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Tui Motu

InterIslands

February 2024

WHAT'S GOOD FOR ALL IN AOTEAROA?

PETER CULLINANE, TUI CADIGAN, JANE HIGGINS & OTHERS

BLESSING SAME-SEX COUPLES

MASSIMO FAGGIOLI, ROBERT MICKENS

WAR ON PALESTINE

PETER O'KEEFE, DAVID MORE

Every Person Counts
Tatau ia Tangata

INDEPENDENT CATHOLIC MAGAZINE

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COVER PHOTO

Children Take Part in Māori Culture
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OUR NAME *Tui Motu InterIslands*

Tui Motu is te reo Māori (Māori language) meaning "stitching the islands together". We pronounce it: to-ee maw-to.



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Editorial

Love Our Partner

HAPPY TUI MOTU NEW YEAR! With one month of 2024 under our belts, the children are back at school and the rest of us are resuming our ordinary lives. But already alarm bells are sounding in Aotearoa because of the coalition government's agenda aimed at eroding the role of tangata whenua in our democracy and so undermining community, the sense that every group in the country matters.

February brings two special days and the beginning of a liturgical season. On 6 February we celebrate Waitangi Day. Then, by happy coincidence, Lent begins on 14 February: Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day this year fall on the same day.

Valentine's Day celebrates the love of partners. In Aotearoa we had thought our bicultural partnership under te Tiriti o Waitangi was solid — not perfect, but nevertheless a relationship we are proud of and working to improve. So it is a shock to hear that the coalition government is entertaining the idea of rewriting the Treaty. It's particularly alarming because the rhetoric around the proposal is about curbing Māori. This is racism and it is being reinforced through the insidious channels of disinformation and misinformation. Alarm bells sound more loudly when we hear that Māori, the Treaty partner, were broadsided by the proposal. Māori have already mobilised with an impressive hui and we can expect to learn more from them.

How will those of us representing, as it were, the other partner to the Treaty respond? It's not the time to stay quiet. That would be counted as agreeing with the government's proposal. A statement from the Sisters of St Joseph's last Chapter urges: "Let's learn from the First Peoples of our countries and wholeheartedly support as neighbours their initiatives for recognition, agency and justice." It is wise advice at this time.

During the season of Lent we have 40 days of reflection in which to learn more and orient our lives towards justice and truth. In biblical terms, 40 means enough time to bring about change. The Israelites spent 40 years in the wilderness learning to be people of God after they'd escaped slavery and before they were ready to settle in the Holy Land. That was more than a generation. Moses, Elijah and Jesus each fasted for 40 days in the desert in order to discover what their ministry and focus in God's mission was to be. We might spend this Lent learning about te Tiriti o Waitangi and what each partner agreed to. We might reflect on the history of broken promises and disrespect of Māori by the Pākehā partner. And we can listen again to the prophetic figures, Māori and Pākehā, who helped us understand our responsibilities as a bicultural country. And through it all, we can let the spirit of Valentine's Day help us grow in love of our partner and give us the courage to join together and speak up.

We are grateful to the contributors to this issue who by sharing their faith, thought, writing, art and craft provide us with material to reflect on and discuss. Thank you!

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



EVERYTHING HAS A WHAKAPAPA

IN TERMS OF bleakness, 1990 was the worst year for our family. Within in six months, both my parents died as well as one of our closest friends. Our house burnt down, the two of our five children in it got out, but the fire loomed large in their upbringing for at least a decade. A close friend who was staying with us lost all his possessions.

As is often the case with hard times, there is bleak humour. As a four-year-old I had set fire to my sister's bed and had then run down the road and done the same under my aunt's house. A brace of fire engines arrived at our own home only to have one diverted to the house down the street. So in 1990 when I went to tell my dying father our house had gone up in flames he had the wit to remove his oxygen support so he could say with a grin: "Ironical, isn't it son?"

I have often reflected that in life most things that happen to us have a whakapapa. When my wife and I married in 1977 we decided that hospitality would be the motif of our relationship.

Since then over 100 people have chosen to come and live with our family because it seemed the right thing to do at the time. Mostly this was because of temporary financial difficulty, health issues or relationship trauma.

As our kids grew, they learned to accept that making up an extra bed and sharing space was normal. People stayed with us for days, weeks or months and on a very few occasions for years.

The original house before the inferno was large and old with many bedrooms. We designed its replacement to have two-bedroom accommodation for my wife's mum in the front and four bedrooms at the back. That arrangement lasted three months because Mum missed her friends who lived an hour away. So those rooms were then used as

the office of a publishing business, before again becoming accommodation.

As time went on we raised an additional mortgage to build a minor dwelling on the back of the section to be occupied by one of our daughters. This gave us three living spaces.

During the height of Covid at the first major lockdown we had three separate groupings on site, all following the rigorous guidelines. Though we had to keep our distance, we could support one another, share shopping trips and meal preparation and talk about how we were faring. The experience was a revelation: we learned anew the value of communal living.

As 2024 takes off we find ourselves again sharing our accommodation at the request of our eldest son, his wife and three children. My wife and I have moved into the two-bedroom flat designed originally for her mum. Thirty-three years after the fire and rebuild the wheel has turned full circle.

The trauma of the fire was awful, but it didn't take long to recognise that while we'd lost our house and possessions, we'd not lost lives. As a family we experienced the generosity of many and learned that with life in Aotearoa there is plenty to go around provided we share. Inequality is a construct of our own making with its own whakapapa/lineage of shame. Just as we made it, we can unmake it — and we must.

Patrick Snedden works with Odyssey House in drug rehabilitation and with Manaiaakalani in education in Tāmaki Makaurau.





Pursuing the Common Good

Peter Cullinane *challenges Christians to promote the common good in our society now.*

THE CORE RESPONSIBILITY of those entrusted to govern is to promote the common good. This doesn't mean just what is best for most people. It means creating the social, economic and ecological conditions which enable *all* members of society — according to their capacity — to reach their human fulfilment and to contribute to the good of society.

Majority rule, and claims to be acting on the mandate of a majority, do not guarantee the common good. Majority rule can even lead to disadvantaged groups and indigenous peoples being under the domination of majority cultures, indefinitely.

Electoral systems are only a means to a higher end. That higher end is the fundamental right of people to participate and contribute to decisions that affect them. As ancient wisdom put it: "If it's about us, then not without us".

"One person one vote" can need to be supplemented by other measures, especially at the local level, to enhance people's ability to participate.

Equality Is Not Just Same Treatment

To safeguard this right, fair-minded people recognise the need to level the playing field for disadvantaged groups. Opposition to this is based on the simplistic view that equality requires everyone to be treated "the same". In fact, sameness of treatment can prevent equality of opportunity.

Worse still, sometimes that is the agenda: to treat

"everybody the same" is convenient for those who want to reinforce the political and economic advantages they already have. They will call different treatment "divisive". What can look like advocating for different treatment based on culture or ethnicity can be, in fact, advocating supplementary measures based on need. Failure to meet those needs is divisive.

Need Understanding of Cultural Diversity

However, self-interest is not the only reason for opposing efforts to level the playing field. Opposition can emerge from a poor understanding of why cultural diversity matters so much. Think of the decision of Australians to vote down a proposal that would have given First Australians a way of making their needs better understood by the nation's parliament.

In our own country, there has been opposition to extra provision for Māori participation on local body boards, and a slowness to allow Māori to manage vaccination roll-outs among their own people when the Ministry of Health's lack of success was evident.

Problems with Dominance of Majority

These matters raise an interesting question: why do we readily accept the need to level the playing field for some disadvantaged groups, but resist doing so when the disadvantage relates to cultural or ethnic diversity? Is this



just the typical failure of some within a dominant culture to understand the deep needs of people whose culture is different? Does it reflect an individualistic culture's tendency to identify need only in individuals, failing to recognise the shared needs of communities?

Or does this zeal for dominance by the majority culture come from something more sinister? After all, to eliminate te reo Māori from public signage is a gratuitous, needless and mean-spirited thing to do — the more bizarre because it is an official language. A dominant culture's failure to recognise the needs of other cultural groups can only heighten

tangata whenua's felt need for full self-determination.

Of course, a people's right to self-determination includes their right to enter treaties and agreed forms of partnership. But treaties, legislation and contractual agreements, though important, are not sufficient. Achieving the common good depends more on those forms of association that bring people together based on goodwill, friendship, loyalty, generosity, shared values and responsibilities. It is through these relationships that we become our true selves by being there for one another – civil society.

Support Common Good in Society

The markets and the state are meant to support that kind of society. But neo-liberalism has subverted these relationships: society's subjugation to polarising market forces, and the state's subservience to the market's most powerful sectors are deemed to be normal, acceptable and inevitable; it's even called "progress".

Need Personal Morality

Society has itself to blame for this to the extent that we have farmed out to the state and the markets the consequences of our poor choices. In discussions on social and economic problems, the glaring absence of any reference to personal virtue, moral formation or social responsibility is commonplace. We expect the state and the markets to fix what we have broken. They can't.

Need Faith-based Support

Pursuing the common good also needs freedom of speech and of association, including religious freedom. Faith-based values and respectful faith-based dialogue have a unique contribution to make to the common good, but that contribution can be obstructed by polarising religious fundamentalism at one extreme, and secularism disguised as "neutrality" at the other.

Need True Compassion

In some remarkable documents, recent Popes have taught the need for giving what isn't owed. Lack of compassion was a feature of the pre-Christian cultures of Rome and Greece, and it is a feature of post-Christian society today. In the early Church, compassion made Christians conspicuously different. Compassion, like God's love for us, isn't owed. That makes it a circuit breaker where otherwise tit-for-tat and getting even would be about as far as the common good could go.

Pope Francis has asked that "those with institutional and political responsibility, and those charged with forming public opinion, to remain especially attentive to the way they speak of those who think or act differently or those who may have made mistakes ... courage is needed to guide towards processes of reconciliation. It is precisely such positive and creative boldness which offers real solutions to ancient conflicts and the opportunity to build lasting peace...

Compassion ... makes a circuit breaker where otherwise tit-for-tat and getting even would be about as far as the common good could go.

"Some feel that a society rooted in mercy is hopelessly idealistic ... I would encourage everyone to see society not as a forum where strangers compete and try to come out on top, but above all as a home or a family, where the door is always open and where everyone feels welcome" (*World Communications Day* 2016).

Similarly, Pope Benedict XVI dared to hope that compassion, gratuitous giving and forgiving could be brought into economic relationships — the very antithesis of neo-liberal economics. He thinks of what it would do to trading relationships, business and industrial practices. He sees this as a way of pre-empting the imbalances and inequities that otherwise need to be redressed afterwards.

"On the one hand, charity demands justice: recognition and respect for the legitimate rights of individuals and peoples. It strives to build the *earthly city* according to law and justice. On the other hand, charity transcends justice and completes it in the logic of giving and forgiving. The *earthly city* is promoted not merely by relationships of rights and duties, but to an even greater and more fundamental extent by relationships of gratuitousness, mercy and communion" (*Caritas in Veritate* par 6).

Entrusted by Dave Sotogi © Used with permission
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Bishop **Peter Cullinane** is a theologian and the former bishop of Palmerston North. In "retirement" he continues his pastoral ministry.





Ko taku reo taku ohooho, ko taku reo taku mapihi mauria

My language is my awakening, my language is the window to my soul

I HAVE CHOSEN a whakataukī or Māori proverb as the title for this piece of writing. It articulates a powerful image of the essential relationship between a people and the language through which they communicate the deepest meanings within their lives. This whakataukī has been closely linked to the revitalisation of the Māori language. Te reo Māori, the first language of Aotearoa, is a taonga of and for all the people who call this land home. This short article is an attempt to provide a point of reflection for those who feel conflicted by the call from this Government who have announced a commitment to reduce, relegate and remove the country's original language — and, for a second time, subordinate te reo Māori to the language of the colonisers.

It is of grave concern to Māori that after the years of commitment by Māori and Pākehā through kōhanga reo/

Māori language preschool, kura kaupapa/schools operating under Māori custom and using te reo Māori, Māori Studies at university and iwi wānanga/Māori tertiary studies providers, we are facing this threat that has the power to reduce us to a monolingual country. It could be that the two Members of Parliament driving this particular direction feel inadequate in their capacity to use te reo Māori. They claim that their iwi status is of value and importance to them, so why reject the language? I am leaving these MPs' "frailty" to their respective iwi to address as the iwi has the right and responsibility to deal to anything that affects their collective mana.

Language Is Key

Language is a vital tool for communication allowing a people to articulate at the deepest level relationships,

spiritualities, prayers, emotions and the significant rituals essential to the life of a people. It is an essential means to interpret ourselves in the context of our place in the universe. Through our language we are able to share perspectives, articulate decisions and explain our actions in any given situation. It opens our smallness to ever bigger circles of interaction through the conversations we have.

Although te reo has not increased at the speed advocates hoped for, it can be heard now in most areas of this country though not always with the fluency or desired pronunciation. Throughout Aotearoa phrases and words are in everyday use by people from all walks of life for both formal and casual events.

We are realising that for too long colonisers have denied indigenous peoples their right to their language and the true expression of their cultures. Those of us who have travelled to other countries have had opportunities to experience and be enriched by different languages and rituals of engagement religious and secular.

Some people, including some tangata whenua, say te reo belongs to Māori and should be reserved for Māori use within their cultural setting and practices. I suggest there are one or two underlying aspects feeding this thinking. The obvious one is racism — it is the go-to position for those who struggle with difference. It will be thinly disguised but the racism is instantly recognisable to indigenous peoples. The other major contender for this position is fear — fear of being excluded, of loss of control, of the comfort of belonging to the dominant group that determines the “norm” of all things, including language. Simply put, the key to the whole issue of resisting the use of te reo Māori, is the need for power and control — to control the norms by which society operates.

Uptake of Te Reo Māori

However, as new migrant peoples arrive with diverse cultures and begin to embrace their new home they are openly engaging with what the Kiwi experience offers. This includes te reo and Māori cultural practices, religious rituals and ways of celebrating. Many, particularly some Asian peoples, have excellent pronunciation due to the similarity of te reo Māori vowel sounds to their own mother tongue.

This guarantee of Aotearoa as a bicultural nation was signed in Te Tiriti o Waitangi on 6 February 1840 between the Crown and Iwi Māori. It has been a contentious reality that successive Governments have failed to honour over generations.

The very thought of the perceived loss of control by some Pākehā, predominantly males, finds this an unacceptable reality. So begins the dance of the desperate, to undo all that has been achieved through

the blood sweat and tears of Māori, Pākehā and new migrants in workshops on Te Titiriti, within Government organisations and private groups to ensure the nation’s organisations integrate te reo.

Just when the country has reached a point of traction on the place of Māori in their homeland our current coalition government wants to reduce our country to monolingual status. Their explanation that New Zealanders are not intelligent enough to read signs and titles written in te reo with English underneath is indefensible.

Call to Churches

I think the Churches across Aotearoa are called to stand with tangata whenua against any attempt to remove or relegate the status of the language of their First Nation People to the point of invisibility. The diminishment of te reo Māori will in effect make Māori invisible in this society. Christians share the Scriptures which name our rights and responsibilities towards one another. “A new

commandment I give to you. That you love one another; as I have loved you” (John 13:34-35). “Love your neighbour as yourself” (Mark 12:30-31). “Who is my neighbour?” Luke 10:25-37).

For Christians to stand by and say or do nothing is to side with those who have the power to diminish and make Māori invisible.

Pope Francis, addressing the Grand Chancellor of the Pontificia Universidad Católica Argentina, spoke of the role and responsibility of Catholic colleges and universities. He says: “Mercy is

not just a pastoral attitude, but it is the very substance of the Gospel of Jesus.

“Without mercy our theology, our law, our pastoral care run the risk of collapsing into bureaucratic narrow-mindedness or ideology, which by their nature seeks to domesticate the mystery. Understanding theology is understanding God, who is love.”

Our call, then, is to act from love and support the essential place of te reo for the well-being of Māori and all New Zealand peoples.

Kia ora koutou katoa.

Mural shows Kuao Longsbury ONZM and King Charles III (at that time HRH Prince Charles) at the Royal Albatross Colony of Pukekura, Otago Peninsula 2005. Mural was painted by Tyler Stent to mark the 60th anniversary of Dunedin Airport 2022.

He mana whenua, he mana takata
Whakarewahia tōku tino rakatirataka nō ōku tīpuna.

**Language is vital ...
allowing a people to
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significant rituals
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a people.**

Tui Cadigan RSM affiliates to te hapū o
Kāti Māhaki ki Makaawhio and is
Poutini Ngāi Tahu descent. She lives in
Ōtautahi Christchurch.





Gimme Shelter by Lyndy Wilson © Used with permission
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TO GIVE AND RECEIVE BLESSINGS

Massimo Faggioli discusses the implications for the Synod on Synodality, the Curia and the papacy of the new document on blessing couples in irregular situations and same-sex unions.

THE MONTHS FOLLOWING the October 2023 synodal assembly might have been taken up with preparation for the October 2024 assembly if not for the release of *Fiducia supplicans* on 18 December and the “clarifications” that the Vatican Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF) issued 4 January. But this is where the Church is. The publication on the “possibility of blessing couples in irregular situations and same-sex couples” and the reactions to it send more signals about Francis’s pontificate — but also about the role of the Curia and, indeed, the prospects of the Synod.

Francis’s reform of the Curia, approved in March 2022, was supposed to reshape the dicasteries, making them more collaborative and receptive to the global Church. But *Fiducia supplicans* raises questions about that. It doesn’t seem that other dicasteries were brought into the process; the declaration simply says that the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith “consulted experts, undertook a careful drafting process, and discussed the text in the *Congresso* of the Doctrinal Section of the Dicastery.”

The subtitle of the declaration is “On the Pastoral Meaning of Blessings.” *Fiducia supplicans* is purportedly less about doctrine than about the liturgical life of the Church and pastoral care.

One dicastery directly affected by the declaration is therefore the one for the liturgy for the definition of blessing. But the dicasteries for the bishops and the clergy also have some competency regarding a document aimed more at those who are in pastoral ministry — bishops, presbyters, and deacons — than at same-sex couples or others who are in “irregular situations”.

Working with these parties might have helped in anticipating the negative reaction to *Fiducia supplicans* from the so-called “peripheries”. It is better to have things in order beforehand than to do damage control later.

THE POPE AND THE SYNOD

The fundamental question is whether and how *Fiducia supplicans* and its reception affect the possibility of consensus on sensitive issues at the second assembly in October. Maybe *Fiducia supplicans* is Francis’s way of telling

us that only the pope, not the Synod, is in charge, or that only the pope is able to take steps when there is lack of consensus on the most sensitive issues.

The agenda of the synodal assembly is ultimately under papal and Vatican control, as specified in the December 2023 statement of the Synod's office in Rome concerning "matters of great importance, some of which need to be considered at the level of the whole Church and in collaboration with the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia". These would include changes in canon law, the formation of ordained ministers, the relationships between bishops and religious orders, and theological and pastoral research on the diaconate.

The statement by the Synod's office was more detailed on that last point: "[M]ore specifically, on

women's admission to the diaconate, etc. A list of these topics will be submitted to the Holy Father as the fruit of the Synod Assembly.

Groups of experts from all continents together with the relevant Dicasteries of the Roman Curia and coordinated by the General Secretariat of the Synod will be asked to work in a synodal way on the topics indicated by the Holy Father."

POPE'S AUTHORITY CAN HELP CONSENSUS

But papal control can also protect and help the Synod. *Fiducia supplicans* does not mark the first time that a papal or Vatican document has intervened in a synodal or conciliar agenda.

In the three intersessions between the four different sessions of Vatican II, there was Pope John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris* (April 1963) and Paul VI's *Ecclesia Suam* (August 1964), which significantly helped the work of the council. The difference here is that it is still not clear just what the agenda for the intersession is, beyond another round of listening sessions, or what kind of theological work theologians are supposed to do for the preparation of the second assembly.

RECEPTION OF DOCUMENT AND THE SYNOD

But the reactions to *Fiducia supplicans* are also bound to affect the Synod and its reception. Much has been made of the negative or unenthusiastic responses from many countries in Africa but that's only part of the story. Generally speaking, Western Europe has reacted with more enthusiasm than Eastern Europe, but there are shades of difference even between countries in Western Europe, as well as within individual countries, like the United States and France.

NEW HEAD OF DDF

As to what *Fiducia supplicans* tells us about Francis's papacy: it's important because it reflects his will to cement his legacy in a strategic and definitional way — that is, beyond simply appointing bishops and cardinals. Head of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith Víctor Manuel Fernández is his creature. He is not part of that dicastery prefect's line of succession inaugurated when John Paul II appointed Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger to the position in

1981. Fernández's appointment signifies the access of a "commoner" (a pastoral theologian from Argentina) after a line of "blue-blood" systematic theologians from Europe and North America, Roman insiders with personal ties to Ratzinger and the academic world he came from.

But there is also a literal change of pace: after Ratzinger's long tenure, his successors (Cardinals Levada, Muller and Ladaria) conducted the work of the dicastery by slowing down its doctrinal "legislation".

The age of Ratzinger restored the doctrinal order that had been upset in the post-Vatican II period, and after that there was no longer any need for an activist dicastery for the doctrine of the faith. Judging by the last few months, with a series of responses to *dubia* and the declarations on blessings, this could be the beginning of a

"I ENTRUST TO YOU A TASK THAT I CONSIDER VERY VALUABLE ... ITS CENTRAL PURPOSE IS TO GUARD THE TEACHING THAT FLOWS FROM THE FAITH IN ORDER 'TO GIVE REASONS FOR OUR HOPE ...'"

new phase of activism, for a different kind of order (despite the reassurances that *Fiducia supplicans* doesn't change doctrine) shaped by the former Holy Office now under Cardinal Fernández.

Fiducia supplicans isn't just the first major test for Fernández. It will also be a test of the unusual mission statement that Francis gave to the former Holy Office in his letter to the new prefect in July 2023.

In that letter to Fernández, the pope seemed intent on closing an almost 500-year-long Tridentine era in the history of the doctrinal office and opening a new one. "As the new prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, I entrust to you a task that I consider very valuable," Francis wrote. "Its central purpose is to guard the teaching that flows from the faith in order 'to give reasons for our hope, but not as an enemy who critiques and condemns'. The Dicastery over which you will preside in other times came to use immoral methods. Those were times when, rather than promoting theological knowledge, possible doctrinal errors were pursued. What I expect from you is certainly something very different."

The turbulent reactions of individual bishops and bishops' conferences to *Fiducia supplicans* marks a first in the modern history of that dicastery. And it suggests that the transition from a Tridentine-era Roman office to a more global and pastoral way of promoting doctrine will be a long and complicated process.

This story originally appeared at *Commonweal*; it is reprinted here with permission.

Massimo Faggioli is Professor of Theology at Villanova University and is currently lecturing at the Catholic University Louvain-la-Neuve in Belgium as the recipient of the Francqui Chair.





African Bishops Reject Document On Blessings

Robert Mickens *discusses the Church, homosexuality and African exceptionalism behind the African bishops' refusal to follow the new Vatican declaration that allows priests to bless same-sex couples.*

HOMOSEXUALITY WAS FOISTED on the peoples of Africa by foreigners from the decadent West. There are no homosexuals among the continent's numerous Catholic priests and seminarians. This is what the Catholic bishops of Africa would have us believe.

They are wrong, of course. Homosexuality was not forced upon or imported to Africa, and the Church there is not "free" of ministers who are homosexuals. But thanks to a harshly-worded statement that the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) published on 11 January, life is bound to become more dangerous for LGBTQ+ people on the continent and more loathsome for the clergy who are forced to hide their homosexual orientation.

"No blessings for homosexual couples in the African Churches" is the title of the five-page text which was

signed and issued by the SECAM president, Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo Besungu of Kinshasa (DR-Congo). The document is described as a "synthesis of the responses" that the 57 different episcopal conferences in Africa made to *Fiducia supplicans*, the controversial "declaration" the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF) published on 18 December, which specifically allows such blessings.

Condemnation of Homosexuality

While Cardinal Ambongo's statement purports to offer the African bishops' "position on homosexual unions and same-sex couples", it is actually a harsh condemnation of homosexuality itself — and, by natural association — homosexual persons. It also repeats the by now familiar refrain of what we might call African exceptionalism regarding homosexuality — that the culture of Africa is

"deeply rooted in the values of the natural law regarding marriage and family" and homosexuality is "seen as contradictory to cultural norms and intrinsically corrupt".

Actually, towns and communities in the deep south in the United States, where the Ku Klux Klan is still revered, would say the same thing. As did most countries in the West up until only 50 or 60 years ago. But it gets worse.

The SECAM president, a Capuchin Franciscan who will soon be 64 and is one of Pope Francis's closest advisors as a member of the C9 Council of Cardinals, says the refusal of the African Church leaders to allow blessings for same-sex couples is based on Catholic teaching and Sacred Scripture. He quotes *Persona Humana*, an outdated text on sexual ethics the Vatican's doctrinal office issued in 1975, which says "homosexual acts are disordered". (The same Vatican department issued an updated text on homosexuality specifically 11 years later, which is the current teaching.)

Cardinal Ambongo says the African bishops also reject same-sex blessings because homosexual acts are "contrary to the natural law", as the Catholic Church has long taught. "The African Bishops' Conferences emphasise that people with a homosexual tendency must be treated with respect and dignity," he says, again reaffirming the current Church teaching. And this will be appreciated by people in the LGBTQ+ communities throughout Africa, even if the cardinal goes on to say that the bishops conference are "reminding them that unions of persons of the same-sex are contrary to the will of God and therefore cannot receive the blessing of the Church".

Plucking Anti-gay "Proof Texts" from the Bible

How can the Catholic bishops of Africa be so sure that they know the "will of God"? That's easy enough. The Bible tells them so. "They cite passages which condemn homosexuality, notably Leviticus 18:22-23 where homosexuality is explicitly prohibited and considered an abomination," Cardinal Ambongo writes.

This passage has long been one of classic "proof texts" used to justify gay bashing. Not even the *Persona Humana* cites it, though the 1986 document from the Vatican doctrinal office does. Mercifully, the African bishops refrained from also citing Leviticus 20:13 (as the 1986 text does), which says that men who have sexual intercourse with men "will be put to death".

The exact meaning of such injunctions in the Book of Leviticus, where all sorts of actions "contrary to the will of God" — like planting the seeds of two different plants side by side — are punishable by death, have been debated by serious scripture scholars. The SECAM statement, however, reads as if it were written by an evangelical fundamentalist, not by a cardinal with degree in moral theology from the prestigious "Alfonsianum" in Rome. "One episcopal conference added the scandal of the homosexuals of Sodom (cf. Genesis 19:4-11)," Cardinal Ambongo continues. "In the narration of the text," he reminds us, "homosexuality is so abominable that it will lead to the destruction of the city."

Tool for Africa's Homophobes

These are incendiary words, indeed, in the "cultural context" of Africa where 33 of the 54 nations across the continent have laws that make homosexual activity a crime punishable with fines and even lengthy prison sentences. In Somalia and some of the states of Nigeria homosexuals can be put to death by law.

Cardinal Peter Turkson, a Ghanaian at the Vatican, is the only prelate from his native country to speak out against [these laws].

The SECAM statement — which also quotes St Paul as condemning homosexuality as "unnatural relationships (cf. Romans 1:26-32) or shameful morals (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10)" — will be a useful tool in the hands of homophobes in Africa, especially those who are responsible for making laws and those who enforce them.

Although Pope Francis has called such laws a "sin" and "an injustice", the African bishops have done little or nothing to oppose them. In fact, entire episcopal conferences, such as the one in Ghana, have congratulated their national governments for implementing so-called "anti-gay" laws. Cardinal Peter Turkson, a Ghanaian at the Vatican, is the only prelate from his native country to speak out against them.

Finally, these lines — with which the SECAM president begins his message — leave one somewhat speechless: "The message that I transmit to you today has received the agreement of His Holiness Pope Francis and of His Eminence Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith."

Why did the pope and his top doctrinal aide agree to this? Was it to show magnanimity or that they really are committed to Church de-centralisation? Or was it more in the vein of what the late Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, did in 2006 when his department reviewed the address Benedict XVI was to give at the University of Regensburg in Germany. The cardinal's subordinates pointed out a line in the text that would likely be misunderstood and anger Muslims. They wondered if they should alert the pope. In reply, Sodano allegedly said something to this effect: "Ah the great professor! No let it be. If that's what he wants to say, let him say it." We, too, can only wonder.

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Rainbow Sunset by Sean McDonnell © Used with permission
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Doing Theology Where We Are

Christopher Longhurst explains Pope Francis's call for a paradigm shift in the way we do theology.

POPE FRANCIS EXPRESSED his vision for a new contextual theology in the Church in *Ad Theologiam Promovendam/To Promote Theology* (Nov 2023). He is calling for theology that is fully inclusive and recognises the realities of contemporary life, rather than being self-referential and inward-looking. He is saying theology must interpret the Gospel for today's world.

Contextual theology takes into account particular settings or circumstances when determining doctrines

and faith practices. This means the theological process and application will vary according to different contexts.

Contextual theologians review doctrines and practices when the need arises without disregarding foundational sources. They look at cultural norms and particular circumstances rather than unchanging universal creeds and moral laws.

Contextual theology sees faith content not as fixed or static, but in a state of dynamic evolution. It starts with basic modifications of language, idiom and imagery when considering the sources. It moves into interpretation based on experience.

What may be prohibited in one context could be permissible in another. For example, Catholic teaching on remaining silent for the common good (*Catholic Catechism*, par 2489), would not be applied in cases of child sexual abuse in churches.

This is because what theologians say about religious teachings and

faith content is expected to be relatable, relevant and life-giving for all in the Church. As Francis said, theology must "prophetically interpret the present and seek new pathways for the future" (AT par 1). To do so, he urged theologians to develop a theological method that "discerns the 'signs of the times'" (AT par 8).

Universal Context

The pope signalled theology's universal context through interdisciplinary and interreligious involvement. He urged the Pontifical Academy of Theology "not to close itself in self-referentiality, which leads to isolation and insignificance, but to grasp itself as embedded in a web of relationships, first and foremost, with other disciplines and other knowledge" (AT par 5).

Francis's approach harvests knowledge from secular disciplines and also from other faith traditions. It is transdisciplinary and interreligious. It strives to interact with other faiths and cultures in ways that are enriching for all, acquiring fuller understanding of what is believed and why. It makes theological research more relevant to current needs, enabling students to acquire an integral vision of

reality and develop a desire for transformational progress.

However, theology's broadest scope for Francis's universal context lies in "openly confronting everyone, believers and non-believers alike" (AT par 4). He signalled the ways to do this — by dialogue, relationship building, inclusion, engagement and in a spirit of intellectual charity and prayerfulness.

Doing Theology in Particular Situations

Contextual theology sheds light on specific questions raised in particular situations, entering more deeply into the community where God's presence or absence is evident, to discern and respond more effectively.

Catholic theology needs to be developed from the situations in which people find themselves — their concrete experiences — "in the conditions in which men and women live daily, in different geographical, social and cultural environments" (AT par 4).

Francis offered the inductive reasoning process — which seeks to make conclusions by moving from the specific to the general — to take into account the real-life experience of local people. He said theology is expected to "develop with an inductive method, which starts from the different contexts and concrete situations in which people are inserted, allowing themselves to be seriously challenged by reality" (AT par 8).

New Zealand's Context

If we consider bicultural New Zealand through the lens of Francis's new theology, we will need to look at what is important for all Māori, not just what is important for Catholic Māori. For example, when translating the Bible into reo Māori, traditional Māori beliefs and practises need to be taken into account for the Bible's meaning.

It is not sufficient to use only one culture's language or a single religion's sources or *karakia* in translation in order to be truly contextual. Context always involves more than a single demographic. It is multifaceted and integral.

Henare Tate's *Towards Some Foundations of a Systematic Māori Theology: He tirohanga anganui ki ētahi kaupapa hōhonu mō te whakapono Māori* (2010), is a context for Christian theology based on concepts in te ao Māori, namely, *tapu*, *mana*, *pono*, *tika*, *aroha*, *tūranga* and *kaiwhakakapi tūranga*, *whakanoa*, *hohou rongo* and *te Wā*. Tate linked these principles in a Māori theology that addressed both *kaupapa* and *tikanga* as foundations for an evolving theology.

Context Makes a Difference

Starting from the context of people is a characteristic of good theology across religious borders. In promoting an interfaith theology, Francis challenged Catholic theologians to dialogue with people of all religions and to learn from all faith traditions.

This integrative approach shows how theology fits into the universal search for knowledge and understanding. All religions have theological content which must have context. Scholars of Islam such as Tariq Ramadan recognises the challenges faced by Muslims living as a minority in Western countries today. Their context requires

approaches and solutions to their theological issues that are different from those in countries where Muslims are in the majority. The emergence of a contextual *fiqh* (jurisprudence) helps Muslims integrating into mainstream Western societies.

Contextual theology is vital for theology to be inclusive and relevant today and for stability and peace in our world. It provides a way to respond effectively in a plurality of religions. Understanding and respecting that diversity is part of what it means for theology to be universally contextual.

Contextual theology stops the theological imperialism of Europe affronting indigenous cultures worldwide. But Francis's new approach, despite its strong reach for integration, still hints at Christian imperialism by recapitulating theology's universality through "the proclamation of the salvific event of the God-*agape*, communicated in Jesus Christ" (AT par 8).

Catholic theology needs to be developed from "the conditions in which men and women live daily, in different geographical, social and cultural environments".

A fully integral theological context would encourage that event to also be communicated in other religious ways. For example, for Muslims the salvific event of the God-*agape*, *Al-Wadūd*, is communicated in the Holy Qur'an.

The ultimate merits of contextual theology lie in liberating theology from a prescriptive format. Theology done in context is not ideological, or imposing, or formulaic.

As Francis said, it doesn't "abstractly re-propose formulas and schemes from the past" (AT par 1). Instead, it opens faith content to interpretation and understanding in "a culture of dialogue and encounter between different traditions and different knowledge, between different Christian denominations and different religions, openly engaging with everyone, believers and non-believers alike" (AT par 4).

In Aotearoa New Zealand we have a tradition of contextual theology by theologians including Neil Darragh, Henare Tate, Tui Cadigan, Peter Cullinane, Mary Betz, Mary Thorne, Mike Riddell, Mary Eastham, among others.

It is important that this work continues especially within the framework of biculturalism and interculturalism, as well as in inter-Christian and inter-religious dialogue. And it is important, as Francis said, "that places exist, including institutional ones, in which to live and experience theological collegiality and friendship" (AT par 6).

Detail of Māori and Pacific stained glass window designed by Nigel Brown in Holy Trinity Cathedral Tamaki Makaurau Auckland

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LIFE AND DEATH

Trish McBride *discusses how near-death experiences confirm the Christian hope of life after death.*

PEOPLE'S REPORTS OF near-death experiences suggest that human consciousness continues after death. This affirms the belief in a life after death which most of the world's religions have always held. In Christianity we've described life after death, imagining heaven as life with God, and hell as life without God. What we are learning from science and theology is that life continues to grow and change.

Many believe that our consciousness is generated by our brain and that the last breath is our absolute end. When I read *Life after Life* by psychiatrist Raymond Moody I found that his medical perspective confirmed my hope in an afterlife. Near-death experiences (NDEs) seem to point to consciousness continuing

after bodily functions identified as death have ended.

Patients' Experiences

Common features of NDEs are an out-of-body experience, such as going through a tunnel, a loving light, deceased relatives, a life-review, and sometimes a conscious return into their body. For Christians it is easy to identify the "loving light" with God/Jesus.

After he had read *Life after Life* our parish priest spoke about the life-review component of near-death experiences. It consists of understanding the implications of all our actions throughout our life. Understanding the hard implications of all our actions would probably be excruciating, but the review was done in the context of unconditional love.

Perhaps, he said, this is our purgatory.

I've heard several personal stories from people who have had an experience of an NDE in different life-threatening circumstances. NDEs reported by patients after cardiac arrests are particularly amenable to study, given the availability of supporting clinical data.

Everyone who had a cardiac arrest before 1967 died. Since then sophisticated resuscitation techniques have been developed, with a consequent increase in numbers of survivors.

Brain and Consciousness

One of the great unsolved questions of science is how, or whether, the brain creates consciousness. This is the big question behind the research of Dutch cardiologist Pim

Van Lommel. He was experienced in the resuscitation of people who had spent several minutes clinically dead — they had no heart, lung or brain activity. He had thought that unconsciousness meant the person was not aware and was intrigued when patients he had resuscitated began telling their stories.

Research into NDE

Van Lommel began a retrospective study of his cardiac patients who had recovered. Of the 50 people he interviewed over two years, he was astonished to hear 12 such stories.

He then designed a prospective investigation with two psychologists into the usual medical explanations for these stories. Over four years they would interview patients who had been resuscitated in 10 Dutch hospitals. They asked patients a few days after their resuscitation about their recollections, if any, of the period of their clinical death. The results were published in a 2001 issue of *The Lancet*, the British Medical Association Journal — as reputable as you can get.

Reports of Change in Attitude

Researchers collected clinical data for 344 patients. When interviewed they discovered that 62 of the 244 patients reported experiences from while they were clinically dead.

The researchers wrote: “Follow-up interviews of patients who had experienced an NDE during their clinical death revealed that they were permanently changed.

They were less afraid of death, had a stronger belief in an afterlife, a greater interest in spirituality and questions about the purpose of life, as well as a greater acceptance of and love for oneself and others.

They displayed a greater appreciation of ordinary things, and their interest in possessions and power had decreased.

They had acquired enhanced intuitive feelings after a NDE, along with a strong sense of connectedness with others and with nature. People can have a very acute sense of others, which can be extremely intimidating, and also experience clairvoyance,

precognition and visions (‘non-local perception’).”

I think this is akin to a conversion experience.

NDE Intense Lesson in Life

“They know death is nothing other than a different way of being, with an enhanced and broadened consciousness, which is everywhere at once because it is no longer tied to a body.

The current materialistic view of the relationship between consciousness and the brain, as held by most physicians, philosophers, and psychologists is too restricted for a proper understanding of this phenomenon.”

A NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE IS BOTH AN EXISTENTIAL CRISIS AND AN INTENSE LESSON IN LIFE ... WHERE THEY FEEL COMPLETE AND HEALED AND WHERE THEY EXPERIENCE UNLIMITED KNOWLEDGE AND UNCONDITIONAL LOVE.”

The researchers discovered that “an NDE is both an existential crisis and an intense lesson in life. People change ... as it gives them a conscious experience of a non-local dimension in which time and distance play no role, in which past and future can be glimpsed, where they feel complete and healed and where they experience unlimited knowledge and unconditional love.”

I think this is unmistakably a description of heaven.

Death a Transition in Consciousness

Van Lommel concluded: “It seems compelling that endless or non-local

consciousness has and always will exist independently from the body. For this reason, we indeed should seriously consider the possibility that death, like birth, can only be a transition to another state of consciousness.”

This conclusion sits well with the biblical description of the source of life: “God in whom we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

A 2022 US paper identified over 50 recorded components of NDEs. Science is now taking this research seriously, opening to the non-rational dimension of human experience, and beginning to move from the rational materialist focus of the last few hundred years.

Spirituality for Health

There are changes, too, in the medical world where spirituality is recognised as an element of good health. Medical staff receive training on exploring spirituality with their patients as pertinent to their healing.

Science is beginning to accept the reality of the non-material that indigenous peoples and the great faiths have recognised.

It is easy to understand the unconditional love, the universal consciousness as what Christians call God/Jesus, and the new existence as heaven.

As to hell, maybe it too equates to the “painful path to rehabilitation”, the “universal salvation” cited in Nicholas Thompson’s recent article “The Return of Purgatory” (*Tui Motu*, November 2023). Purgatory, then, can be understood as the life-review process.

I wonder now whether it was stories of such experiences told among the ancients which gave rise to the beliefs across faiths and cultures that became encoded in their — and then our — sacred scriptures and doctrines.

Photo by Neomon on Unsplash

Trish McBride is a Wellington grandmother and internationally published spirituality and social justice writer. Her books include *A Love Quilt: Later Faith Patches* (2020).



The Crossing

Let us cross over to Bethlehem
and see
if the war has ended.
For from the river to the sea
we cannot count the dead and displaced.
But that's too kind a word
like displaced in the race.

Jerusalem, place of bread,
there is none in Gaza
for old people
parents
children
and again a baby born on the West Bank
cries out to us.

© Anne Powell





Speak Up for the People of Gaza

Peter O'Keeffe says that diplomacy, morality and the media have failed the people of Gaza.

IMAGINE THIS HEADLINE: “Brits bomb Belfast to obliterate IRA — 24,000 dead, 50,000 injured, all hospitals flattened — children limbless and starving”.

You have to engage your imagination to comprehend the unbridgeable gulf that exists between Israel as an entity committing alleged war crimes, and other, more civilised, nations — even those with their warts.

But in the monochrome mainstream media you will not find any invitation to understand what horror is unfolding in Gaza.

Paradoxically, in 100 days, proportionately more has been written about the war in Gaza than any other

conflict. Overwhelmingly, it expresses horror and shock at the holocaust of death, injury, suffering and destruction perpetrated by Israel in its assault on the impoverished civilian population. But that's as deep as it gets.

That Israel has a moral right to seek out and bring to justice the criminals who committed the unfathomable outrages of 7 October 2023, no civilised person would deny.

But they have abysmally failed, in a spectacular misjudgement of methodology and technique, preferring war and revenge to investigation, intelligence, justice and punishment.

That they felt they could do this to Palestinians, and get away with it, regardless of the world or its assumed norms, has been a demonstration of impregnable arrogance, almost unequalled among the nations.

Even without averting to the elephantine “context” evoked by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres last October, the reasons why Israel can and will get away with it, lie in the systemic failure of diplomacy and mainstream media.

The failure of the United Nations to change anything meaningful on the ground echoes the failure of the League of Nations to restrain Italy in Abyssinia in 1935, a paving stone to what followed in 1939.

A major war in Egypt was indeed averted in 1956 by Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld and President Eisenhower, but it required giants like them, a willing General Assembly and a UN Emergency Force, all features currently extinct on the world stage.

The nations that comprise the UN — with some notable exceptions such as South Africa — have made a mockery of its mandate under the UN Charter “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war ... unite to maintain international peace and security ... ensure that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest ... and take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of ... acts of aggression.”

The failure of President Biden and Secretary of State Blinken has also been evident and almost wilful. With one eye on electoral donations and the other on their own intrinsic sympathies, they have failed to do anything concrete to bring about a ceasefire. Without their overt support for Netanyahu and, therefore, their covert support for alleged Israeli war crimes, the government of extreme right wing zealots would have fallen and something more intelligent would have replaced it.

Already standing in the graveyard, and evidently devoid of a functioning moral compass, Biden and Blinken have come as close as may be to supporting an “acceptable level” of death, suffering and destruction in Gaza, leaving it to the Israelis to determine when enough is enough.

Clearly, 24,000 is not yet enough for them.

Blinken’s shuttle diplomacy, whose effect has been merely to warn and threaten the Arabs from any form of intervention, has produced no material restraint on Israel.

This very failure has locked the US into a shameful level of complicity, while emboldening Israel to a sense of invulnerability and untouchability.

In a staggering exhibition of hypocrisy, the US has led other nations in emulating the Israelis by attacking Yemen from air and sea because of Houthi interference with commercial shipping. Criminal and pointless piracy though it is, it has not caused the loss of 24,000 seafaring lives.

The mainstream media has also abysmally failed the people of Gaza — and in doing so has failed the citizens of Israel who know not what they do to Palestine and its people.

A tiny number of well-vetted journalists are embedded with the Israeli military, reporting on the heroes in terms you might expect. But the Israeli government has, of

course, otherwise banned journalists’ entry to Gaza.

There are no Western journalists there. No one has snuck in under cover — after all they, too, might be murdered in the indiscriminate bombing, shelling, starvation and disease. All reporting is from the comfort of a hotel in Jerusalem. No western journalistic titans will make their names in Gaza as they did in Vietnam. Anyway, a satellite phone is a homing signal to a drone.

Who could criticise, but it shows how the Israelis have laboured, successfully, to control the narrative 100 per cent. Except for Palestinian journalists on the ground.

But, as far as the Western mainstream media is concerned, they are not publishable because they report things that must not be said.

It is reputedly claimed that between 80 and 100 journalists have been killed during the war — possibly one a day — striving to report things that must not be said — including Lebanese and Israeli journalists, though the overwhelming majority have been Palestinian.

Finally, a closing failure — that of the Albanese government of Australia. Here’s another impossible headline: “Turkey bombs Anzac Cove — claims terrorists hiding there — 24,000 dead”. Would Australia have nothing to say? Would it squirm to hide under some anodyne condemnation from as big a collective as it could anonymously squeeze into?

AND GAZA?

The Headquarters of the 2nd Australian Imperial Force was in Gaza. When the 8th Army won the Battle of El Alamein in November 1942, a fifth of the almost 14,000 dead, wounded or Missing IA, were Australians of the 9th Division holding the coast road and rail line. They held against ferocious attacks from Rommel. Australian wounded were treated at the 2/6th Australian General Hospital on Gaza Ridge. The Division departed from the old Gaza Airport in December 1942 for the war in New Guinea, leaving many Australians behind in the Gaza War Cemetery.

Gaza is part of Australian history — more recent and more relevant than Gallipoli, and it should matter more to us.

Has the cemetery been bombed by Israel? How would we know? And do we even care?

When Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs Penny Wong headed for Israel in late January, probably to echo the US request for an acceptable level of death and misery in Gaza, it is likely that her Foreign Affairs and Defence brief lacked most, if not perhaps all, of the information in this article.

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Image by Anas Mohammed/Shutterstock.com

Peter O’Keeffe is a Australian lawyer with a long-standing interest in hospice and palliative care.





No Place for Antisemitism

minister was a vocal opponent of Rabin and of two states in Palestine.

Netanyahu was charged with breach of trust, bribery and fraud in November 2019, and his trial commenced in May 2020. It is ongoing, but hearings are presently reduced to two days a week because of the Gaza conflict. Netanyahu is trying to pass laws to control the Supreme Court. It appears that if he is convicted, he would be able to determine the outcome for the court to deliver.

The killing of Israeli civilians and taking of hostages by Hamas militants in October 2023 was clearly unlawful. But so is Israel's subsequent and ongoing killing of Gaza civilians. The Israeli government can be justifiably condemned for its actions against Israel's Arab residents. There is a disturbing similarity in Israel's treatment of Palestinian Arabs, and the persecution of the Jewish people by Christians over the centuries. However, a clear distinction has to be drawn between the actions of the State of Israel and the Jewish people.

The Second Vatican Council said in *Nostra Aetate*: "The Church recalls ... that from the Jewish People sprang the Apostles, her foundation stones and pillars, as well as most of the early disciples who proclaimed Christ to the world ... True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; still, what happened in his passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today."

The same statement is applicable to the Jewish people in relation to the actions of the Israeli government in its present war against Hamas. New Zealand Jews cannot be held responsible for the deaths of Palestinian children in Gaza. There is no justification for demonstrating against Jews, as people, or against their synagogues. Likewise, New Zealand Arabs have no responsibility for the killing of Jewish civilians by Hamas militants. There is no justification for demonstrating against Muslims or Arabs because of the actions of Hamas.

Protesting the war in Gaza draws attention to the injustices in Palestine. Pope Francis expressed concern at the recent rise in acts of antisemitism and said: "This scourge must be eliminated from society, especially through education in fraternity and acceptance of others."

Jesus Unrolls the Book in the Synagogue by James Tissot Public Domain Brooklyn Museum NY

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ACCORDING TO MATTHEW'S Gospel, written at least 80 years after Jesus's death, Jesus was arrested and brought before Pilate. After enquiring into the charges, Pilate accepted that Jesus was innocent and wanted to set him free. However, the people insisted on crucifixion. Pilate was concerned about a possible riot and being reported to Caesar, so he acceded. He ceremoniously washed his hands of the decision telling the crowd he was "innocent of this man's blood, see to it yourselves." They replied: "His blood be upon us and on our children."

Within 40 years of Jesus's death, the Romans had sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. Then after an unsuccessful rebellion in 132 CE, the Jews were forbidden access to Jerusalem. The Jewish people were scattered throughout most of the then civilised world. Many lived in ghettos and virtually all were persecuted by Christians. The mistreatment of Jewish people continued throughout the centuries, culminating in the Holocaust in WWII.

The Jews never forgot their former homeland and every Passover dinner ended with the prayer: "Next year in Jerusalem." From the start of the 20th century Jews commenced returning to live in Palestine. The United Kingdom took Palestine from the Ottoman Empire in 1917 and issued the Balfour Declaration publicly pledging to establish a national home for Jews in Palestine.

On 29 November 1947 the United Nations voted to partition Palestine into Arab and Jewish states, to take effect on 14 May 1948. One of the two envisaged States proclaimed its independence as Israel and in the 1948 war involving neighbouring Arab States expanded to 77 per cent of the territory of mandate Palestine, including the larger part of Jerusalem. Over half of the Palestinian Arab population fled or were expelled.

International pressure for two states continues today. Yitzhak Rabin, the only Israeli prime minister to support two states, was assassinated by a Jewish right-wing activist in 1995. Benjamin Netanyahu, the present prime

Trust All Will Be Well

"BE STRONG AND courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

Those are the heartening words of Joshua 1:9-11. They speak to us today whenever we're tempted to give way to worry and fear. They are words to live by.

And so I clung to them as I planned my first trip away from New Zealand without Mike by my side. We had always wanted to visit Quebec at Christmas to experience its magical decorations and lights, to be part of a snowy Christmas again, as we had been for the three years we lived in Switzerland. But with Mike gone, it seemed an impossibility.

Then as I lay in bed getting over Covid and feeling a bit sorry for myself, I thought: Well, why not go on my own? Because, as friends pointed out, it's a very long way and we're only just starting to bask in a Kiwi summer, and it will be expensive and how will you navigate airports and buses and trains, and really?

Undeterred, I pressed on, found an Airbnb in the old part of Quebec City, arranged flights and trains and then something wonderful happened. I was speaking to my son Matthew just a fortnight before I left. Knowing he was neck deep in business, I hadn't mentioned my plans earlier. But when I did, he immediately said that he would come to Quebec, too.

And so for six precious days of my trip, I had my son. We walked for hours, ate and drank and savoured the city. He lives in Panama City so falling snow and low temperatures took him back to our time in Switzerland when he was just a lad, absorbing the language as easily as walking.

We visited the oldest church in Canada, the Basilica Notre-Dame of Quebec, resplendent in gold and so richly ornate that I wondered how a simple worshipper could feel at home in such a setting. Twice the church has burned and twice been rebuilt, but it has stood in the same setting for over 300 years. Every day we went there, to sit, to pray and, to be honest, to get warm after the outdoor icy conditions.

For the whole trip through Vancouver, Montreal, Quebec and Toronto, I felt loved and supported, even when



Matthew wasn't around. Sitting alone at lunch wasn't such fun, but always hovering around was Mike, reminding me of other holidays, telling me I've "got this" — even when my boarding pass and passport didn't match up and I'd been given Soo Ye Wen's boarding pass by mistake. A very deep breath later and it was sorted.

In fact, I only forgot those words of Joshua when I arrived back in New Zealand and in the queue for immigration discovered I'd left my phone on the plane. That's when the rubber hits the road, isn't it? Not when things are going smoothly and it's easy to feel strong and courageous. But when there's a slip up, a mistake, a poor decision. And then, panic, and all else goes out the window. Worst case scenarios play a constant loop along with great dollops of self-reproach. And then, finally, calm is restored, phone found and lesson learned. *Tout ira bien*.

Photo by Alin-Andersen on Unsplash

Rosemary Riddell lives in Oturehua, Otago. She is the author of *To Be Fair: Confessions of a District Court Judge* (2022).





Connecting to a Praying Community

Shanti Mathias talks to the creative manager of the prayer app *Pray As You Go* about using technology for prayer.

EMMA HOLLAND IS on the other side of the ocean, but I feel like I've met her before. I have, in a way: we've been praying together for years. Holland is the creative manager of *Pray As You Go* — a daily prayer podcast produced since 2006 by the Jesuits in the UK. It's morning where she is in a brightly lit room with the logo of her podcast on the wall behind her. In Auckland, it's a warm summer night and I'm listening to Emma on an audio signal converted to ones and zeros, ricocheting under the ocean from London to Aotearoa.

The question of the technology that connects Holland and me is material to her work. *Pray As You Go* could be seen as a contradiction: it tries to bring the silence and wholeness characteristic of Ignatian spirituality onto people's phones —

places that are more often home to noise and distraction.

I've been using *Pray As You Go* for years, and I've certainly experienced this dissonance. I speed up most of my podcasts so I can get the information faster, but when I push play on a *Pray as You Go* episode, I slow it down because information transfer is not the point. I get distracted easily on technology apps and find myself sending pictures of trees to my boyfriend, or replying to messages from a friend, but *Pray As You Go* captures me in prayer.

Digital Space for Prayer

"We make decisions based on what is going to distract people the least," Holland says. There are no ads interrupting the prayer. There are no subscriptions. The app doesn't have hundreds of notifications a day or a busy design. It seeks to translate

into digital form the ancient prayer practice of *Lectio Divina*. It provides space for journalling and hearing the Gospel passage of the day from the liturgical calendar.

Pray As You Go is different from a news app sending constant notifications of what is happening. "Scripts are written months in advance," Holland says. They're created by a team of spiritual directors and lay Jesuits, many of whom are women. Each episode has a song, a reading of the Gospel passage for the day, questions for reflection, a prompt for praying and ends with the traditional doxology "Glory be to the Father..." Sessions don't instantly respond to current events, but God still speaks.

"It's amazing to watch how it lines up with current events so often," Holland says. In the middle of

the Covid pandemic and the Black Lives Matter protests, Pray As You Go released an episode that invited listeners to pray for people who couldn't breathe. At that time people were reacting to awful events — chanting on streets, protesting. “[The writer] didn't know that this would

podcast is successful: as of 2020 it is used 30 million times a year.

“As we become less connected to ourselves, prayer is something embodied,” Holland says, quoting Ignatius of Loyola: “Leave the Creator to act immediately with the creature, and the creature with its Creator and

others may be on a bus, trudging around their neighbourhoods, or breastfeeding a child on the couch. “In the scripts we often ask people to pray for the others listening,” Holland says. “There is a unity with God.”

Even though those praying are distanced by thousands of kilometres, God is among us all, uniting us through headphones and wi-fi routers. We might be paramedics or parents, students or workers, in Auckland or London or beyond but when we push play, we are joined and we turn our hearts towards God.

The app seeks to translate into digital form the ancient prayer practice of Lectio Divina. It provides space for journalling and hearing the Gospel passage of the day from the liturgical calendar.

be happening when we recorded it,” Holland says. “It just came up at the right time, and that is a God thing.”

It's tempting to see technology as nothing to do with God. Certainly, the devices we use in order to listen to Pray As You Go are known to cause heartache — made of materials mined in unsafe labour conditions, manufactured in factories contributing to air pollution and enriching some of the world's biggest and most ruthless corporations. While this is true, it doesn't take away from the reality of prayer as something that can be embedded. Holland prays as she mixes audio files on her computer. Narrators and writers pray as they record new episodes. Musicians pray as they compose new melodies to direct attention towards God.

Digital Prayer Can Be Embodied

“We don't want to commodify prayer,” Holland says. Hundreds of thousands of people from around the world listen to each episode, and there are versions in Arabic, Ukrainian, Dutch and other languages. The team resists the hyper-personalised digital marketing that relies on the technology of surveillance capitalism. Pray As You Go has not yet dabbled in AI, even though there are hundreds of episodes to produce each year. “We see it as an offering,” Holland says. Despite the lack of targeted ads, the

Lord.” It might come to us through the sterile medium of silicon chips and lithium batteries working together to produce sound waves, but the Pray As You Go team intends the podcast to help listeners feel fully engaged with mind, heart and senses in the relationship of prayer. The questions posed in the sessions invite listeners to imagine themselves within the Gospel scenes and to respond to God's invitation with the whole of their senses.

“If we can responsibly use technology for prayer, then we should do it,” Holland says. Reinvention of the church's ancient prayer traditions doesn't mean just adding bridges and riffs to hymns. In the future, we might make prayer resources that are personalised with the use of AI, or that exist within an augmented reality space. God wants us to be able to pray where we are, and sometimes that means among the online shopping and calls from the bank and intriguing YouTube videos on our phones. When almost everything we encounter online is commercialised, the Pray As You Go app is a reminder of Divine creation and gratitude for belonging in it.

Using Technology to Pray Together

Perhaps the most powerful part of Pray As You Go is praying with a community. I may be quietly at home,

Shanti Mathias was runner up in the “Junior Feature Writer of the Year” 2023 for her journalism in *The Spinoff*.





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Jesus and the Quiet Place

Kathleen Rushton explains the significance of Jesus going to a quiet place in Mark 1:12-13.

TODAY OUR QUIET moments can be swallowed up easily. We find that the entertainment and information on our digital devices can be irresistible. We have to be deliberate about taking and enjoying quiet.

The hurry of our lives, especially in a family, can leave us with little time for reflection, for being aware of God's presence, for openness to what is good, beautiful and true in our world, for developing our inner being.

Just as we focus on Jesus as "the Truth", we can focus on Jesus as "the Way". By practising the Way of Jesus we can un-hurry our lives.

JESUS SOUGHT A QUIET PLACE

In Mark we read that immediately after his baptism Jesus headed straight into the desert. "The Spirit immediately drove him out in the wilderness (*erēmos*)" (Mk 1:12) where he remained for 40 days.

The Greek word *erēmos* does not necessarily mean desert, heat and sand. Its meanings include a deserted place, a desolate place, a solitary place, a lonely place, a quiet place and a wilderness.

John Mark Comer in *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in the Chaos of the Modern World*, suggests that following the Way of Jesus calls us to go frequently to "a quiet place".

PLACE TO DEVELOP STRENGTH

In all the Gospels we read that Jesus stops his work and goes to a quiet place. There he finds strength for his participation in mission. There, and only there, he is at the strength of his spiritual powers. He is alone with God.

Mark 1 tells about Jesus's first day on the job as the Messiah. He seems to be up early, teaching in the synagogue (Mk 1:21-28) and healing the mother-in-law of Peter (Mk 1:29-31). That evening, he is up late healing the sick and demonised (Mk 1:32-34). It is a very long day.

Then we discover that "in the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a quiet place (*erēmos*), and there he prayed" (Mk 1:35). Jesus could have slept in but he needed to be up early and away to a quiet place to prepare him for his ministry ahead.

Even after Jesus had been in a quiet place (*erēmos*) for 40 days, when he came back to Capernaum for one day of activity, he headed straight back afterwards to a quiet place to pray. For Jesus, this was an ongoing rhythm in his life.

JESUS'S RHYTHM OF LIFE

Mark's story continues. When Simon and his companions searched for Jesus and found him in a quiet place, they said: "Everyone is searching for you." Jesus is very clear in his reply: "Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came to do" (Mk 1:37-38).

Going to a quiet place was a priority for Jesus. He came out of the quiet grounded and centred, and with clarity about his identity and calling. He is in touch with God and with himself.

Later Jesus invites the disciples who were dead tired after a long stretch of working in the reign of God to: "Come away to a quiet place (*erēmos*) all by yourselves and rest a while" (Mk 6:31). The Gospel continues: "And they went away in the boat to a quiet place (*erēmos*) by themselves" (Mk 6:32).

John Comer interprets Jesus's invitation for today's readers as: "What you really need isn't a beer or a night out at the movies. What you really need is time alone with me. But to do that, we need to get away from all that noise and people."

WORKING WITH THE REALITY

As we know too well, our intention to withdraw from busyness can be subverted by everyday demands. The Gospel says that many had seen Jesus and the disciples leaving in the boat and they had hurried around the shoreline ahead of them. When they landed a large crowd was already there. The story says that it was "very late" and Jesus "had compassion on them" and fed them with loaves and fish.

Going to a quiet place was a priority for Jesus. He came out of the quiet grounded and centred, and with clarity about his identity and calling.

Life happens. People call on our time and attention. Our desire for a quiet evening can be sabotaged when our children cannot sleep. A friend is troubled and needs to chat. Like Jesus and the disciples, we often have to attend to immediate demands before we can rest.

The Gospel shows that the needs of others do not overtake the need to refresh ourselves. While he dismissed the crowd, Jesus made the disciples go ahead of him by boat to Bethsaida. Then he "went up the mountain to pray ... he was alone on the land" (Mk 6:46-47).

Withdrawing to a quiet place is part of the rhythm of Jesus's life and is an important theme in Mark's Gospel.

OUR OWN PRACTICE

This year Lent begins on 14 February. During the 40 days of Lent we might intentionally develop a practice of quiet reflection as following the Way of Jesus. It could be a place or a space to "come away" — a quiet time at home or in a nearby park; time alone before the morning family routine kicks in; while we're waiting for the bus; walking the dog or driving to work.

This quiet place time apart helps to orient our lives towards goodness — towards our participation in God's mission. We take the place and space time we have with gratitude. We slow down. Breathe. Come into the present.

Through this ancient yet ever-new practice we are accepting the Gospel invitation to stay alert to where God is moving in our lives and in our world and refreshing ourselves so that we are ready to respond as disciples of Jesus.

Mark 1:9-15: Reading for First Sunday of Lent 18 February

Jesus in the Desert www.freebibleimages.org

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



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Caritas on COP28



THE CONCLUSION OF the COP28 negotiations late 2023 left many feeling confused. While the “historic agreement” that finally mentioned fossil fuels has been lauded by some climate activists, it has been lambasted by others as overly weak and dominated by big oil interests.

The Good

Despite delivering far less than what is needed, there were some significant wins at COP28. The final statement agreed by the parties was the first ever to explicitly name fossil fuels as the source of climate change and call for transition away from them. It is astonishing it has taken this long but is a sign of real progress.

Although the statement does not force action by any parties, it does send a clear message to policymakers, investors and business that a transition away from fossil fuels is on the horizon, which will hopefully reinforce global efforts to reduce emissions.

The commitment to transitioning away from fossil fuels can be seen as a win for stewardship — kaitiakitanga.

The Bad

Despite the mention of fossil fuel transition the statement has come under fire, both for what it includes and what it doesn't.

The final text of the agreement has been criticised for including “loopholes” to allow further fossil fuel use — for instance, the list of emissions-reduction technologies includes Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS), an unproven and expensive technology that oil producers claim can offset the emissions from fossil fuels.

Further, the agreement explicitly recognises the role of “transition fuels” (considered to refer to natural gas) in the global energy transition, providing an excuse to legitimise the trillions of dollars globally being invested to scale up extraction of this fossil fuel.

As well as explicitly including these potential loopholes, the agreement fails to include strong enough language.

The agreement calls for a phase-out of fossil fuel subsidies, yet the same promise was made by the G20 in 2009, and last year the world spent \$13 million every minute on fossil fuel subsidies. While trillions of dollars are being invested to expand fossil fuel production, and emissions continue to increase, the phrase “transitioning away from fossil fuels” is seen as far too weak by many who have been working for a total phase-out.

The Association of Small Island States (AOSIS), which includes 15 Pacific Island nations, had lobbied hard for text referring to a phase-out of fossil fuels, yet

they were not even in the room at the time the final agreement was signed.

Caritas has been advocating for greater inclusion of Pacific voices at COP, and the failure to do this at COP28 has led to an inadequate final text.

The Uphill Battle

The significant achievements at COP28 have been attributed to consistent grassroots pressure by organisations across the globe, an example of the ground-up multilateralism Pope Francis discusses in *Laudate Deum*. Yet at the same time, corporate oil interests have clearly also influenced the final agreement.

What happens now will depend on how these forces interact with governments and communities across the globe.

As a civil society organisation, and generally as people of good will, we are faced with a serious uphill battle. The COP28 agreement gives us points we can use to pressure our governments into action to reduce emissions, phase out fossil fuels, and achieve climate justice.

Guided by Catholic Social Teaching values, we must emphasise subsidiarity — mana whakahaere and participation — nāu te rourou, nāku te rourou, centring and listening to the voices of those most affected by climate change, including our Pacific neighbours, through forums such as the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS).

We must continue the grassroots work ensuring our governments and communities prioritise stewardship, so that technologies such as CCUS are only used to actually reduce emissions, rather than becoming an excuse to facilitate further pollution.

Although the COP28 negotiations dominate the headlines, the struggle for climate justice takes place every day in communities across the globe and particularly in the Pacific. Your continued support underpins our climate advocacy, humanitarian and development work, preparing communities for climate change and dealing with its consequences.

For more on Caritas's advocacy work, including analysis of Loss and Damage at COP28, visit www.caritas.org.nz/advocacy-newsletter

Peter Lang works as an Advocacy Analyst for Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand. He is passionate about environmental justice, especially working towards emissions reduction and stopping seabed mining, with a focus on the Pacific.



Reviews

Soundings: Diving for Stories in the Beckoning Sea

By Kennedy Warne

Published by Massey University Press, 2023. (NZD 40)

Reviewed by [Diana Atkinson](#)

Soundings flows from Warne's early family life in the Bay of Islands, New Zealand. His later work as a marine scientist and journalist led to wide-ranging sea and diving experiences. The stories in *Soundings* provide a wealth of detailed information and passionately encourage us to embrace the beckoning sea in our care for creation. Warne challenges us to understand marine animals such as sharks, Harp seals, whales, crocodiles, sardines, dolphins and deltas, coral atolls and reefs. He writes about the massive impacts on marine life he has witnessed from climate change – important insights for us as island-dwellers.

He discusses the use and abuse of oceans and their inhabitants. For example, marine protection areas are positive but they're at risk of poachers. Should wild marine life become theme park circuses? Can Pacific atolls actually increase with climate change? Warne tries to dispel some marine myths and provides links to further information. However, myths about sharks and crocodiles still scare me.

Readers who care for the planet, sea-lovers and travellers will find *Soundings* informative, awe-inspiring and challenging. While I would have liked more photos and a few maps would have been useful, I found *Soundings* a fascinating and timely book. Thank you, Kennedy Warne. ★



The Parish As Oasis: An Introduction to Practical Environmental Care

By Kevin Hargaden & Ciara Murphy

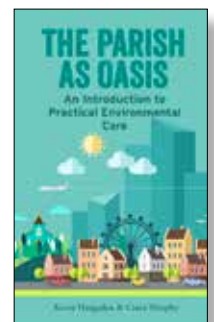
Published by Messenger Publications, 2023. (EUR 15)

Reviewed by [Lynne Toomey](#)

Drawing on the example of ancient Ethiopian forest churches which cultivated flourishing oases amid the surrounding desert, this little book captivated me with its vision of parish and Church as “oasis” – as life-generating and verdant, offering refreshment and hope and a shelter from the rapidification of the world. People don't create oases but they are called on to cultivate them, providing hospitality for all. What a rich image of Church! The oasis challenges us to live on the edge, on the margins and to be Church in such places. This resonated with me.

To inspire Christians to care for our common home and cultivate Church as an “oasis”, the authors share 20 practical experiments. They include community and eco initiatives, ideas for reclaiming the liturgical calendar and worship through an environmental lens. The authors intentionally don't dwell on climate catastrophe and biodiversity loss but remind us of what we have always been called to do – to live carefully in Earth, helping one another. There is joy and transformation in doing “something that is good and beautiful and true in itself”.

How can we joyfully foster an integral ecological way of being parish and Church? This inspiring book has plenty of ideas and encourages creative thinking. ★



Ahuahu: A Conservation Journey in Aotearoa New Zealand

By David Towns

Published by Canterbury University Press, 2023. (NZD 80)

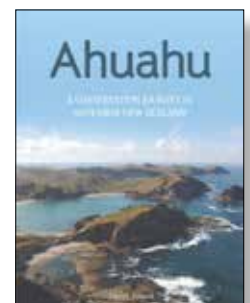
Reviewed by [Mary Betz](#)

Ahuahu is the largest of the Mercury Islands – just off Coromandel's east coast. As in much of Aotearoa, the island's human history devastated its native flora and fauna. Fortunately, recent eradication of invasive mammals and regeneration of native vegetation has made possible the return and proliferation of native birds like tūtūtiwhatu (NZ dotterel), kākā, kākārīki, korimako (bellbird), tūī, kererū, pāteke (teal), pakahā (fluttering shearwater) and grey-faced (oi), northern diving (kuaka) and Pycroft's petrels.

But the book is about far more than Ahuahu. It

chronicles the history and ecology of Aotearoa's offshore islands from the Kermadecs to the Subantarctic Islands, their terrestrial and marine ecosystems, and interactions among hundreds of bird, reptile and invertebrate species and their environments. It documents the intricacies of restoration, the controversies and questions that arise: who to consult, how to eradicate pests, which natives to reintroduce, how best to ensure their survival and how to monitor populations, especially tricky reptiles like skinks and invertebrates like weta.

Engaging, well-written, thoroughly referenced and beautifully illustrated, *Ahuahu* will appeal to anyone with a passion for ecology and conservation. ★



Reviews



The New World (2005)

Directed by Terrence Malick

Available on Netflix

Reviewed by Paul Sorrell

Now that it's so easy to select films from streaming services such as Netflix, it's interesting to consider the pathways that lead us to choose a particular movie. Stimulated by recent discussion of the Treaty of Waitangi, I've been reading about early contact between English settlers and the Indigenous peoples of North America. Nathaniel Philbrick's book *The Mayflower: A Voyage to War* throws up many parallels between New Zealand and New England, some depressingly familiar, others hopeful.

Terrence Malick's film about the first English settlers in Virginia raises the same issues — the Algonquian people are aware that their lands and way of life are already threatened — although his focus is on the unlikely love affair between Captain John Smith (Colin Farrell) and the young "princess" Pocahontas (Q'orianka Kilcher). In his voice-over, Smith conveys his hopes for a New World order characterised by honest labour, where all are equal and the poor are no longer exploited by a rapacious landlord class. He sees the Indians as guileless children of nature, their language lacking words for greed or deceit.

Yet *The New World* is not an issues-driven film, but lyrical, impressionistic, a celebration of what might have been and perhaps what might still be. Scenes are developed only to cut away to a black screen — the outcome left to our imaginations. Pocahontas is associated with beneficent nature, with images of warming sunlight and swirling water. A nature spirit in human form, she invokes the Mother goddess from whom she draws life. But if elemental, she is also childlike, playful and reticent; she hardly speaks, even as the language barrier falls away. Her dancelike movements as she mimes the words for sun and water to a wondering Smith are captivating.

The film ends, not in Virginia, but in the home counties of England, where Pocahontas creates a sensation as an "American princess" and meets King James himself with her new husband, John Rolfe, a decent and tender-hearted settler. Smith, whom she believed dead, had been pursuing his vocation as a restless explorer. Meeting him in England one last time, she asks: "Did you discover your Indies, John?" He replies: "I may have sailed past them." Their world-spanning love was destined not to be, and certainly not to be domesticated. Smith and Pocahontas (now Rebecca) are twin forces of nature whose romantic relationship could never have flourished, whether in the wilds of Virginia or England's tamer climes. ★



After the Party

TVNZ+ (TV series, 2023)

Reviewed by Shaun Davison

The prophetic voice echoing through history from biblical figures like Isaiah and John the Baptist to contemporary icons such as Whina Cooper and Greta Thunberg, holds a pivotal role in shining a light on the truth. However, delving into this truth exacts a toll not just on the prophet but also on those around them — their family and close friends. *After the Party* delves into this complex truth landscape, focusing on Penny (Robyn Malcolm) a relentless advocate for justice, haunted by an event she witnessed.

Penny's unwavering pursuit of justice concerns the harrowing issue of sexual abuse. This is her story and she is cast as a heroic figure. Yet, her actions, driven by urgency and emotion, often veer into impulsiveness. *After the Party* is uncomfortable viewing, shedding light on the grim reality of societal silence around abuse. While the series explores the brutality of family dynamics, we are invited to reflect on how similar dynamics work within wider society and of course within the Church.

Critically acclaimed as New Zealand's best drama series, *After the Party* holds a mirror to unsettling societal truths. This makes for an essential, albeit challenging, viewing experience. ★



Cross Currents

by Jane Higgins

MY FAVOURITE PHOTO of the summer is of my great-niece (aged four) visiting whānau on Rēkohu/Chatham Islands. The photo captures her and her cousin in a kapa haka pose. It's a picture of fierce joy.

I know that I'll return to this photo often this year. The fierce joy of children who are comfortable and confident in their heritage is something special. It shouldn't be, of course. It should be normal. But around the globe this year, millions of children will be denied this by the violence of war, extreme weather, poverty and the displacement these forces impose on their families.

This year will be hard for many in Aotearoa. We face policies that reward the well-off at the expense of those in poverty, and that foster hostility towards te reo Māori while threatening the progress made towards acknowledging the injustices of historic land dispossession.

This month, the commemoration of the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi will be telling for our political leaders. And for our church leaders too.

In an environment in which hostility to all things Māori is being

fostered by some, what is the role of the churches? Bearing witness to history is one role. The churches — Catholic, Wesleyan/Methodist and Anglican — were very influential at the signing of Te Tiriti. They were influential later, too, at the time of the 1981 Springbok tour, when Māori were pointing out that there was racism at home as well as abroad.

Now comes a further, pivotal moment for our country. How will the churches respond?

The Methodist Church is currently engaged in a process of telling the land stories (kōrero papatupu whenua) of its properties. This involves delving into and understanding its history. In my hometown of Ōtautahi/Christchurch this history includes the profound injustice of the land purchase under the Kemp Deed.

In 1848 the Crown purchased 13.5 million acres of land in Te Wai Pounamu, with a promise in the Deed of "ample" land for tangata whenua as well as guaranteed access to their dense network of mahinga kai (food gathering) routes and sites across the region. None of this was honoured by the Crown. Ngāi Tahu should have

received at least 10 per cent of the land, 1.3 million acres. They received 6,000 acres. And their access to mahinga kai, which was essential to their livelihood, was denied and destroyed.

Land dispossession like this took place across the country — sometimes by war, sometimes by law. The recompense made through the claims process of the Waitangi Tribunal is a small fraction of the actual loss endured across many generations.

Now we face the denial of this history by our political leaders and by other loud voices in our media. This denial is pernicious, feeding on ignorance and cultivating fear. Many of those who fall prey to such fear are older Pākehā, including parishioners in our churches. As active participants in our country's bicultural history, the churches could play a vital role in speaking truth to power and in addressing this ignorance and fear.

With climate instability, inequality and poverty all on the rise there are certainly things to fear in the year to come. Honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi is not among them. ✧



TUI MOTU InterIslands
The Independent Catholic Magazine Limited

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

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

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Letters to the Editor



INCLUDE RELIGION IN AOTEAROA HISTORY

Michael King's *The Penguin History of New Zealand* constitutes a superb taonga of reflection and analysis, based on formidable research and familiarity with all the big issues. But I'm puzzled that this empathetic historian gives so little attention to religion. Have church people been confined to a remote siding of our national history, wasting such skills and energies as I and others have on some irrelevant spiritual enterprise? Given the undoubted stature of Michael King and that his perspectives are echoed by so many of his colleagues, it's by no means a rhetorical question.

Those of us who are churchgoers know that a worshipping community offers us an assurance of belonging, a conviction that life has meaning and that, in the eyes of eternity, we matter. I think of the mute testimony of the serried ranks of our church

archives to the churches' care of the orphan and the aged, to their work for social justice, for peace. I think of the willingness of people to volunteer to run youth clubs and bible classes, to visit the sick and lonely.

We need, then, to take account as exegetes of the past not only of the giant figures like Rutherford Waddell, Molly Whitelaw or Suzanne Aubert, but of the input of countless local wives, mothers, youth-leaders, and so-called ordinary lay people and clergy who kept the fires of hope alive in dark times and through times of prosperity. The heartbeats of past generations may be hard to measure, but without attention to the emotional life of our nation little else makes sense.

Peter Matheson, Ōtepoti/Dunedin

SEXUALITY AND LAY COMMON SENSE

Indirectly Martha Heiszer's timely article on sexuality (TM Nov 2023) emphasises the importance of context. Traditional Catholic teachings on sexuality evolved and were formulated in an age of ignorance. Sexuality is a new area of study and research. Common sense demands that traditional teachings be reconsidered and reformulated in the light of the new science.

The soundness of judgement of the authors of traditional Church teachings must also be critiqued and reassessed. Already Cardinal Ratzinger's action and inaction as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) [now the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith] from 1981 to 2005 are being subjected to severe and very public scrutiny. Geoffrey Robertson has pointed out in his book *The Case of the Pope: Vatican Accountability for Human Rights Abuse* that in 1981 the bishop of Oakland appealed to CDF for the laicisation of a priest named Kiesle, whom Robertson describes as "an incorrigible child rapist". Ratzinger delayed four years in dealing with this case. He then decided that Kiesle should continue in his ministry with children. Kiesle continued. He reoffended. This was not an isolated case. There were many others ignored or dismissed. When a cardinal made such appalling errors of judgement in matters of child rape, can his judgement on other areas of sexuality be trusted? Doubtless some theologians will still insist on the supremacy of the Church's magisterium. Has the day come when lay people need to rely on their own magisterium, their own very reliable common sense?

Jim Howley, Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland

Reviews

The Platform: The Radical Legacy of the Polynesian Panthers

By Melani Anae

Published by Bridget Williams Books, 2020. (NZD 18)

Reviewed by Sandy Leaitua

I am so pleased to have read this book. It has given me an understanding of a turbulent period in New Zealand's history surrounding Polynesian immigration.

In *The Platform*, Melani Anae tells the story of the Polynesian Panthers and the Dawn Raids of the 1970s in an open, honest and personal way, connecting it to her childhood and culture in a narrative that makes the reader want to know more.

As a young palagi (European) woman in 1970 married to a first-generation Samoan immigrant, I was aware of the

problems some of my husband's family experienced in the "dawn raid" period. Although we experienced racist attitudes towards us as a young mixed-culture couple in our town, I was unaware of the extent of racism that those in bigger Polynesian communities experienced.

The Platform opened my eyes; it is incredibly informative. I was impressed to learn of the Polynesian Panther Platform programmes to empower and educate the children of immigrant families and the wider population about systemic racism.

I recommend *The Platform* to young people of all cultures so they, too, can be inspired now, and in the future, to be inclusive of all people who call Aotearoa home. ★



For What It's Worth

"This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I set before you life and death, blessings and curses" (Deut 30:19a).

IT IS GOOD TO celebrate life especially when it appears as light in darkness.

Recently I was treated to a wonderful experience kayaking on Lake McLaren and its tributary streams to view the display of glowworms. The evening journey starts by paddling into the growing darkness and ever-narrowing watery winding ways to be surprised by tiny bright lights as they appear on the flora-covered banks. Just a few at first and then the number growing exponentially with every second stroke of the paddle, until everything is decorated in what might be described as a terra firma version of the milky way. The lights are sure signs of life as they are a vital part of the life cycle of *noke maramara* or *Arachnocampa lumina*, commonly known as the glowworm.

Juxtaposing this experience of light in darkness was the illuminating commentary of our guide who demonstrated equal eloquence in both the precise scientific explanation of the life cycle of *Arachnocampa lumina* and the revealing of the whakapapa of *noke maramara* through a passionate retelling of the familiar Ranginui and Papatūānuku creation story. This mythology references the same "heavens and earth" called as witnesses in the Deuteronomic text and demonstrates again the importance of enabling "light" to enter "darkness".

The guide (whom I proudly claim as my nephew) is a young Pākehā male who was equally comfortable in pronouncing the Latin-based scientific names as he was the te reo Māori names and told both "stories" with the same enthusiasm, delight and deep respect for the natural environment. This, too, brought light into my darkness.

After the change of government, I had been depressed and angry by the turning back of policies and

decisions that have aided bicultural gains, hard-won in Aotearoa over the last several decades, especially as these pertained to the renaissance of te reo Māori and the growing respect for, and understanding of, Te Tiriti. Perhaps, as I feared, all may not be lost by the racist back-peddalling of the new government leaders. Maybe the attitudes and values of younger generation(s) will enable the survival of te reo and even a truly harmonious, bicultural future for these motu ātaahua and their inhabitants — whether human or "worm-like"!

Let's hope this light shines through our Te Tiriti o Waitangi celebrations this year and minds are more open to te ao mārama than to the darkness of domination and division, ensuring enlightened and harmonious progress for all.

"Now choose life, so that you and your descendants may live" (Deut 30:19b).

Haumi ē, hui ē, tāiki ē! ✨

Bruce Drysdale is the chaplain at ABI, a facility for rehabilitation for people with serious brain injuries, and combines floristry with his role as a wedding and funeral celebrant.



Our last word

Like ferns unfurling in the forest
open our hearts and minds
to the responsibilities of Te Tiriti
for the common good of Aotearoa.



From the Tui Motu Team