples and planet Earth economically, socially, politically and environmentally.

We know from examining our own way of living, behaviour and pre-occupations that we do not love all human persons and Earth as completely as God calls us to. Our

ignorance, indifference, preferences and actions are often self-absorbed, and we make excuses for our limitations.

A helpful prayer resource for us might be the *Laudato Si' Movement Prayer Book*. The "Ecological Way of the Cross" in it helps relate the suffering of Christ's Passion to the suffering of Earth and the poor in our own time.

Bearing Our Cross

The price of following Jesus in his alternative community, the church, is to encounter suffering because of our commitment. For some, like Martin Luther King, Oscar Romero and Irene McCormack, it meant the loss of life itself. It is what Paul calls the "folly of

But for the first fifteen centuries Christians did not depict Jesus as suffering on the cross. Their images were more like those found in the 6th-century mosaics in the chapel of St Apollinare in Ravenna: depictions of the risen Christ, or Jesus on a cross adorned with jewels.

Daniel O'Leary wrote *Dancing to My Death* when he was struggling with his cancer diagnosis. He wrestled — as Jesus did — with embracing a future which means pain, suffering and death. But in facing his condition with tough honesty O'Leary was able to understand how his suffering connected him — and all of us — into creation, incarnation and evolution. The Divine Creator became human in Jesus and entered with us into

God desires ... "to live at the heart of our pain, to become in Jesus, the divine/human back to bear and carry our particular crosses."

the cross" (Cor 1:23) — a commitment to that which threatens our own life and yet gives it. We are not all martyrs, but we have our "cross" to bear and a community to support us.

We are called to "denial of self" — to follow Christ and stop the self-centredness of our "false self" from leading us into a competitive and exploitative way of life.

By denying our false selves we enable the interests of our true selves and our commitment to discipleship to flourish.

Death-Resurrection

In the New Testament Jesus's suffering and death-resurrection are always connected. Our contemporary art can lead us to focus only on the suffering Jesus — as if that was the end. Indeed, Jesus on the cross is usually the principal image within our churches.

the love, joy and suffering of God's unfinished, evolving universe.

"Sooner or later life is going to lead us into a place of pain we cannot fix, control, explain or understand," O'Leary wrote. But God desires "to live at the heart of our pain, to become in Jesus, the divine/human back to bear and carry our particular crosses."

This is where transformation happens — of the Church as of individuals — "because only then," O'Leary wrote, "are we finally in the hands of God." ♦

Readings for 27 August and 3 September:
Matthew 16:13-20; 16:21-28

For *Laudato Si' Movement Prayer Book*:
www.mail.laudatosimovement.org/landing/prayerbook

Image: *Representation of the Cross* 6th century Mosaic in Sant'Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna Wikimedia Commons

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





ACT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

WITH MY HANDS IN the soil, I surveyed the destruction. It was a Saturday morning, early winter, and I'd stumbled down to an A Rocha Aotearoa NZ event, to work on a section of creek damaged by the January 2023 Auckland floods. We moved branches that had snarled on the ground, shifted by the force of the floodwaters. I made conversation with the others in the group: some I knew from Church (and one was my grandmother) but most were strangers.

After an hour or two of weeding and branch removing, it was time to plant. I followed instructions, being generally ignorant of the ways of plants. Sedges go right by the edge of the creek. Spread their roots out to bind the soil. Then little trees, further in; delicate as I shook them out of their plastic pottles.

I spotted shreds of litter on the bank: a chocolate bar wrapper, half a plastic cup. It's good, I guess, that some of these single-use plastic items are slowly being banned, with a new wave of regulations begun on 1 July this year, but the millions we've produced already will persist: in landfills, waterways and oceans. A sad thought.

But I'm trying to linger with the trees, or perhaps just the idea of the trees. I spend a lot of time thinking and writing about the environment and climate change in the abstract. I've written three or four articles about plastics and composting and climate change just in the last month. It's so easy to think about the problem, to feel vaguely guilty that my favourite snack (salted seaweed) comes wrapped in four layers of plastic.

I know that this morning of placing my hands in the soil, looking closely at just one place that is changed by all the people living around it, is not a solution by itself. At most I can say — that a deeply broken and twisted relationship to the land has been improved, and for now. But something did change here. There are some plants making their home in the soil, becoming a habitat for the tūī I glimpsed earlier this week. Today,

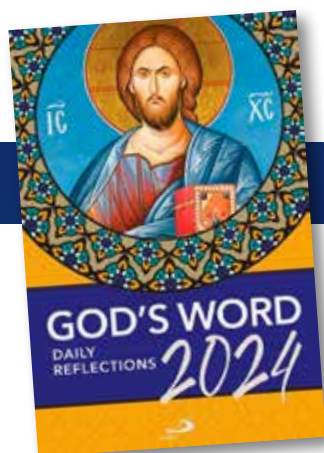
more than yesterday, they sing their mirthful song in the grey winter twilight.

Planting trees is something obvious, something practical, and it makes a nice change from my weekdays before a screen. Like most people, I find the little picture more approachable than the big. When I try to think at scale, I find myself surrendering to my helplessness, to the enormity of the problems we face — even though I know how unhelpful it is to surrender.

So we try not to surrender. We do small things, and we keep at them. It takes eight people a morning to clear just one section of stream bank — one of the many bodies of water that find their way through New Zealand's biggest city — and this morning's planting will continue to need tending. Magnify that by the natural and human disasters on seven continents, for eight billion people. Remember that there is work ahead. Remember that change comes when people do that work together. Plant the tree anyway. ✨

Image by Alexander Denisenko/Shutterstock.com

Shanti Mathias was runner up in the "Junior Feature Writer of the Year" category of the 2023 Voyager Media Awards for her writing in *The Spinoff*.



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Reviews

Sunday Best: How the Church Shaped New Zealand and New Zealand Shaped the Church

By Peter Lineham

Published by Massey University Press, 2017. (NZD 55)

Reviewed by Anna Holmes

Sunday Best is a history of the Christian Churches in New Zealand which discusses how the denominations shaped and were shaped by New Zealand culture. The book also considers the impact of Churches on one another. The detail in each chapter is impressive and covers social, architectural, religious and spiritual aspects of church life. I was surprised by the sensitivity of the first missionaries to Māori connections to land and whānau. I particularly liked the chapter, on the “Gendered Church”, which shows

both the limits placed on women in the Churches and the ways they challenged or defeated these.

The final chapter considers major reductions in religious attendance and belief, both in the early years and since the 1960s, when globalism and materialism impacted the openness of communities to spiritual importance. The shift to the idea that belonging to a Church was a personal choice was a big step. These effects continue with the influence of media.

Sunday Best is a good book for those looking for explanations of how the Churches developed in Aotearoa. It outlines the attempts at unification and the rigid differences between Churches that continue to be part of the journey. ★



Walking Together: The Way of Synodality

By Pope Francis

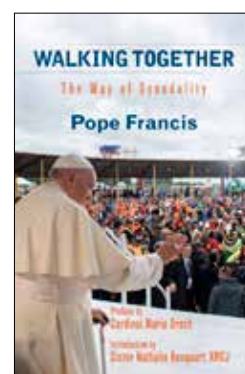
Published by Orbis Books, 2023. (USD 26)

Reviewed by Stuart Henrys

In *Walking Together* Pope Francis calls for a more collaborative and participatory approach to decision-making in the Catholic Church. This compact collection of Pope Francis's reflections, speeches, letters and extracts from encyclicals, reveals a developing theology of synodality — the cornerstone of his pontificate. Francis emphasises the importance of listening to humanity's voices and to cultivating a culture of encounter and dialogue, where different opinions and ideas can be shared and discussed in a spirit of prayer, openness and humility.

I recommend *Walking Together* to our bishops, priests and lay leaders as a reminder that Pope Francis is giving muscle to Vatican II's vision of a more vibrant and inclusive community of faith, where we are all invited to participate and contribute to the life of the Church. The recent synods — Family, Young People and Amazon — have become progressively dynamic, with more robust consultations and an

openness to challenging topics. Pope Francis is providing a roadmap for a synodal Church. Can we finally dare to dream that the enlarged space of our tent embraces and inspires the skills of all the baptised in shaping a different Church? ★



He Pou Hiringa: Grounding Science and Technology in Te Ao Māori

Edited by Maria Amoamo, Merata Kawharu and Katharina Ruckstuhl

Published by Bridget Williams Books, 2021. (NZD 18)

Reviewed by Tui Cadigan

He Pou Hiringa, a small book of just 213 pages articulates a massive kaupapa around the expansion of Māori development and engagement with the worlds of science and technology. While there has never been an exclusion of Māori from these fields of study, there has existed a “norm” of how to engage and an unnamed ownership by Western science.

This work arose out of the government funded National Science Challenge programme — Science for Technological Innovation. The book is a pioneering

attempt to use a Māori lens to look at the language, processes and methodologies that have dominated research and discussions in science and technology. Crucially, it uses Māori concepts and te reo to name and develop the stance that kaupapa Māori and tikanga Māori critical thinking are essential for future development in science and technology — for Māori and for the whole country.

He Pou Hiringa holds a Māori perspective invaluable to the research when respectful cultural engagement happens. It is an important work of research for whānau, hapu and iwi along with anyone who thinks their business is geared to work with and serve tangata whenua in a time of co-governance.

Hei kona. ★



Reviews



The Stranger

Directed by Thomas Wright

Available on Netflix

Reviewed by Paul Sorrell

Frustrated with scrolling through endless titles in search of something that would both entertain and make me think, I took to googling “best thrillers on Netflix.” Up popped *The Stranger* (2022), an Australian psychological thriller based on a true crime case, given a 92 per cent critics’ rating by Rotten Tomatoes.

Thriller it may be, but there are no Hollywood histrionics, manic car chases or serial explosions. The characters and settings are stripped of all glamour as the film traverses grimy suburbs and drab country towns, mainly in Western Australia. Many scenes are shot at night and colours are washed out or shrouded in shadow. The film’s claustrophobic atmosphere, both indoors and out, evokes a sense of entrapment.

Entrapment lies at the heart of the film. The mainspring of the action is a police operation known as a “Mr Big”, whereby officers, posing as a criminal gang, go undercover to ensnare a suspect and elicit a confession. Here the suspect is Henry Teague (Sean Harris), a quiet drifter and petty criminal, who is in the frame for the abduction and murder of a boy in Queensland eight years earlier. For the police involved in the sting, drawn from interstate forces, the elaborate fictional world into which they draw the hapless Henry carries many risks.

While maintaining this ploy drives the tension, at the heart of the film is the developing relationship between Henry and Mark (Joel Edgerton), the undercover officer assigned as his minder. As the pair drive around WA, ostensibly picking up contraband or delivering fake papers, a curious trust develops between them. The scene where Henry puts on a record and dances to Icehouse’s “Trojan Blue” — his attempt to please Mark who has just admitted that music has never been a part of his life — marks a significant stage in their relationship.

But as Mark begins to unravel mentally and spiritually, the noose tightens around Henry as he is summoned to a coronial inquest in Queensland, site of the cold case where he is the prime suspect. It seems that all that is needed for a conviction is a watertight confession that the “gang” can extract under the guise of their oft-repeated demand for Henry’s total honesty and loyalty.

Reality — whatever that may mean in the context of the movie — fades into nightmare as Mark wrestles with his psychic antagonists and a brutal crime is retraced, detail by detail. An absorbing and intelligent film, marked by some understated but masterly performances, *The Stranger* comes highly recommended. ★

Anderton: His Life and Times

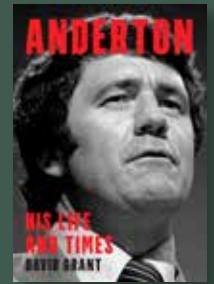
By David Grant

Published by Te

Herenga Waka

University Press, 2022. (NZD 50)

Reviewed by Susan Smith



New Zealand politician Jim Anderton wore many hats — successful business man, president of the Labour Party, much loved MP for Sydenham, prophet who railed against Rogernomics, founder of political parties, promoter of Kiwibank and, towards the end of his political career, highly regarded minister of agriculture.

Unlike some other left-wing political leaders in Aotearoa, Anderton was more influenced by Catholic Social Teaching than by Marxist ideology, and although identified as a communist by right-wing ideologues, he is more properly described as a social democrat.

Grant believes in Anderton but recognises his weaknesses. He admires Anderton’s deep compassion for the poor and marginalised, his organisational skills and his prescient awareness of the damage that Rogernomics would mean and still means for Aotearoa.

But Grant also sees Anderton’s controlling and authoritarian tendencies, at least prior to his rapprochement with Helen Clark in the Fifth Labour Government, when he became a successful and mellowed deputy prime minister.

It is unfortunate that more contemporary politicians are lacking the organisational skills, personal integrity and compassion for the poor and marginalised that were so characteristic of Jim Anderton.

This is a fine biography — a good read whether or not you admired Anderton. The many photos and illustrations help anchor the story in its time. ★



Cross Currents

by Jane Higgins

AS OUR GENERAL ELECTION draws near, it's becoming difficult to have reasonable public conversations across political divides. Voices are raised, fears are stoked, complex issues are reduced to slogans, facts get mangled, evidence falls by the wayside. Media headlines often don't help.

Consider, for example, the recent debate over an algorithm designed to address inequity in surgery, which was rolled out in Auckland this year. A headline decried: "New Surgery Ranking Policy Based on Race". This turned out to be excellent clickbait: politicians, opinion writers, talkback hosts and members of the public piled on.

But dig only a little deeper and you find that this algorithm is not "based on race" at all. It is designed so that clinical need always takes precedence. Beneath this priority of need come other variables that, according to health data, are associated with poor health outcomes. Geographical location, financial circumstances and time spent on the waiting list, sit alongside ethnicity as significant factors in making decisions about priority.

The algorithm applies only to elective surgery, not to emergencies. And, apart from clinical need, the

weighting of various factors is not set; it varies according to best practice.

For example, one surgical services manager commented that in the case of neurosurgery "clinical priority and days waiting absolutely take precedence over everything else". But for low-end routine surgeries: "If the proportion of Māori and Pasifika on the waitlist exceeds their population percentage then a higher weighting is given to ethnicity."

The algorithm recognises that our system is not neutral: ethnicity is a significant factor in how people's health needs are addressed. In particular, Māori consistently do worse in this system and always have done. Māori life expectancy is lower than that of Pākehā, mortality is higher for certain cancers, those with the same heart conditions as Pākehā get prescribed fewer medications, those presenting with chronic pain are less likely to receive specialist referrals. To claim that ethnicity is not already a factor in how people receive health care and that we have a level playing field, is to ignore these brutal realities.

The arguments that rage around this issue are not unique to Aotearoa. Last month the US Supreme Court ruled against the use of affirmative action in admissions programmes at

Harvard and other institutions of higher education. Affirmative action was established because education systems designed by the dominant culture have not catered well for those who come to education bearing the burdens of colonisation or, in the US case, slavery. The result is inequity. This ruling ignores that.

Like the surgery algorithm, affirmative action is an attempt to address inequity at a late stage of someone's journey through the system. But these fixes are admissions of failure. While they recognise that health or education systems do not fairly address the needs of a whole population, they fall short of what's needed: transformative systemic change.

Catholic Social Teaching has a principle that addresses this: the universal destination of goods. This principle "requires a common effort to obtain for every person and for all peoples the conditions necessary for integral development, so that everyone can contribute to making a more humane world" (*Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Compendium*, 2004, para 175).

It's not exactly clickbait, but it is a profound way of approaching inequity. ♦



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

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Letters to the Editor

We welcome letters of comment, discussion, response, affirmation or argument of up to 200 words.

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

Opinions in letters are not necessarily those of the Magazine.

STABILITY FOR OLD AND YOUNG

What a pleasure it's been to get to know young Shar Mathias over time. But her insightful article (*TM* July 2023) really hit home for me, an "oldie" Anglican priest, now settled into a new (last) parish. I'm getting to know a new, varied group of people – some becoming friends, some probably "moving on" as I will eventually. Stability is important for us elderly as well as for the young, in their very mobile years. Yes, Jesus spent about three years in his short, mission life, but every now and then he literally stopped, thought, prayed, regathered, in order to move to sometimes fresh, sometimes barren, resistant, hostile soil to plant the kingdom. My three granddaughters, all Catholic educated, are at various stages in their journey into "the unknown" and I'm privileged to live nearby – stable love.

I envy Shar in that she is blessed by involved godparents. In my concerns for baptised persons, whether children or adult believers, it bothers me that parents and

godparents have promises included in the Baptismal Rite which, at the time, they either don't understand, or have no intention of contributing to the spiritual stability of the baptised one. It also bothers me that, traditionally, only baptised persons can receive or be involved in the Church's life (but no Church seems prepared to discuss that!).

David Day, Westshore Parish, Napier/Ahuriri

A FRANK WORD

Ex-Gloriavale members seek to be treated as employees – not volunteers. As their case goes through the employment court and the facts are published, it reminds me of the pre-Vatican II "Catholic ghetto" of my childhood.

In winning their case, the ex-members have exposed the lifestyle of their former home and posed more questions for the outsider than answers. Within the community, the court result has reinforced the leadership's need of isolation and an appeal will be lodged.

I wonder if part of the mindset of former parishioners of my contemporary Feilding parish is not unlike the brave ex-Gloriavale members. Our parents grew up believing the cleric was the centre of parish life. As children we witnessed our parents scolded in sermons by celibate, "other-worldly" men we gave our power to. At school the cleric had free access to the classroom and was deferred to by the teaching nuns – undermining their teacher-pupil relationship.

After Mass or school we safely ignored the sermons or lectures and life went on despite them. My inner spirit however was damaged and that damage was psychologically internalised. I was like Galileo, knowing the Church was wrong but unable to safely question it. Now, grown to adulthood with children and grandchildren of my own, I ignore dogmatic religion in general but keenly feel the need of a relationship with God.

A cult member will preserve a belief by agreeing to accept the rule of elders and do nothing towards

growing their personal spiritual literacy. In contrast, a healthy religion has elders who seek to encourage believers and non-believers alike, celebrating respective differences and learning from common ground.

The questions I have for departed fellow parishioners (some of whom are lifelong friends): "Is your departure from religion a symptom of the acceptance of a personal response – ability to grow in faith? Is it following the road less travelled? Are you in fact setting me a good example?"

These questions are also Pope Francis's gift to me. A synodal Church will be messy and require personal input, but it will be real and deal with real time issues. It will not need to pretend normal. I will be free to experience a religion designed to help me through my life, not a cult designed to isolate me from it. The realm extending from the Council of Trent has served its time.

David McCann, Feilding/Aorangi

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For What It's Worth



I WENT FOR A walk in cold and bluster down the rail trail which adjoins my property. There were patches of snow from the last fall and all the puddles were frozen over.

I leaned over a little bridge to see the weeds in the water beneath, immobile in their watery grave. Further along, the dam was frozen. Not enough for a bonspiel, like the old days when trainloads of folk came from Dunedin, all bundled up warmly with skates to glide under lights, with hot food provided by the locals. I was tempted to climb the stile and test the surface of the dam. In my younger years, I would definitely have given it a go; now I thought of the inconvenience of a broken leg or even a sprained ankle in a spot where not a lot of people venture. Common sense prevailed.

But as I looked at this frozen landscape, I thought of the seasons of life and how I am entering the winter. I'm retired. My professional obligations have come to an end. There are far fewer expectations on me. If I want to sit in front of a fire and read a book all day, I can. In a crowd, I'm invisible, just another old lady. Advertisers aren't particularly interested in me and in the world of fashion and beauty, I'm a little passé.

And that's fine with me. I can give myself over to exploring with greater intensity the inner world, the richness of the mind, I let go of those beliefs that no longer serve me, and reconfirm with gratitude the ones that do. Pablo Picasso said: "The first half of life is learning to be an adult — the second half is learning to be a child." I look back and realise that sometimes the sheer busyness of life extinguished my joy. Oh, what I would give for another moment to hold my children when they were small, to take joy in who they were, to lose myself in simply watching them. That's a futile wish.

But now I have the chance to see the world through a child's eye: to have fun; to do some daft things; to look and really see.

I am blessed to be healthy, something not guaranteed in the winter of life. So I can stomp down the rail trail in my

mustard-coloured gumboots, put my imprint in the snow and crack the puddles. I can reflect on the complexities of life, how rich and how hard it is. I can wonder about heaven, as I do regularly, thinking about my husband and daughter there, how they're doing, what it's like. They are bittersweet ruminations.

But more than that, I can choose to embrace what's around me, not just the sparseness of winter, not just the growing old, but the freedom that comes with letting go of expectations I've put on myself, like a coat that no longer fits. I can throw off the worry, the anxiety of what might go wrong, the little fears that have never served me well anyway.

I can rest in the wonderful words of John O'Donohue in his poem, "For Old Age": "May you be given wisdom for the eyes of your soul / To see this as a time of gracious harvesting. / May you have the passion to heal what has hurt / you, / And allow it to come closer and become one / with you." ❖

Hoar Frost and Otago Central Rail Trail near Otarehua by David Wall ©
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Our last word

May hope
like waxing light after solstice
make a home in us
and in our communities.

From the *Tui Motu* Team

