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# Tui Motu

## InterIslands

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### THROUGH LENT TO EASTER

WAYNE TE KAAWA, NEIL DARRAGH,  
MIKE RIDDELL, SANDRA WINTON & OTHERS

### ADDRESSING THE TRUTH

SUSAN CONNELLY,  
SANJANA HATTOTUWA, REB HALABI

### LITTLE GIFT OF LOVE

JAMES LYONS

From Darkness Comes Life  
Mai I te Pouri ki te Ora

INDEPENDENT CATHOLIC MAGAZINE

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#### COVER PHOTO

*Making Fire in the Darkness*  
by Toa Heftiba on Unsplash

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

From Darkness Comes Life

WE LIVE IN a rhythm of night and day with roughly equal hours of darkness and light every 24 hours. We take it for granted that daylight allows us to get on with our lives, just as we expect darkness to relax and rejuvenate us for the coming day. So it was a revelation when our planet was photographed from space for the first time only last century, to see Earth as a small light in the vast darkness of the universe. Our little planet was born and evolves in the deep blackness of space. Earth doesn't produce daylight. We are reliant on the sun deeper in the universe to give us the light for life.

Astronauts have described their emotional response to seeing Earth from space. Michael Collins on *Apollo 11* which landed on the moon in 1969 said: "I had a feeling it's tiny, it's shiny, it's beautiful, it's home and it's fragile." Two years later Edgar Mitchell on *Apollo 14* described his seeing Earth as an "explosion of awareness" and that he had an "overwhelming sense of oneness and connectedness ... accompanied by an ecstasy ... an epiphany." They were speaking of falling in love with Earth and Earth's community from this experience.

The darkness of space changes the perspective of Earth for space travellers. Ninety-year-old William Shatner, who had starred in the *Star Trek* series, was unprepared for the reality when he travelled on the 2021 *Blue Origin* spaceflight. He said he felt grief because he saw more clearly the slow death of Earth and life on it. "It was among the strongest feelings of grief I have ever encountered. The contrast between the vicious coldness of space and the warm nurturing of Earth below filled me with overwhelming sadness. Every day, we are confronted with the knowledge of further destruction of Earth at our hands ... It filled me with dread. My trip to space was supposed to be a celebration; instead, it felt like a funeral."

We know the damage humans are doing to Earth. We've been warned that we have to change because, as space travellers have verified, our planet is tiny, finite and fragile in the immensity of the universe. With all our hearts we want love and life to reign in Earth for generations to come. It's no wonder then that our primary Easter symbol is a flame bursting forth in the darkness of night. It's echoed in the rising sun and the popular treats of Easter eggs and hot cross buns. We celebrate Christ's rising from death as a birthing of life and love from creative darkness. And we hope in God's potential to transform us into Christs — lovers of all, promoters of life and resisters of evil.

We are grateful for the contributors to this 280th issue of *Tui Motu* magazine. Their research, reflection, faith, art and craft provide perspectives on the gifts, reality and symbolism of life from darkness.

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



# THROUGH DEATH TO LIFE

*Treasures from the writing of  
Neil Darragh, Mike Riddell RIP  
and Sandra Winton provide  
food for thought as we move  
through Lent to Easter.*

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## MEDITATION FOR LENT

THE CHANGE THAT we seek in Lent begins best from a sense of thanksgiving. It is the sense of the energy of God in and around us that is the starting point for renewal. When his public mission begins, Jesus calls his disciples to conversion out of a sense of the gracious energy of God's reign already emerging around them. Knowing what we need to change emerges from knowing for what we are thankful. It is the open heart that counts more than the bowed head.

Christian life is lived out in the four dimensions of our human nature: personal, ecclesial, social and environmental.

We can best treat Lent then as a season of thanksgiving and change in four dimensions of our lives: personal, ecclesial, social, and environmental.

In the *personal dimension*, looking into ourselves, we begin by paying attention to the gifts for which we are thankful, our personal qualities and talents, gifts of God, acts of grace and graciousness that others have done for us or we to them. Emerging from and constricting these gifts are the things we know we need to change. A modern way of dealing with this is to look at addictions (vices essentially), where legitimate desires and hopes have become inordinate and self-destructive. Probably most of us have several of these but some are more self-destructive than others: addictions to drugs, alcohol, nicotine, sex, food, work, accumulation, new

experiences or (more subtly) an attitude of dependency, a desire for honour, or a compulsion to control others. Generally these are about an overdose of self-indulgence, self-promotion or self-interest. The tradition of "giving up something for Lent" has been an attempt to deal with these in the form of increased self-control.

The *ecclesial dimension* is about how we relate to other people within the Christian community. Firstly, what do we have to be thankful for in this community? A community in which there is trust and common belief perhaps. A supportive network of people? The generous, dedicated or compassionate people that we admire and wish we could imitate? Leadership that builds community and communicates a common vision?

In each of our church communities there will be reasons for thankfulness, and we may find the Holy Spirit in unexpected places. But growing out of that thankfulness will also be invitations to change.

This is a community that often fails. It will be easy to pick instances of failure and defect — forms of abuse or bullying, financial impropriety, prejudice, cynicism, or simply incompetence. Authority in the church can be a problem. Does it fail to empower others, or to function collaboratively and look more like attempts at control? A failure of vision is another self-defeating defect where "business as usual" reigns and the church community is focused on looking after itself in ways it has always done. We may ourselves be part of those failures, or we may be





complicit, however regretfully, in the failures of others.

The *social dimension* is our involvement in the wider society around us, beyond the Christian community. We can be thankful that we live in a largely peaceful society, that we live in a democracy not based on a principle that some people exist simply to serve others. We have many generous people and organisations working for the good of others and for a better society. Ours is not just a hedonistic, self-serving society.

Yet the defects in our society are also evident. The gap between wealthy and poor with the suffering it causes is now obvious and documented. Our attitudes and our politics allow this to continue. The issues of social injustice immediately close to hand in our society, and even more desperately overseas, call us to a change in attitude and action.

The *environmental dimension* of our lives is our interdependence with the other beings, especially the living beings, which make up the planet Earth. We can be thankful today for the "green" movements that have become part of our politics which have now become mainstream. We can be thankful for the information that the environmental sciences have made available. We are called to change our relationship to our environment. Many elements go into

the human causes of climate change. Many of these we can do something about, but not without a change of lifestyle and public support for more environmentally-friendly corporations and public policy.

Lent is about our ability to be thankful and out of this to see the things we need to change. It invites us to find solutions by the time we get to Easter. It is about those dimensions of our lives that make us fully living persons within the church, in society and as participants in God's wider creation. "Live simply that others may simply live." *Neil Darragh* ✧

## MEDITATION FOR HOLY WEEK

DEATH CREEPS INTO our lives by stealth. Every loss, every goodbye, every ending brings us to a small grief — little deaths practising for the big one. The essence of dying is the art of letting go. It does us no harm to practise relinquishment before getting to the final act.

Without witnessing death, without knowing that it is an essential part of life, we too easily become reluctant to embrace it. We teeter on the edge like terrified bungy jumpers, refusing to take that final plunge into the unknown. Anxiety is not the most helpful of companions to accompany our dying.

This is where faith comes into the equation. The faith in the goodness

of life, however that may be framed. It is the belief that nothing good is wasted, and that our own existence is a part of the good.

At the centre of our Gospel story is the strange idea that neither death nor the forces of death were enough to subdue the abundant life that was in Christ. This is not so much a celebration of life after death, as the recognition of a life that is so magnificent that death cannot defeat it. That life begins here and now. Only those who cleave to life and explore its outer reaches can feel confident enough to lay it aside when the time comes. Leaping into the mystery of death comes more naturally when we have learned to trust the everyday goodness of Life.

Letting go asks that we release what is familiar in the hope of what is better. By definition, there is no way of knowing the outcome until the deed is done.

The final transition is the most demanding of them all. It bids us relinquish our hold on what has seemed so substantial and to do it with gentle confidence. It seeks our deep trust.

The best preparation for a good death is a good life. A life that is generous, adventurous, humble, festive, accepting, honest and loving. Perfect love casts out fear. We may not know how we will die or the consequences of it. But we can have ultimate trust in the One who has allowed us to experience life. We travel only deeper into that mystery. *Mike Riddell RIP* ✧

## MEDITATION FOR THE VIGIL OF EASTER

I SAW LIGHT made in the hands of people in a small village in Vanuatu that had a bamboo church and a cluster of thatch huts lived in by mainly first-generation Christians. We explained the rites and the people immediately seized on the symbol of the Easter fire. We could make the fire, they said.

It was pitch black in the large clearing in front of the church. Everyone gathered around two men who crouched with sticks prepared.



In the faint moonlight I could see the whites of the eyes of awestruck children. Even the adults were witnessing something rarely attempted now. The men twirled their sticks and slowly the tiniest glow of red appeared. The size of a pinhead or a seed, it was tenderly cupped, blown on and tipped onto crumbled dry leaves. Gentle breath nourished it until the minute flame caught. First tiny twigs and then larger were brought to the glow until everyone had a burning brand. We walked around the whole clearing holding our flaming bamboos. We pushed back the darkness.

Light is a central symbol of Easter. Christ is depicted liturgically as the sun that rises over the horizon onto a dark world. His rising is enacted symbolically in the lighting of a candle. One symbol is drawn from nature, the other created by human hands.

Perhaps it is like this, too, in our experience of the divine. Sometimes it is given to us, surrounds us, unbidden and regular as the alternation of light and dark. Love, life, healing fall on us and over us and we can do no more than open our eyes and be grateful. The kindness of people, everyday courage, small gestures of understanding, the daily devotion of parents, the miracle of children, the beauty of a flower, a cloud or a turning wave. We do not create these — we merely receive.

Then there are the times when divine light kindles in our hands. We may not be aware of it but we can be co-creators of the light that pushes back the darkness. A gentle word, a small gesture, a holding faith, a refusal to give up, planting a seed, feeding a bird, a step to forgiveness. One day we are blowing on the flame; on another we are receiving it from someone else. It is fragile.

The darkness is immense — war, poverty, exploitation and despoiling of the planet, human greed and cruelty. It can take a powerful act of faith to keep blowing on the tiny embers of hope



in the world. It would be easy to feel bleak and powerless. But that would be to give too much weight to forces we have no hope of controlling. I find myself saturated with reasons not to succumb to negativity.

Living well is a strategy. Rosemary and I have experienced our share of suffering and loss in our years together. However, rather than feel aggrieved, we have made a choice to live as generously as we can. In doing so we've found delight and wonder that encroaches on our daily existence. But mostly because Christ rose from the dead, and we are enfolded in Christ.

Richard Rohr says: "Prayer is not primarily saying words or thinking thoughts. It is, rather, a life stance. It's a way of living the Presence, living in

awareness of the Presence, and even of enjoying the Presence."

Too often I suspect we regard the resurrection as some sort of magic trick to be applauded from the sidelines. It is so much more than that. It is the recognition that the whole of the universe has shifted in the favour of humanity, and that whatever may befall any of us along the path, all will be well. The challenge becomes to live as if this is true, rather than drowning under the stormy swells of doom and gloom.

Our mission, should we choose to accept it, is to show forth in our lives the beauty with which God has touched us. May Easter resonate in our hearts. **Mike Riddell RIP** ✧

and believing that death and darkness are not the ultimate destination. The hand of God can sweep over the heavens and entrust itself into a human palm. The light of Christ is both immense and fragile. It soars above us and is passed among us. This is Easter.

**Sandra Winton OP** ✧

## MEDITATION FOR EASTER

THE TIME OF Easter is a celebration of transformation. In the midst of darkness, loss and disillusionment comes the resurrection — the shining light of hope sidelining death and despair. Through Christ, we look backwards on history from the other side of all that would distort life and joy.

There is ample cause for despair

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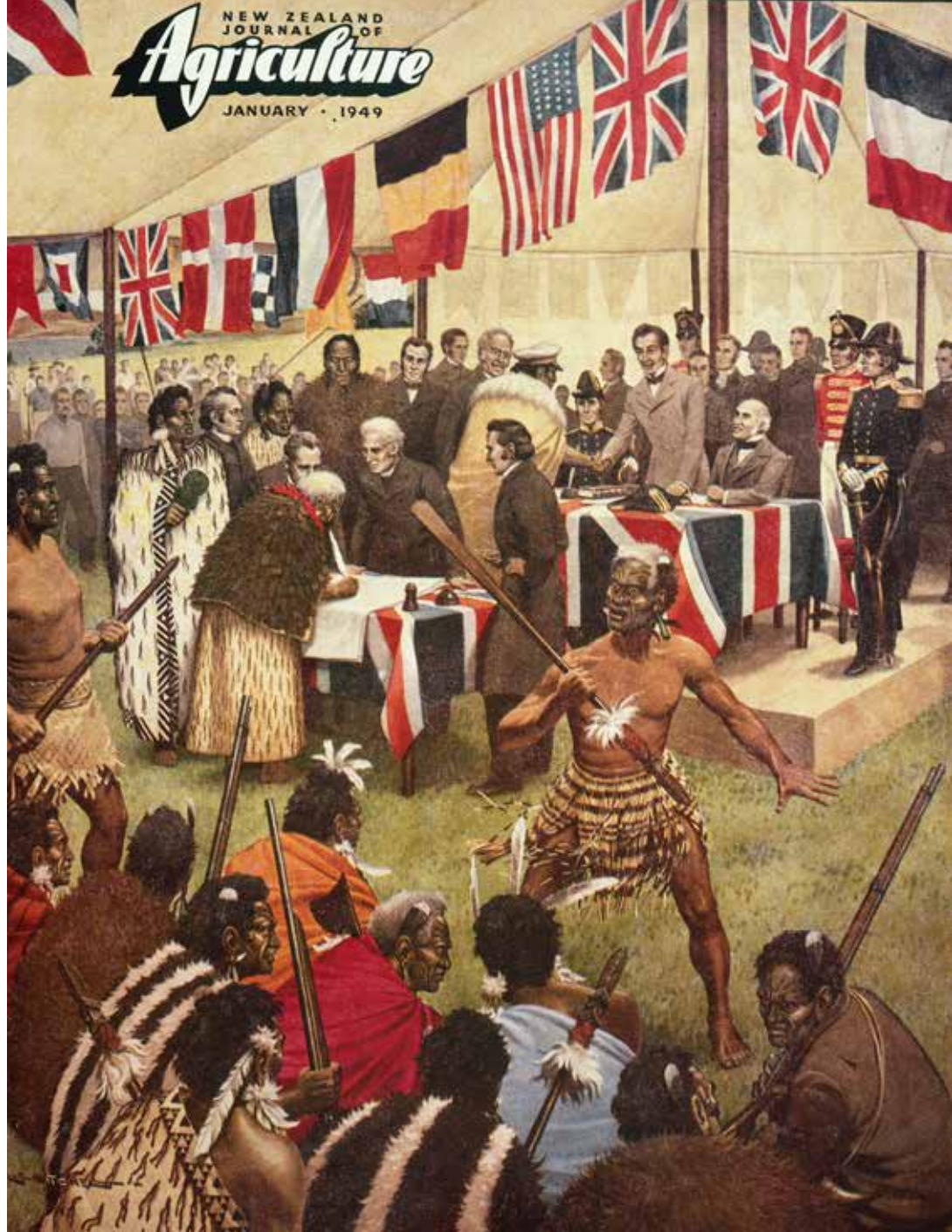
(L-R) Sandra Winton OP  
Neil Darragh  
Mike Riddell RIP





# Love *Must* Live On

Wayne Te Kaawa reflects on our challenge this Easter to love like Christ in response to the threats to te Tiriti o Waitangi relationships in this country.



SINCE THE FORMATION of the coalition government last year, the Treaty of Waitangi, co-governance and te reo Māori/Māori language have been front and centre of the national consciousness. The government has outlined its plans for the Treaty, te reo Māori and power-sharing for the next three years, prompting massive opposition from iwi and Tangata Tiriti.

My personal response was: “Here we go again.” Inside, my wairua felt tired and weary and I doubted that I had the energy for another campaign, another protest, another hīkoi/march. I was heartened by the fact that the younger generation have taken up the struggle and have been quite visible and vocal and prepared to take responsibility for the response. If the young call for support to sign a petition or join a hīkoi to parliament, I will find the energy to rally to their call as this is about their future. At my age I am

moving into becoming an ancestor of the past; they are the ancestors of the future.

## Scripture Showing a Way

Historically Māori have always turned to the Bible in their fight for justice. Te Whiti and Tohu from Parihaka found inspiration in the words of Isaiah to turn their swords into ploughshares (Is 2:4). Their biblically-inspired response did not stop the Taranaki land confiscations of the 1800s. In fact, they were imprisoned without trial for their actions.

The response by Rua Kenana to the threat of Tūhoe land being taken over for mining and European settlement was to build the New Jerusalem — a new community, giving people a model of how to live a life consistent with the word of God even during land confiscations.

As a way forward after land confiscations, WWI and the influenza epidemic, Rātana tried to unite people under the

Christian God and established the Rātana Church with the Bible and the Treaty of Waitangi as foundations.

Many Christians have found inspiration in the words of Jesus. In Matthew 24:35 Jesus says: “Ko te rangi me te whenua e pahemo, ko aku kupu ia e kore e pahemo: Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” We could rephrase this verse to say: “Politicians and their policies will come and go, but te Tiriti, te reo Māori and iwi will remain.”

A rallying call at this time has become: “Toitū te Tiriti: The Treaty will remain.” I remember discussing Mt 24:35 in a bible study group and someone saying: “Toitū te kupu a te Karaiti: The words of Christ remain.”

### Challenge and Cost of Love

What are the words of Jesus Christ that remain and have deep significance for us in these current tensions? They are of love. I think of the context of Jesus's life. He was a young Jewish man living under colonisation. His country of Israel was forcibly occupied by the Roman Empire and his people were suffering under its harsh regime. Anyone who stepped out of line was punished. The punishment reserved for those judged rebellious was crucifixion.

And there were also groups who profited financially and politically from Roman rule and who lived off the misery of those already downtrodden.

During his ministry Jesus was pressured by those who opposed Roman rule to lead a revolution, even by force if required. Jesus's response to all this craziness was to give a new commandment recorded in John 13:34-35: “Love one another as I have loved you.” This, Jesus said, is the way that “everyone will know that you are my disciples.”

### Love Needs Response

This Easter Jesus's message of love is our command for responding to the injustices in Aotearoa New Zealand.

I am not sure that I can love those who want to change the Treaty of Waitangi. I know that I cannot find any love within me towards those who are anti-te reo Māori. They say that you don't have to like someone to love them. I think that is cheap slogan-theology. I simply don't like or love those who are anti-Treaty, anti-Māori language or who want to shut me out of decision-making. Neither will I be forced to like or love those who are anti-me.

Jesus gives the words and the model; he walked his talk. He prayed for those who persecuted him. On the cross he asked forgiveness for those who put him there after mocking and torturing him. His commitment to his words was so strong that he was prepared to suffer death.

There is nothing radical there as many people have suffered an unfair death for what they believe in. What is radical is that Jesus's love for God and for us was so total that he rose from the dead. Now that, in young people's language, is “wild”!

This total commitment reminds me of who Jesus is and who I am. Jesus is not me and I am not Jesus. Because I can't forgive, like or love those who are so anti-Māori, who then do I ask Jesus to forgive? Do I ask forgiveness for those who want to harm my world, or do I ask forgiveness

for myself because I am refusing to love those who want to deconstruct my world?

### Church to Support the Treaty

Regardless of how you look at history, the Churches had a major say in Waitangi negotiations in 1840. Principally the Anglican, Methodist and Catholic Churches were present – speaking, explaining, educating, debating, translating and advocating. Somehow, over time, the Church had been worked out of the Treaty relationship and it has become specifically focused on the Crown-Iwi legal and political relationship.

We've forgotten that words and models were taken from the Bible and written into the Treaty. The notion of governor was based on the model of governor operating in

Do I ask forgiveness for those who want to harm my world, or do I ask forgiveness for myself because I am refusing to love those who want to deconstruct my world?

Israel during the day of Jesus. The Treaty was referred to by Rangatira/chiefs as a biblical covenant.

Now as I watch the response to the government policies, I am heartened by the number of young Christians, Māori and Pākehā, who are taking the lead and claiming a voice to ensure that the command of Jesus to show love, no matter how difficult, is not forgotten.

### Solidarity Is Loving Like Jesus

Protesting and visibly standing up for our rights under the Treaty is something many Māori know about, but we grow tired of constantly having to defend our hard-fought gains. It makes me realise how vulnerable we are still and how vulnerable the future of our children and grandchildren is.

It is for their future that I am prepared to go on one more hiko, one more protest, gather signatures for yet another petition. It is for their future that I am prepared to ensure that the words of Jesus to love as Jesus has loved us, do not pass away but live on, inspiring us to be more than who and what we are. ✨

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*A Reconstruction of the Signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, 1840 (1949)*  
by Leonard Cornwall Mitchell (1901-1971) Ref:A-242-002 Alexander  
Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

Wayne Te Kaawa is an ordained Presbyterian minister and former Moderator of the Presbyterian Māori Synod and Ahorangi of Te Wānanga a Rangi.







# Celebrating Easter in Aotearoa

**Peter Matheson** *suggests that a lack of public discussion about Christian Easter is emptying it of meaning in this country.*



FOR WEEKS NOW, stacks of Easter eggs, Easter bunnies and hot cross buns have tempted us in the supermarkets. They're "Easter" goodies but most shoppers are unaware of the reason for them or of their religious symbolism. For many families the Easter egg hunt is an amusement dissociated from the story of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The truth seems to be that the meaning of Easter is impenetrable for most in society. We should be cautious, though, about assuming that the fault is wholly theirs. How imaginative have we been in communicating the Easter message?

Kiwi mystic James K Baxter tried to communicate something of the mystery of Easter in his *Song to the Lord Jesus*:

"Lord Jesus, you died in pain on the cross  
You rose again from the dead  
Now you live within us  
You live our lives and die our deaths with us."

Baxter's words are so simple, so direct, yet without an

understanding of the foundational Christian stories they make no sense to many in New Zealand now. And why? Well, for one thing it's breaking the great tabu by talking about death and also it's too "religious". The great no-no!

## Through Death to Life

A friend of mine works tirelessly and imaginatively with the people of the street. After celebrating a simple Eucharist in their shabby mission hall, one old man asked: "Is all this only for us broken people?" (He had noticed that people with cars, homes and a secure future seemed disinterested in religion.) That question lingers: "Is Easter only for broken people?"

"I set before you," Moses declared so long ago, "death and life. Choose life." The trouble is, before we can choose life we have to face up to death.

The Swiss poet and preacher Kurt Marti, writes about the *Empty Tomb*.

"A grave dives down



deeper  
than those who  
dig it  
Awesome,  
This head start of death  
Deepest of all, though  
the grave  
that buried death  
Awesome,  
its head start to abundant life”

### Cross Has Symbolic Meaning in Our Lives

Making our way through suffering, pain and death, as our Easter pilgrimage expects us to do year after year, is a tough ask. It raises gnarly questions about the bitterness of death and what lies behind it. It talks about costly sacrifice for others. We have to be gentle with ourselves and understanding of our friends who may shrink away from it.

Our faith, after all, is not a list of beliefs we can proudly tick off. It is often walking a thorny track taken by the martyrs and saints before us, and which we are privileged to follow to the end, death, but which is not the end. For many of our contemporaries, the cross is a marker in a cemetery or along a motorway. How are they to grasp that death, the cross, carries what Marti called a *vorsprung*, a head start to life?

### The Cross Calls Us to Resist Evil Together

It is perhaps no accident that Handel's oratorio *Messiah* remains for many their best access to Easter. Nor is it an accident that Baxter reaches out to us in song. The pragmatic stance of Kiwis, admirable in many ways, does not take us anywhere when approaching Easter. It does not include the capacity for a tragedy of Greek or Shakespearean dimensions.

Somewhere along the way we seem to have lost contact with our Judaic inheritance — the call of Moses and the prophets to face up to and resist evil in all its political, cultural and social manifestations. How else can we understand Jesus's whole ministry and mission as incarnating a better way?

I have a hunch that our postmodern society with its tendency to relativise everything, finds it hard to come to terms with the awesome commitment of the biblical Suffering Servant. Pragmatists tend to shuffle away from the problem of evil.

They are probably reacting to the long dominance of evangelical and Jansenist concepts of salvation and sin. They highlight sin and salvation as all about me as an individual and not as a community. This has caused widespread confusion of sin with shame, something healthy people psychologise away.

However, evil — as the war in Ukraine and Gaza remind us — cannot be psychologised away.

### Care of Earth Is Action for Resisting Evil

Many people of all ages sense something of St Paul's insistence that the whole of creation is in labour pain, yearning for the freedom of the children of God. And while

they are active and committed to the care of Earth, they do not connect Easter with their commitment to resisting the evil that is damaging Earth.

### Public Discussion of Faith in New Life

Is it not striking that as churches we are still largely singing to the choir during the great festivals of the faith, not least at Christmas and Easter?

From the time of the Early Church there was a branch of theology with the curious name of “apologetic” theology. There was nothing apologetic about it. Rather it sought to throw a bridge between church and secular philosophy and culture, to explain the faith in terms those outside the church community could understand. We have foolishly

**Making our way through suffering, pain and death, as our Easter pilgrimage expects ... is a tough ask. It raises gnarly questions about the bitterness of death and ... talks about costly sacrifice for others.**

neglected this, latterly, almost making a virtue of the fact that Christendom has gone forever, and that we now sit on the margins of society.

The Gospel, however, surely has a universal outreach. It would be good, once again, to get into an intelligent dialogue with the “cultured despisers of religion”, to reach beyond the church walls.

Next year 2025 marks the 500th anniversary of the German Peasants War with its passionate longing for justice for the common folk. It was triggered by a new vision of the Gospel and a great longing for the freedom of the children of God. It was the greatest social and political uprising before the French Revolution. In preparation for the quincentenary new and sensitive historical portrayals of the war are beginning to appear. Perhaps our advocacy of Easter has to be infused with something of this breadth of spirit.

Yes, we know militarism surges across the globe. Environmental catastrophe looms. It is timely, then, to turn to the Magnificat, the song of Mary and to kneel with her at the foot of the Cross to point to a better way.

As Kurt Marti says:

“Deepest of all, though  
the grave  
that buried death  
Awesome,  
its head start to abundant life.” ♦

**Peter Matheson** is a theologian, Emeritus Professor of Knox Theological College, Dunedin and author of many books including *Argula von Grumbach: A Woman before Her Time*.





## An Option for the Poor

**Susan Smith** discusses our challenge to understand and work against the structural injustices that contribute to the poverty and marginalisation of groups in our society.

IN 1971 PERUVIAN theologian Gustavo Gutierrez's groundbreaking *Theology of Liberation* was published. This wonderfully erudite yet readable publication invited all disciples of Jesus to recognise Christ truly present in the poor and oppressed. But not only were we to recognise Christ present in oppressed groups, we were to be in solidarity with them in their struggles for social justice.

This was what mission came to ask of us in the latter decades of the 20th century – solidarity with the poor. In a pre-Vatican II church, mission was primarily about the growth of the institutional church through conversion of pagans, those supposedly “living in darkness.” The gospel text that was so important was

Matthew, “go and baptise all nations in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19).

After Vatican II, mission was seen as being faithful to the mandate we find in Luke to bring good news to the poor (Lk 4:18), and in Matthew, where Jesus teaches his disciples that when they care for the least of his brethren, they care for him (Mt 25:39).

These two gospel texts remind us that solidarity with the poor and the outcast is required of us today in a society where social and economic inequality is steadily on the rise. Thus in Aotearoa in 2017 and 2018, the wealthiest 1 per cent, representing approximately 38,000 adults, had \$274 billion in net worth,

20 per cent of the population's total. In contrast, the poorest 50 per cent, representing 1.4 million adults, had just \$23.7 billion, 1.7 per cent of the total (see Max Rashbrooke, Geoff Rashbrooke and Albert Chin, “Wealth inequality in New Zealand,” <https://digitalnz.org/records/45854789>). The years of the Labour government (2018-2023) did little to reduce the gap between rich and poor and to date, proposed government policy suggests an ever-widening gap.

### Churches Need to Address Poverty

When concerned voices are raised about our country's growing social and economic inequalities, right-



wing commentators identify such concern as the “the politics of envy,” suggesting that it is simple jealousy that drives such talk. But poverty in our country needs to be addressed not only by politicians, but by other powerful institutions like the churches.

Why? People who live in poverty can often be people who live without dignity. It is wrong to see poverty as the result of personal inadequacy and while there is a minority who may try to work the system to their advantage, structural injustice rather than personal inadequacies is the root cause of poverty today in New Zealand. What is most concerning for families living in poverty is the flow-on effects.

For example, when the schools reopened we learnt that some parents could not afford to send their children to school given the high costs of buying uniforms, tablets, computers and stationery. Social costs flow from such school absences: crime, some petty and some not-so-petty, mental health issues, reduced employment opportunities and, sadly, more inter-generational poverty.

Complex causes lie behind such realities and while banning mobile phones may resolve some issues, a much more holistic and comprehensive approach is needed to resolve problems caused by social injustice and inequality.

### Analysis and Action for Social Justice

So why does making an option for the poor warrant attention in our fractured and divided society today?

In the 1970s and 1980s, the late Father John Curnow of the Christchurch Diocese used to facilitate social analysis workshops. What John gave to participants were tools that allowed them to analyse our society and to see who had power, and who did not, and how that power was used. Those with wealth assets — inherited wealth, significant investment portfolios, mortgage-free properties and land, as well as good salary or wage-generated incomes, call lots of shots in both overt and covert ways. Aotearoa is a

society in which political, economic, and ideological structures favour the agendas of those who are economically and socially advantaged.

Readers of *Tui Motu* include many of those Catholics who responded enthusiastically to Vatican II and to subsequent magisterial documents that encouraged solidarity with the poor in their struggles for justice.

The mission of the Church had always been founded in charity and compassion, but the Council, and later magisterial documents, taught that social action to address structural injustice was equally important.

**The ... Gospel ... reminds us that solidarity with the poor and the outcast is required of us today in a society where social and economic inequality is steadily on the rise.**

I have been helped in understanding this by my reflections on the gospels. Jesus was a tradesman, he was a Jew, his first disciples were fishermen. Perhaps Jesus, along with Joseph, were among the hundreds of Jewish men involved in building the Roman city of Sepphoris, about 6km north of Nazareth. As a tradesman Jesus was somewhere there in the middle of Palestine's hierarchically structured society.

Although Jesus tells us that the Son of Man had nowhere to lay his head (Mt 8:20), he had freely chosen to embrace the life of an itinerant preacher and healer, a significant life choice, that points to his freely chosen identification with the poor.

### Jesus's Compassionate Action

Two aspects of Jesus's ministry emerge as significant in any reflection around what an option for the poor means.

First, we need to note that Jesus constantly demonstrates a great compassion for the poor, the outcasts, and the sinners, those right at the bottom of the social ladder in first-century Palestine.

If we look at Jesus's miracles, almost without exception they are intended to help those whom the ruling classes considered as inferior — he raises the son of the widow of Nain, he feeds the hungry who follow him into the desert, he heals the lepers, he allows the blind to see and the deaf to hear.

The compassion of Jesus for the least of his sisters and brothers is quite extraordinary. After all, these were the people whom the priestly class and the Pharisees claimed were “unclean” and therefore to be avoided.

### Jesus Critical of Oppressors

Second, Jesus never ceases to criticise those who marginalise the poor and oppressed. Jesus drives out the money changers from the temple, he criticises the Pharisees for laying heavy burdens on others. Jesus always demonstrates compassion and mercy towards those lower down the social ladder, and almost invariably he finds himself in conflict with those above him on the social ladder, a position which ultimately leads to his death by the ruling classes in Palestine.

Jesus shows us what making an option for the poor means — being on the side of those who are the victims of structural social and economic injustice; and challenging those who are responsible for the injustices with which they have to contend. What is this saying to us today? ✦

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# SCAPEGOATS IN BOATS



**Susan Connelly** writes that we are prone to use people as scapegoats even though we can understand that they are innocent.

PEOPLE IN OFFICES, parishes, sewing circles, school boards, national parliaments and in every other human endeavour are involved to various extents in scapegoating.

Literature and history are full of scapegoats. There is some form of crisis, a social upheaval in a family, a corporation, a nation. Something has happened to upset the equilibrium and people feel threatened. Who is to blame? The fingers point at someone weaker, different, suspect, or perhaps the one in charge. They may indeed be to blame for bad behaviour, even some elements of the crisis, but they are shouldered with the lot: the crime is theirs. It is never “us”. They must be punished, otherwise how can we protect ourselves? Blaming and punishing the scapegoat then brings a type of unity — until the next collapse, the next crisis.

Most people can actually see through this perpetually repeated scenario, given time, goodwill and reflection. The reason? According to René Girard (1923-2015), it is because the Gospels tore away the curtain behind which humans used scapegoating as we evolved over millennia.

## Use of a Scapegoat

When ancient communities experienced conflict, Girard writes, the violence generated could threaten the very existence of the group. In order to bring peace and

therefore survival, blame was placed on one person or one section of the society — perhaps on a foreigner, or people without the means of retaliation. This victim, fitting these criteria for the scapegoat, was expelled or killed. So instead of “all against all” violence, the resolution came through the violence of “all against one”.

## Recognise Innocence of Scapegoat

However, scapegoating is no longer capable of resolving crises as in the past, although it is tried again and again. It is now far less than successful because people can see through it. The Gospel’s presentation of Jesus, the quintessential scapegoat, has unveiled the victim as innocent.

This Lent and Easter we ponder again the political, religious and social crises for which Jesus was blamed and the criminal accusations against him. He fulfilled all the criteria for the scapegoat, abandoned and alone, and was finally subjected to appalling violence. Caiaphas sums up the whole flawed scapegoating process as it begins to unravel before humanity’s eyes: “It is better for one man to die for the people ...” (Jn 11:50).

Recognition of the innocence of the scapegoat is a “leap in human consciousness” according to Girard — an awareness of what makes humanity tick.



The recognition has its downside, too, in that humans can so easily claim the mantle of victimhood, as can be seen repeatedly in personal relationships and on the world's stage.

### Australians and Fear

The fraught relationship of Australia to recent asylum seekers illustrates Girard's theory. A crisis of fear easily takes root in the nation. Alan Renouf, a former head of the Department of Foreign Affairs, stated that "Australians have been a frightened and intimidated people."

Surely the origins of this fear can be detected in the arrival of the very first English military and convicts. So-called "white Australia" was uninvited, and proved more than a threat to those who had existed on the continent for tens of thousands of years.

The Indigenous population has suffered grievously, with even the mild suggestion of a Constitutional Voice to Parliament rejected in late 2023.

To what extent does dispossession loom as a frightening possibility for today's Australians, given our history, our scant population and an indefensible coastline?

### Asylum Seekers as Scapegoats

The recent arrival of some people who have come as the first arrivals did — on boats — has been used for political advantage.

The Australian government's practice of turning back rickety boats full of asylum seekers to foreign ports has quelled the fear of many Australians. A type of unity is built, with sections of the population feeling safe from the imagined arrival of hordes of foreigners. Our safety is enhanced by the claim that we are saving these people's lives, giving us a little glow of righteousness.

Testimony to the success of deterring asylum seekers and allaying the crisis of Australian fear was seen in a display in Scott Morrison's Prime Ministerial office. It was a model of a small boat with the title: "I Stopped These".

"Stop the Boats" deftly changes the image of beleaguered people escaping war and persecution into a threat to Australians. Seeking asylum, the internationally accepted right of anyone, anywhere, was transformed into a crime against Australia.

But the crisis has been assuaged by blaming the asylum seekers. They are our scapegoats, being unarmed, vulnerable, traumatised and without a champion.

### Violence of Scapegoating

The process of scapegoating reached its culmination in the violence that has been the hallmark of Australian treatment of asylum seekers.

At the end of 2022 there were 5.4 million asylum seekers. In the past decade more than 3,000 people and over 200 children of those who sought safety in Australia

mainly by boat were taken to Nauru and Manus Island and denied proper medical care, leading to deaths and serious mental and physical health problems. Boat arrivals are considered "illegal" and are denied the prospect of permanent residency.

The legality of Australian immigration detention was not able to be challenged and people were incarcerated for lengthy periods in closed centres. It is a process of blame, demonise and punish.

The total mess that is Australia's asylum seeker policy has been highlighted in the High Court's recent ruling that indefinite detention is a breach of human rights. Despite consequent evacuations from Nauru early in 2024, some people remained in Papua New Guinea and more than 1,000 were living in limbo in Australia without clarity about their future. Further, reports of administrative corruption and incompetence at the highest levels have emerged.

Scapegoating has served sections of humanity well for

Scapegoating has served sections of humanity well for millennia and is not easily relinquished ... Even though we may be able to see through scapegoating, we are all prone to it.

millennia and is not easily relinquished. The Gospel has undermined it, although not without cost.

Thoughtful consideration of the mayhem in today's world shows the extent of crises, the amount of blame, the wholesale violence and the suffering of the innocent. Humanity finds more scapegoats to solve problems, like the drug addict who needs a greater dose to attain the original high — according to Girard.

### Our Temptation to Scapegoat

Reports of other boats landing on the Australian west coast in early 2024 mean that a crisis is once again proclaimed, accusations are made, fear is stoked and the scapegoating process continues.

The political aspects are not lost on anyone, as previous years of successful scapegoating of asylum seekers may herald similar electoral gain.

Even though we may be able to see through scapegoating, we are all prone to it. As we contemplate the original innocent scapegoat this Holy Week and Easter once again, we would do well to ask ourselves: Who are my scapegoats? ❖

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Susan Connelly RSJ is the author of *East Timor, René Girard and Neocolonial Violence: Scapegoating as Australian Policy* (Bloomsbury, 2022) and lives in Sydney.





# A NEW THREAT

**Ann Hassan** talks to **Sanjana Hattotuwa** of the *Disinformation Project* about the increase of racism in Aotearoa since the last election.

## *Racism isn't new in Aotearoa. How is the discourse surrounding the Treaty Principles Bill different?*

"This government embraces, normalises and locates that which we have studied outside of government, till October 2023, within it. Leading up to and after the general election in October 2023, we found particular parties, politicians and candidates echoed a language once relegated to certain places and spaces online defined by conspiracies, disinformation, and discourse inciting racism, hate and harm.

"We first studied what we now do at much greater scale around the debates on signboards [the He Tohu Huarahi Māori bilingual traffic signs programme]. In the past, every time Whittakers put out a chocolate wrapper in te reo, or Air NZ made a safety video featuring Māori or in te reo, the bilious pushback was significant. The same bile was aimed against the former foreign minister Nanaia Mahuta or any wahine Māori who was a public figure with the moko. Now all that's amplified.

"When populist leaders like Bolsonaro, Trump, Duterte or Modi articulate something that is violent and targets a particular individual, community, identity or religious faith, what invariably follows is offline violence as a consequence. They also create a permissive space for others to talk in the same manner or much worse.

"The year-on-year difference in anti-Māori rhetoric around Waitangi Day is unprecedented. It's chilling. The presentation of the [Treaty Principles] Bill by ACT and Mr Seymour, and those who are talking about it, has

enabled a frothing anti-Māori hate in the guise of equality and equanimity. It is a racism now often awfully explicit, but also more insidiously framed in a rhetorical flourish that suggests interest in the Bill, or the preservation of democracy, by those who claim to have many, good Māori friends."

## **Disinformation as Political Tool**

*David Seymour has said that disinformation has been spread about the Treaty Principles Bill and that it was clear ACT could not "rely on the media to correct the disinformation" (NZ Herald, 7 Feb 2024). Is the threat of disinformation now being used as just another political tool?*

"Yes it is. It's called 'accusation in a mirror' — which means you accuse others of what you're doing yourself, in order to do it more. You project something you are doing yourself as if you're the victim of it, so that critiquing what you do or say can be projected as a personal attack — invalid and insensitive. Those who employ this technique are usually very sophisticated media actors, who peddle narratives that divide societies, and harm democracy."

## **A Large and Growing Cohort**

*We've been through the pandemic, and seen that New Zealand is home to a significant and active reactionary segment. Is this same group now animated by the Treaty Principles Bill, or are we talking about a different cohort?*

"In terms of volume, quantitatively, this is more people [than the anti-mandate cohort]. That is very clear in the data, every day. The Venn diagram of those who now



publish a vaulting anti-Māori racism across all social media landscapes has a broad overlap with the disaffected, anti-government, anti-mandate, anti-establishment folks from the Covid-19 period. To see this in a broader context, we inhabit a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world. People are searching for meaning and stability.

“What all populists do is give or suggest there are simple answers to complicated problems. They focus on things that are not really answers to pressing problems – which they are often responsible for – in order to conveniently distract people’s attention. The Treaty Bill has become one such thing. It has appealed to many more people than anti-mandate and anti-vaccine discourse, by pandering to the disaffection they feel.

“We strictly maintain this really tough line between the sanctity of protected political speech, and first principles, and the study of what’s called ‘dangerous speech’, that is incendiary and racist. The study of disinformation has become much murkier as a consequence of the October 2023 general election results. Political and protected speech is being actively weaponised. Rhetoric from politicians now fuel cycles of outrage online, with algorithms helping spread bitter invective. Much of this anger may be performative, but even a little is enough to unpredictably result in offline violence. It’s a volatility, growing at pace, that’s eating away at social cohesion, every day.”

## A Violent Future

*If this kind of discourse thrives online and offline and, especially in government, what can we expect to happen next?*

“Nothing good, obviously! I grew up in wartime Sri Lanka. As an academic, I’ve studied dangerous speech for over a decade. Both from lived experience and research, the dangerous speech now present and spreading in New Zealand invariably leads to violence. That’s an unqualified statement, because history proves it, and social media worsens it. If you take a look at Rwanda, Sri Lanka, India today, or even the US, dangerous speech leads to violence and death.

There is no question about it. Academic research out of the US found what Trump tweeted about Muslims resulted in violence against Muslims offline. It was a causal link. Now we have our own New Zealand populists spreading their ideology, and whipping up the emotions of their supporters. The dynamic here is the same as what’s defined cycles of violence elsewhere. New Zealand isn’t magically inoculated against the worst outcomes, and violence.

“Many folks are worried about what happens if we go to a referendum, and the violence that may result. My worry is actually not that – or that alone. It’s more about a heightened volatility and violence in discourse, that’s sustained because of what a few do and say. This volatility, and the real antagonism it breeds, online and offline, is a severe challenge to New Zealand’s institutions and liberal democratic framework. Social cohesion’s giving way to tribalism and that’s not good.

“So it’s not just shootings [we need to worry about]. It’s this incivility, and the negotiation of what I’d call an everyday violence – very different from what New Zealand’s high trust has been used to and taken for granted would always be around. Obviously, Māori and minorities are impacted more.

## Taking Action

*Is there anything we can do, and if so – what?*

“Simple. Just reject racism. Acknowledge that without looking at the past and addressing foundational violence, we can’t realise New Zealand’s democratic potential. Understand that Māori have no interest in a counter-violence against Pākehā that Pākehā have inflicted on Māori for centuries. That’s simply not their vision of the future.

“We need to acknowledge that there have been wrongs, and there are wrongs being done now, and until we address them meaningfully, we can’t say things are fine, normal, peaceful or democratic.

“What we’re seeing is a really unfortunate unfolding of a profoundly regrettable process that disrespects and upsets normative foundations of New Zealand’s social compact between tangata whenua and tangata tiriti. It is a process tearing asunder the country’s social fabric, within and between communities, online and offline. Nowhere I have studied this rhetoric, and the resulting perceptions, behaviours, and attitudes has there been an eventuation or outcome that is not violent. Nowhere.”

## Protecting Aotearoa

*This must be difficult, sometimes depressing work. What drives you [Sanjana] to keep going?*

“Love – as strange as that may sound and seem. I lost my country [Sri Lanka] to disinformation. I know where what is seeded and spread online leads to and ends with. The loss of a home can’t be put into words. It is a sadness that’s inexpressible. But because of this loss, I have this enormous love for Aotearoa driven by a desire to not see you end up in anywhere near where Sri Lanka’s at today.

“So that drives what I do. Yes, it’s depressing but there are amazing people around the country, and I must say, even in government and the public service, doing what they can to stop the worst violence from being realised. So we need to acknowledge that, too. I work to support these people. That’s it. That’s enough for me.” ♦

Photo by AI/Shutterstock.com

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**Ann Hassan** is the Administrator and Assistant Editor of *Tui Motu* magazine. She lives with her sons in Ōtepoti/Dunedin and is a parishioner of St Francis Xavier in Mornington.



# If It's Not Too Much

A tribute to all relationships both old and new

If it's not too much to ask

Do you love me?

Do you care for me the way I care for you?

Do you understand the truth beyond the questions —

That I'll give you all my life

And all my loving, too.

If it's not too much to say

Let me tell you —

That having you beside me warms my soul.

There's strength in our togetherness

That looks beyond the differences

No matter who or what we are.

It it's not too much to feel

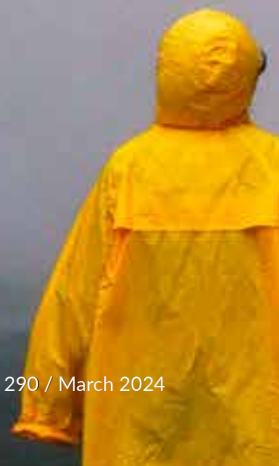
Let male and female yield

And claim a partner to match the one inside.

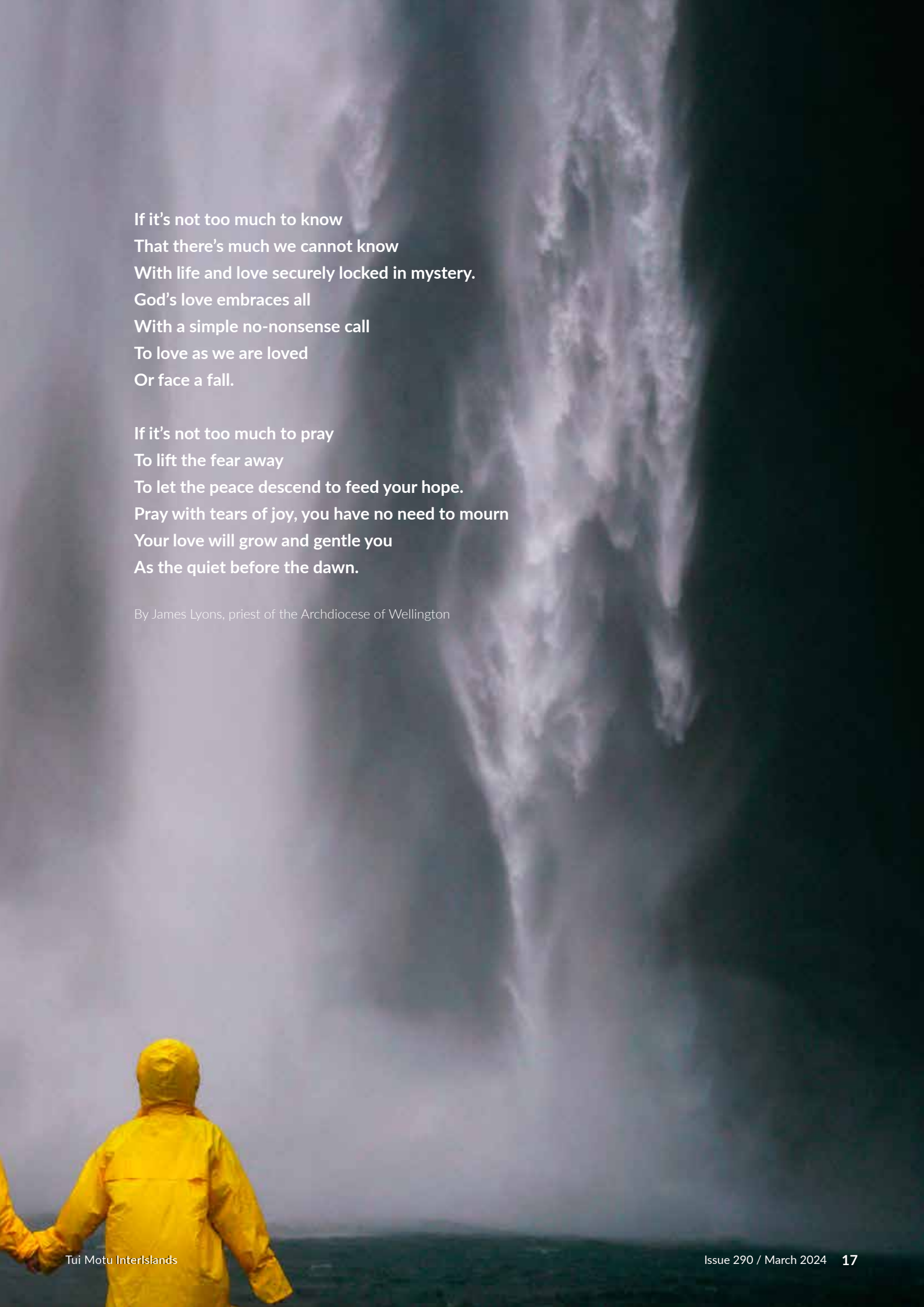
It's love that lights the path for self-giving selfless hearts

And you and I can never judge

Those that truly love.





A person wearing a bright yellow raincoat is seen from behind, looking up at a dramatic, cloudy sky. The clouds are dark and swirling, with a bright light source creating a strong glow on the left side of the frame. The person's hands are clasped in front of them.

If it's not too much to know  
That there's much we cannot know  
With life and love securely locked in mystery.  
God's love embraces all  
With a simple no-nonsense call  
To love as we are loved  
Or face a fall.

If it's not too much to pray  
To lift the fear away  
To let the peace descend to feed your hope.  
Pray with tears of joy, you have no need to mourn  
Your love will grow and gentle you  
As the quiet before the dawn.

By James Lyons, priest of the Archdiocese of Wellington



# Deflect, Distort, Deny

*Reb Halabi highlights how misinformation is being spread in the media about Israel's war on Gazans.*

"There's been an abundance of evidence ..."  
"Our intelligence sources say ..."  
"It is very credible intelligence ..."  
"A complete and transparent investigation ..."  
"According to the intelligence dossier ..."  
"Our reliable sources confirm ..."

NONE OF THESE statements provide evidence of any sort. At best it's lip service to ward the general public off the scent. At worst it is lies and fabrication and gross spin-doctoring. There's a line in a Dr Seuss poem:

"I said, and said, and said those words. / I said them. But I lied them".

It's no fault of the average person to be totally befuddled by media propaganda and lies. They aren't to blame for believing outrageous lies and accusations when they don't know where to find the truth or who is telling the truth.

## Effect of a Message Most Repeated

Once the general public hear statements such as those above, they are relieved and believe something is being

done by decent people regarding alleged crimes. They are drawn into a haze of misplaced trust that needs no other explanation or closer scrutiny.

Governments said they're doing all they can to get to the bottom of allegations of beheadings, rape, murder, assassinations, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) staff as secret militants, etc.

It doesn't matter if no further information or investigation is forthcoming, the damage of propaganda has been done. The general public believes that beheadings, mass rape and torture have been committed. Case closed.

The nature of such accusations, unverified and hearsay, within hours of 7 October is an attempt to point the finger at who is the violent beast and who is the meek victim.

In what world are we allowing the legal murder of 11,500 babies and children while trying to compare the incomparable — all victims count?

In what world does a dominant state claim they have a right to defend themselves against those they have



unethically, immorally and illegally imprisoned for decades, killed and persecuted without trial?

### Look for Credible Evidence

The average person in the street quite possibly still believes Hamas committed all these atrocities. Surely, they think, their governments wouldn't be looking into "intelligence sources and dossiers" if there's nothing credible to the accusations? But are those intelligence sources of any worth? Do they simply consolidate misinformation on purpose? Or do sentences like the above simply plug up the void where truth should be?

Of course, it is utterly tragic for anyone to have lost their lives in the violent attack, but for Israel to suggest that 40 babies were beheaded and mass rapes took place, serves only to ensure that the supposed "civilised" world is shocked to the core. (The same civilised world that allows Gazan massacres to continue.)

Whether any such thing took place is without solid evidence. President Biden said: "I never really thought that I would see and have confirmed pictures of terrorists beheading children." I smell disinformation. Biden didn't even know where to place his footing after he made that mumbling statement and needed guidance to simply walk forward. Even when the Israeli government was forced to admit it had no evidence to support the claim about the babies, it continued to imply that it might be true.

Biden regularly wears sunglasses, perhaps in an attempt to deflect from issues of his ageing. We would have sympathy for such an aged person in that condition in normal circumstances, but he runs the free world and has access to certain buttons.

### Spinning Stories to Hide Facts

Within cooee of the International Court of Justice determining that Israel must ensure all efforts are made to stop a genocide from happening upon the Palestinian population, up pops a story about UNWRA staff aiding and abetting Hamas to breach the prison gates.

I wonder sometimes if there is a list of headline grabbing lies that are concocted and held in a special folder until the appropriate moment arrives. When a distraction is needed, up pop outrageous claims that perhaps are not believed but they do the trick to divert the world's attention from the shameful accusation that Israel is behaving in an inhumane, illegal and undemocratic manner, and is on the path to committing genocide.


We can imagine Israeli spin doctors yelling down the halls of power and media: "Quick, get a headline out to the media and we'll accuse someone of something — whichever is going to best deflect from our violence."

Nearer the truth is that "confessions" coerced out of Palestinian prisoners allegedly named 12 UNWRA workers

who were complicit in 7 October. I, too, might tell lies under those conditions — who knows!

Just weeks ago at a meeting in the Knesset a right-wing lobbyist (a former official of the Israeli foreign ministry) vigorously declared: "It will be impossible to win the war if we do not destroy UNWRA. And this destruction must begin immediately."

Imagine! A person in the Knesset, a legal body that represents Israeli citizens, calling for an end to humanitarian aid to a decimated people on their knees and starving to death.



What stage in the world have we entered when such inhumanity and gross violation of our duty of care to our fellow human beings has turned into this nightmare?

### Where Is the World's Moral Compass?

What stage in the world have we entered when such inhumanity and gross violation of our duty of care to our fellow human beings has turned into this nightmare?

Israel will bulldoze over anyone who stands in the way of the Zionist project. That is frightening. And anyone who is in the way of the Zionist project will be subjected to the violent wrath of Israel because Israel doesn't respect international law. Israel does not care about United Nations resolutions or about international public opinion. And Israel has total disregard for international norms of human rights.

What this describes is an untameable beast held only by the most tenuous of chains. One frailty in one link and the whole world will know about it. But don't worry, "civilised" governments are on to it. They are conducting a transparent investigation, have reliable intelligence, dossiers, sources and credible evidence.

Just don't ask to see any of it. ✦

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Left: Photo by Anas Mohammed/Shutterstock.com

Above: Photo by AI/Shutterstock.com

**Reb Halabi** is a PhD candidate at the University of New England, Armidale NSW, and has a particular interest on the intersection of religion and geopolitics.





# Catholicism & Threats to American Democracy

Massimo Faggioli asks how USA Catholics will respond if Donald Trump is again the Republican candidate for president in the 2024 elections.

DONALD TRUMP WAS the landslide winner in the Iowa caucuses in January, the first contest of several that will determine who becomes the Republican Party's nominee for the 2024 USA presidential election. Trump is now more likely to be his party's candidate for president. If so, he will again face Joe Biden, the current president and only the second Catholic to occupy the White House after John F Kennedy.

## Ethno-nationalism and the Religion Factor

The role of the church has changed compared to the early post-Vatican II period until the early 2000s, when the momentum in the trajectory of the political culture of Catholics worldwide was on the side of democracy as a system that protects human rights and religious freedom. Compared to the 1980s, the Catholic Church today is not able, or is no longer willing, to be clearly on the side of democracy as it was in the "third wave" of the democratic revolutions in the late 20th century. This is one of the effects of the end of the Cold War. But there is also the shift in the meaning of "democratic" that today can be used to justify ethno-nationalism and ethno-centrism. There is also a lack of faith in democracy today, knowing how easy

it is for the masters of the internet, foreign interference and various demagogues to disrupt the process.

## The Catholic Church and the US Elections

One key test will be the US elections, beginning with the campaign season that is now underway, right up to Election Day on 5 November. What role will Catholics play — not just as an electorate, but as a moral voice? The Catholic Church is the single largest Church in the country. Its members hold key positions in government, beginning with President Biden. They also occupy important posts in Congress, the judiciary and the military. But progressive Catholics in the Democratic Party and conservative Catholics in the Republican Party are deeply polarised.

## Shift to Fragmentation of Catholic Stance

Then there are some more subtle and recent shifts. The first is the marginalisation of what used to be the mainstream conservative Catholicism in favour of a new crowd that has raised its voice in the last decade as the most vocal opponents of Pope Francis. They include trads and integralists, anti-liberals and illiberals. And they have a less nuanced and more subversive agenda than



the previous generation of "post-liberals". There is an increasing fragmentation within the political spectrum of conservative American Catholicism, similar to the one of the Republican Party. This intra-Catholic fragmentation has also ecclesial consequences.

### Shift to Silence at Constitutional Crises

The second shift is the "constitutional agnosticism" of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), which has become evident over the last 15 years. It's been more shocking since the violent 6 January assault on Capitol Hill in 2021. Peter Steinfels recently noted in *Commonweal* that the USCCB's latest voter guide never even mentions the word democracy. And the same laissez-faire and cavalier attitude towards the January 6 assault can also be seen in influential political commentators who are considered Catholic public intellectuals, such as Ross Douthat in the *New York Times*.

### Shift in Disaffection of Young People

The third shift is the visible political disaffection of young, progressive Catholics compared to the previous election cycles even as recently as 2020. This is because of reasons that are hard to ignore: they include Biden's advanced age and his connection to an ancient political era, his administration's policies on immigration, and his support for Israel and its brutal assault on Gaza in reaction to the 7 October terrorist attacks by Hamas. These younger voters will not switch sides and vote for the Republican candidate, but their apathy could sap the energy of the Catholic vote for Biden.

### Shift in Vatican's Challenge

There is also an important shift at the universal level — and that is in the Vatican. A few days after the insurrection of 6 January 2021, Pope Francis urged American Catholics to protect democracy. But he has aged visibly over the past three years and campaigning has now begun for the next conclave. In the "synodal process", global Catholicism finds itself divided on some of the issues (like the inclusion of LGBTQ persons) that politically divide Catholics and Christians within their own countries.

If it is true that synodality is not democracy in the Church, the two still have something in common and are in a de facto relationship: the health of one affects the health of the other. In international affairs, Francis has chosen a non-confrontational *modus vivendi* with the right-wing governments of Giorgia Meloni in Italy and Viktor Orban in Hungary.

He also has to express the position of the Holy See on the wars in Ukraine and Israel/Gaza in ways that narrow even further the international political support for his

message. For all these reasons and more, the triangular relationship between Francis, Joe Biden and the Republican candidate (whether it's Trump or someone else) might not offer, even to progressive Catholics, the same stark clarity of the 2020 election.

### Catholics, Trump and Threats to Democracy

During the long season of US primaries that will lead up to Election Day in November, these shifts could take a shape somewhat different from today. But a combination of them will have an effect on American politics, in a country where one of the two national political parties is likely to make Donald Trump its presidential candidate for the third consecutive time. These shifts will also have an effect on the internal dynamics of US Catholicism.

The serious threats to democracy, the rule of law and human rights in the United States are coming from the political right and its proudly displayed authoritarian dispositions. Its strength is due in part to support from Americans who claim to be Christians — especially white Evangelicals who see something messianic about Trump but also influential sectors of white Catholics. Under the guise of "pro-life" politics, an important segment of the Catholic clergy is maybe unknowingly, but effectively, part of the Trump movement. As noted by Newt Gingrich, the former House speaker and convert to Catholicism who

has advised Mr Trump: "Trump is not a candidate, he's the leader of a national movement."

Between now and 5 November Catholic leaders

in the United States will have to decide what to think, say and do about this movement. No matter how Catholic bishops can be annoyed or disturbed by "wokeism" on university campuses, there is no comparable threat from the left. The situation would be different, but not radically so, even if the Republicans should nominate someone other than Trump, given the political culture that now dominates the Grand Old Party.

The immediate question is how American Catholics will respond to the challenges to the constitutional and democratic order. It will be interesting to see if (and how) the bishops, parishes, schools and universities will make defense of constitutional democracy and the rule of law part of their ministry, or if they will simply ignore the threat. ♦

Republished from *La Croix International*. Read more at: [www.tinyurl.com/c6v68crd](http://www.tinyurl.com/c6v68crd)

Photo by Al/Shutterstock.com

**Massimo Faggioli** is a Church historian, Professor of Theology at Villanova University, columnist for *La Croix International* and contributing writer to *Commonweal*.





# MAKE HOPE OUR LEGACY

THERE WAS ALWAYS going to be a moment when I grasped that my offspring had grown up and viewed the world in a way I would never be able to.

Standing face-to-face in my lounge late one evening, we had been locked in a serious conversation for what seemed like hours. It was well past my bedtime and I had to rise early the next day, but as the instances of meaningful conversation between us were rare I couldn't, and didn't want to, shut this one down.

My son had come home for three months to do an internship, over summer, before returning to a northern city to finish his final year at university. It was his sixth year away from home and since he'd left we'd spent no more than a few consecutive nights under the same roof.

There must be a myriad of books written and research papers produced on the transition for young people to become independent adults in the 21st century. I haven't read any of them, bar the occasional media article about the increasing prevalence of 30+ "children" returning to live at home and save money to buy a house.

His temporary homecoming had been largely uneventful as he slotted back into many of his old habits. Apparently, it is a known phenomenon that people returning to their childhood home will often revert to annoying teenage habits. But accompanying his lack of sheet-washing and dishwasher-emptying was a subtle yet palpable difference which took weeks to reveal itself. As the onion layers of our relationship gradually peeled away it became clearer that this almost 24-year-old had been grappling with some of the significant existential questions of our time.

Boiled down: What is the point of his existence and is he a worthy person?

Big questions indeed. I realised we saw things differently when he revealed that he and everyone he knew of his generation felt no hope for the world and did not believe in a sustainable future. As someone who came of age in the 80s under the prevalent threat of nuclear holocaust I could relate to the threat and the fear. But the concept of no hope? That stopped me in my tracks.



He explained that he felt he was at a fork in the road: Progress towards nihilism, believing life to be meaningless, or to take a different path. This meant exploring religious thought and the morality and values that underpin different faiths.

This intellectual, personal journey has led to intense self-examination and sometime painful awareness of his own human frailty.

We talked at length of my distrust of the institutions that sit behind religious faiths, of their potential for hypocrisy. His knowledge base is growing, he seeks out mentors and he has become an active listener.

As the weeks turned into months I could see his commitment to his search for meaning. My mother's heart ached for him to find a peaceful place to rest and accept the contradictions and complexities of this life we live and within himself.

The fact that he has embarked on this journey is a constant wonder to me. What more could a parent really want?

Since then, I have been conducting my own gradual and unscientific quest to check in on young people around his age about whether they feel a sense of hope for the world they were born into.

It is sobering that the answer is invariably no, or not really. My question now to myself and to my generation is: How can we let that be our legacy? ♦

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







## Your Generosity Provides Care

WHEN OTHER BABIES her age began to stand, walk, talk and feed themselves, Joylin could barely crawl. She could not hold things in her hands, see well or speak. Joylin's needs were challenging and although her mother tried to help her daughter as best she could, when she was given an opportunity to study, she took it up and did not return.

It is estimated that in Papua New Guinea about 1.3 million people have a disability — one in every five people. Most people live in rural communities dispersed across the country, many in areas which are accessible only by foot or air. The limited infrastructure and transport means that people with disabilities too often miss out on essential disability-specific services. The resulting economic burden for their households can place people with disabilities at risk of abuse and neglect.

Sometimes, a ray of sunshine shines in the darkness of great need. It did for Joylin. Her dad met a wonderful woman Anna who became Joylin's stepmother. She thought Joylin was beautiful and wanted her to be able to walk and talk. It seemed impossible and Anna knew she could not achieve this alone.

This is where Christian Blind Mission's work helps. cbm-funded rehabilitation officers reach into communities and

identify people, particularly children, with disabilities. They then give caregivers like Anna a rehabilitation plan to help them work on transformational goals for their children.

Anna is being coached on visiting a doctor, and on how to teach Joylin activities such as to spoonfeed herself and to sit up in a special chair. The cbm-funded rehabilitation officers build apparatus from bamboo like parallel bars that support children like Joylin learning to walk. Joylin and her siblings receive therapy through play. From barely being able to crawl, after the support of the rehabilitation officers and the dedication of Anna, Joylin is now able to eat, talk and walk.

It is through the generosity of cbm donors that this work continues for children with disabilities in Papua New Guinea.

Whatever donation you give for this work will be multiplied 5x by the New Zealand Government Aid Programme. 💎

**Dr Murray Sheard** has worked in international development for over 16 years and is the Chief Executive Officer of cbm New Zealand.



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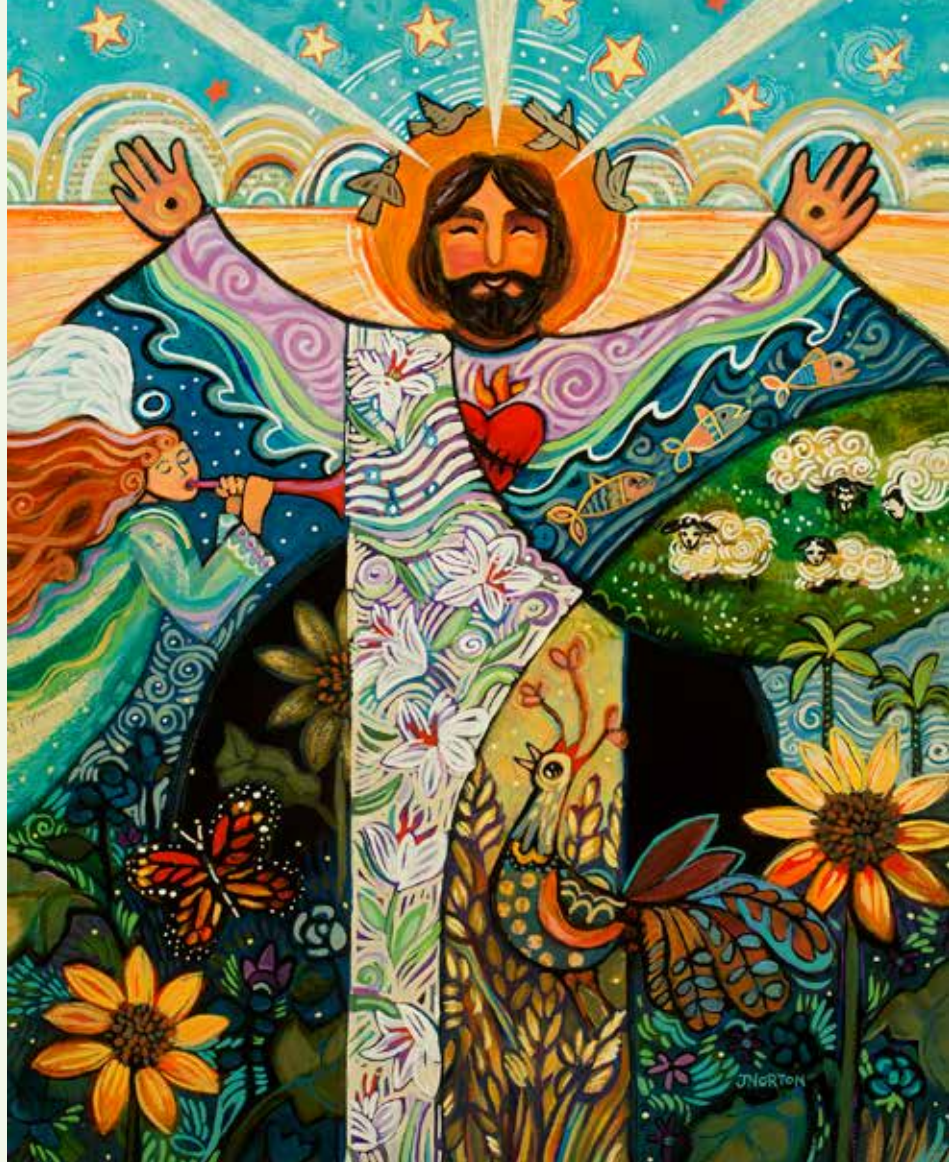
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# Resisting Evil

Kathleen Rushton writes that the women and the Beloved Disciple standing at the foot of Jesus's cross in John 19:25-30 are engaged in resistance to the evil of the Roman Empire.



WE HEAR JOHN'S story of the suffering and death of Jesus (Jn 18:1-19:42) at the Good Friday liturgy. An aspect we may not notice is the mention of those "standing near the cross" (Jn 19:25-30) and what their presence there can mean.

## Crucifixion in the Roman Empire

The Romans inflicted crucifixion as a form of public execution on conquered peoples and especially on the lower classes — slaves, criminals and unruly people in rebellious provinces such as Judea. Because many welcomed the security and the worldwide peace of the Roman Empire, they colluded with the imposition of such a cruel death which was used as a deterrent.

This barbaric form of execution entailed great humiliation. The naked victim was on display in a prominent place. University of Otago theologian David Tombs has written that crucifixion involved sexual abuse and Jesus, like all who were crucified, would have suffered this. Women were also crucified.

Crucifixion was so abhorrent that Jesus was not depicted on the cross in early Christian art. Later, as shown in the illumination from the Syriac *Rabbula Gospels* completed in 586, Jesus is clothed and not suffering because he has risen.

Martin Hengel says that reflecting on "the harsh reality of crucifixion in antiquity may help us to overcome the

acute loss of reality which is found so often in present theology and preaching."

## Dangerous World for Christians

Judaism was considered a "legitimate" religion and Jews had an exemption from worshipping Roman gods and goddesses as long as they submitted to the political laws of Rome. When Christianity grew out of Judaism, Christians lost this protection. Christianity only became legal in the Roman Empire in the early fourth century. Sjef van Tilborg writes that before then the "readers of the Johannine story enter into a dangerous world when they finish their reading and are going to confront their daily city life."

## Women's Resistance

Raymond Brown states it would be unusual for the Romans to permit family and friends anywhere near a crucifixion. While the four Gospels mention women, only John adds that they, along with "his mother and the disciple whom he loved," were "standing near the cross" (Jn 19:26-27) before and after the death of Jesus.

Luise Schottroff argues that the women followers of a crucified person were at risk as their presence was part of their resistance to Roman oppression. It is essential to relate their resistance in early Christianity to its larger context, namely, women's resistance in the Roman Empire



such as when they protested publicly and collectively against the 215 BCE *Lex Oppia* law which restricted women's rights and was repealed in 195 BCE.

### "Jesus handed over the Spirit"

It is commonly understood that Jesus's death is being described in the words he "gave up his spirit." In the ancient world, death was never described in this way. The word translated as "gave up" is used when Judas "hands over" Jesus. The Greek has no word for "his". An accurate translation, therefore, is "handed over the spirit."

James Swetman observes that "at the deeper level the climax of the Passion of the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel is not the death of Jesus, but a bestowal of the Spirit" who was promised previously (Jn 7:39; 14:16-17). Jesus "handed over the Spirit" to his mother, the women and the Beloved Disciple.

### A Beloved Disciple

And who is the Beloved Disciple? Sandra Schneiders suggests each reader/hearer is a Beloved Disciple to whom Jesus hands over the Spirit. Why? To finish the work of God's ongoing creation and re-creation. The works of God were to be finished by Jesus. As his death approached: "Jesus knew that all was finished" (Jn 19:28). His last words were: "It is finished" (Jn 19:30).

Palestinian theologian Mitri Raheb sees that for Jesus, faith was active in resisting and dismantling empire – not so much as a reaction to Rome, but through the new vision of the Reign of God. The way of Jesus is to be seen in the context of Roman occupied Palestine and Raheb sets before us that the challenge for Christians today is "to engage and change empire." He continues the "Messiah has come ... God had done [God's] part. The ball was now in the court of humankind ... The transformed faithful were to engage the world, to challenge the monopoly of power, and to live the life of an already liberated people ... belief in Jesus as the yearned for Messiah replaced the idea of divine intervention with the direct intervention of the faithful." Today, "Beloved Disciples" are to step into this world "to engage and change the empire."

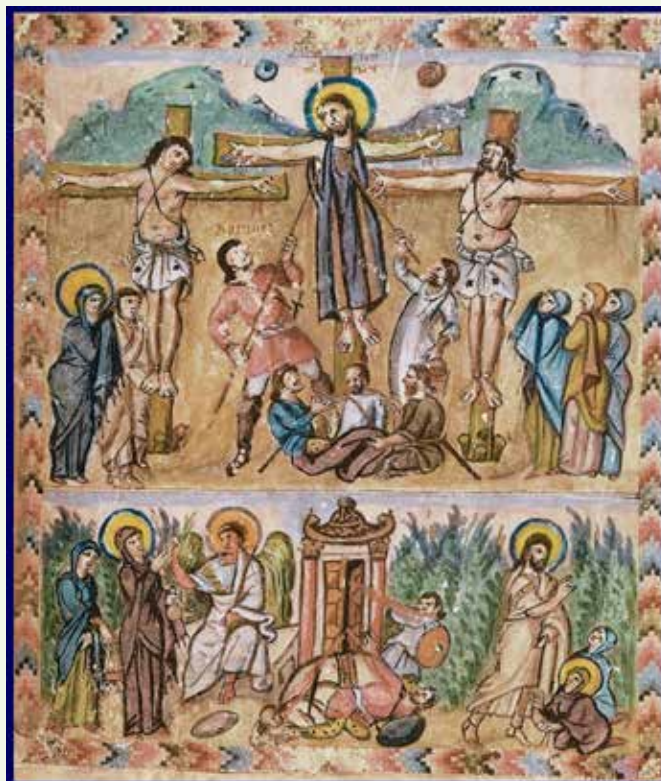
### Resistance

We have a history of resistance In Aotearoa New Zealand. In 1893, for example, Māori and Pākehā women, won the right to vote in general elections. While Kate Sheppard is our most celebrated suffragist, many women, including

Meri Te Tai Mangakāhia (Ngāti Te Rēinga, Ngāti Manawa and Te Kaitiātae), worked tirelessly for change on two separate fronts: nationally for the parliament and within the Kotahitanga Māori parliament. The influence of the Christian Temperance Union is often disregarded but was a significant force for change. Along with Kate, whom the Prime Minister of the time called "that bloody woman" and

four other women, Meri, who was educated at St Mary's College, Auckland, features on the Kate Sheppard National Memorial sculpture in Christchurch.

In our present environment, hostility to all things Māori is being fostered by some. We face policies that encourage aggression towards te reo Māori and undermine the progress made towards acknowledging historic land injustices. We face policies that reward the well-off at the expense of those in poverty. As women's resistance to the Roman Empire led them to stand near the cross, we are drawn into their resistance as a Beloved Disciple – to prayer and action, "to engage and change empire."



### Death-Resurrection

Let us return to the image from the *Rabbula Gospels*. The death-resurrection of Jesus is portrayed as interconnected – the lower panel portrays the Resurrection as told in Matthew 28. A careful reading of the New Testament reveals that when the suffering or death of Jesus is mentioned, close by in the text we find reference to his resurrection or to being raised up.

The mystery of death-resurrection inspires today's Beloved Disciple to participate in finishing the works of God – "to engage and change empire." In this work, "[t]he Spirit, infinite bond of love, is intimately present at the very heart of the universe, inspiring and bringing new pathways" (*Laudato Si'* par 238). ☞

Reading for Good Friday – John 18:1-19:42

Left: *All Creation Sings Christ's Praise* by Jen Norton © Used with permission [www.jennortonartstudio.com](http://www.jennortonartstudio.com)

Above: Earliest crucifixion in an illuminated manuscript in *Vangeli di Rabbula/Rabbula Gospels* (6th Century) Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana

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).





IT'S HARD NOT to think about water. We have water restrictions in some parts. We keep water bottles with us for hydration in the heat. We water the garden. And we love swimming and other water activities.

It's difficult to reconcile how essential water is to us with the way that we treat water in Aotearoa. Biking around Auckland recently I noticed how many creeks are channelled into pipes and in drains under the road to allow for our idea of infrastructure. So often the water remaining is mucky and nothing is alive in it.

Profligate human groundwater use around the world has shifted the weight of the planet so Earth's tilt has changed. More than 80 per cent of lowland lakes and rivers in Aotearoa are severely polluted; nearly 100 per cent of freshwater that is outside of native forests is not okay to swim in. Monitoring by the environmental research group Land, Air, Water Aotearoa (LAWA) shows that nearly two-thirds of freshwater ecosystems around the country have impaired ecological health. They have an excess of nitrogen, phosphate, sediment or other toxins preventing them from functioning effectively as a home for freshwater species.

I've been trying to make sense of these devastating numbers. I resonate with a banded kōkopu that wants to migrate to cool headwaters but finds its way blocked by culverts, or a stonefly nymph that likes to nestle under rocks in cool clear water. As a human benefiting from infrastructure

like drinking water treatment and wastewater pipes, it's easier to shield from the risks that other species face. But when water is unhealthy, all life is implicated.

In John's Gospel Jesus talks of being "living water". Although this functions symbolically, it is a challenge to us as well. Our life depends on access to clean water. And as we think of Jesus the Living Water, we can grow in understanding of how water connects us to all life and the health of the whole world.

We have voices calling for healthy water in this country. We are beginning to learn that water is not just a resource to be turned on and off with a tap, but a lifeforce which is essential to our planet. As tangata whenua, we have a relationship with water, something which Te Mana o te Wai, the fundamental concept behind our Essential Freshwater regulations, enshrines in law. The Te Mana o te Wai policy is based in te ao Māori principles, recognising the mana and mauri of water. It places first the health and well-being of the water, with our water needs (and our profits) being secondary to this. Local councils are bound by law to place the needs of the water first — a fundamental shift in the way we think about water and about ourselves.

As we reach for a drink, long for rain, or water the garden we can think about the ways our lives and all creatures depend on water. Perhaps, too, we might find a way to support ongoing calls for healthier water in our own communities. ❖



Photo by Charles Lebegue on Unsplash

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





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# Reviews

## Church as Sanctuary: Reconstructing Refuge in an Age of Forced Displacement

By Leo Guardado

Published by Orbis Books, 2023. (USD 30)

Reviewed by David George

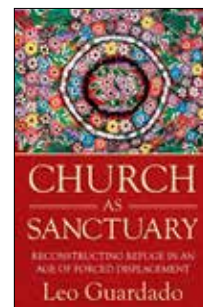
Leo Guardado was born in El Salvador and has family experience of displacement and seeking refuge from violent regimes. His book discusses the Sanctuary movement in the Church in the 1980s and into the present century— edging away from the nihilism and deconstruction of mid-20th-century philosophy. We may recall the experience of Ahmed Zaoui seeking sanctuary in this country and how church people stood with him.

Guardado features the thinking of the French

theologian Henri de Lubac and shows how people like Archbishop Oscar Romero practised sanctuary. The book is a grounded narrative with good theology and examples from life throughout.

I think this book could become a springboard for exploring the safety of women and children within the Body of Christ generally. It discusses the boundaries and personal spaces of sanctuary, with the church as matrix.

In this sense this book does not presage the voice of women, but does help provide a theoretical base, from which a following body of work might emanate. Guardado is an academic theologian and *Church as Sanctuary* is in places a dense read. ★



## The Ever-Widening Circles

By Marg Schrader

Published by Philip Garside Publishing, 2023. (NZD 40)

Reviewed by Mary Betz

In this beautiful memoir, Marg recalls life as a continual listening for God's next call. Born and raised in Australia, she found her way to Christianity, becoming a primary school teacher, Methodist deaconess, college chaplain and counsellor, all by her late 20s.

In 1966, she married widowed Presbyterian minister Warren, and moved to New Zealand, parenting his seven children and one of their own. Marg was ordained to the Presbyterian ministry, and active in Spiritual Growth Ministries.

In 1992, she opened The Still Point, a centre for

contemplative prayer, and soon after was elected Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. Later she continued her spiritual direction practice on the Kapiti Coast and became a pastoral minister for L'Arche. Now in her 80s, she lives in profound gratitude for the richness of life.

Marg's remarkable energy, vitality and commitment to God and life shine through these pages, which also include some of her writing and speaking on church, abuse, dreamwork, spiritual direction and ageing. Her clear-sightedness, forthrightness and courage will be an inspiration for anyone in ministry, especially women. ★



## Introducing He Whakaputanga

Edited by Jared Davidson

Historical Essay by Vincent O'Malley

Published by Bridget Williams Books, 2023. (NZD 18)

Reviewed by Shona Lowson

This book includes the text of "He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tirenī / The Declaration of Independence of New Zealand", edited by archivist and author Jared Davidson and with an accompanying essay by historian Vincent O'Malley.

When the first Māori arrived in Aotearoa from Hawaiiki in the 1640s they adapted to their new land with its different environment and climate maintaining strong ties with hapū and whānau. Then, in the 1800s, a new challenge arrived: the missionaries and settlers with their

different culture and religion. During this period of change and challenge, the Declaration was signed by 52 rangatira between 1835 and 1839.

At times I found this book difficult because I was new to this part of our history. And I don't know the areas of Northland concerned, or the iwi and hapū there, so I struggled to build a picture in my mind of the action. I would have found a map and glossary helpful.

I learned a great deal from this short book. In particular, I found reading of the lives of the chiefs who signed intriguing and through their stories became captivated by the rest of the history. *Introducing He Whakaputanga* is certainly worth reading, especially with our current government changes affecting Māori iwi. ★



# Reviews



## Perfect Days (2023)

Directed by Wim Wenders

Reviewed by Paul Sorrell

Hirayama is the character who we need now more than ever — an island of simplicity and calm in our ever more tumultuous world. On the outside, he is a nobody — a cleaner of public toilets in downtown Tokyo who follows the same routine each day and returns every night to a solitary home.

But there is much more to Hirayama (played by Kōji Yakusho) than meets the eye. His daily routines — folding away his futon bed, lunch in the park, visiting his neighbourhood bathhouse and local bar — give his life a predictable base, allowing him to meet the small changes and challenges in his life with aplomb. He goes about his work methodically and conscientiously, eschewing shortcuts. His goofy assistant is quite the opposite — impulsive, unfocused, toilet brush in one hand, mobile in the other. Takashi could learn from the simple mantra that Hirayama shares with his niece as they enjoy a bike ride following her unexpected arrival — “Now is now, next time is next time.”

Hirayama’s disciplined habits and fondness for analogue technology provide the literal sound track to the film. Each day on his way to work he pops a cassette into the car stereo, mainly Western popular music of the 1960s and 70s. Perhaps inevitably, Lou Reed’s “Perfect Day” and Nina Simone’s “Feeling Good” figure among his choices. Like his musical tastes, his reading is eclectic, but he gravitates towards quality. He is a regular visitor to a second-hand bookshop where he picks up paperback editions of the likes of William Faulkner and Patricia Highsmith in Japanese translation. Each evening concludes with Hirayama consuming a chapter by the light of his bedside lamp.

While all this manages to be deeply engaging, where Wenders triumphs is by showing us how Hirayama’s seemingly ordinary days are punctuated by an inexplicable joy. Deeply attracted to growing things, especially trees, Hirayama draws inner strength from nurturing his collection of houseplants and by contemplating the play of light and shadow through the trees around his various work sites. Graceful images inspired by these daytime visions populate his dreams at night.

Always present in the moment, Hirayama nevertheless draws on deep reserves of character and resolve as he navigates life. His contentment, simplicity and dignity radiate from every frame of this wonderful film, emulating the power and beauty of faith. *Perfect Days* is a film for all of us who aspire to live a centred and spiritual life. ★



## The Brokenwood Mysteries

Seasons 7–9 available on TVNZ+  
Seasons 1–6 on DVD at your local library

Reviewed by Shaun Davison

If you enjoy “whodunnit” murder mysteries with a distinct New Zealand flair, then *The Brokenwood Mysteries* are worth exploring. Set in a fictional, semi-rural town, it incorporates familiar elements such as the golf club, a popular pub, a Saturday market and the usual local outdoorsy activities. Each episode spans 90 minutes, allowing ample room for character development and intricate plot twists.

Main characters Detectives Mike Shepherd, Kristin Sims, Daniel Chalmers and pathologist Gina Kadinsky share an easy banter as they navigate through complex murder mysteries. One particular favourite of mine involves a seemingly cloistered silent order of nuns, whose true nature proves to be a revelation.

While some episodes feature exotic elements, the show maintains a grounded tone. *The Brokenwood Mysteries* have garnered acclaim both domestically and internationally winning numerous accolades. It’s worth noting that many tourists arriving in Aotearoa reportedly inquire about the directions to Brokenwood!

I highly recommend this series. ★





# Cross Currents

by Jane Higgins

THIS LENT, Pope Francis invites us to experience the season as “a time of communitarian decisions, small and large, that are countercurrent. Decisions capable of altering the daily lives of individuals and entire neighbourhoods, such as the ways we acquire goods, care for creation, and strive to include those who go unseen or are looked down upon.”

It's an invitation to live simply and to resist the compulsion to elevate consumption over everything else.

Some of us are able to choose to live simply during Lent. Others have no choice. The cost of living crisis is biting hard and many have tough decisions to make every day about what bills to prioritise amid food insecurity and housing stress.

Those living in poverty, who often “go unseen or are looked down upon”, will struggle under policies being advanced by the current Coalition government. The minimum wage rate has been cut in real terms: a rise of 2 per cent, to \$23.15, is significantly less than the rate of inflation. (The Living Wage, by contrast, is \$26 and is due to rise this year to keep pace with inflation.) The move towards establishing Fair

Pay Agreements has been abolished. Prescription charges are soon to be reinstated for most people. The promised downward pressure on rents is nowhere in evidence. There is no sign that the cost of living crisis is being effectively tackled for the people in most need.

Francis exhorts us to “pause in prayer, in order to receive the Word of God, pause like the Samaritan in the presence of a wounded brother or sister”. This is an invitation to take stock of “business as usual”. To ask who is wounded? And why? What toll does the current economic system take on people? On the planet?

The power and momentum of “business as usual” has overwhelmed the warnings of climate and Covid. Those who call attention to the damage it is doing are shouted down or ignored.

For example, Covid continues to have an adverse effect on the health of many people, including their capacity to engage in work and education. Repeated infections have been found to be particularly hard on the body. And yet, governments and others in positions of influence seem reluctant to recognise this.

We are extolled to get back to “normal”, but without adjustments to our working and education environments that would be protective. Masking is rare. Improved ventilation in buildings seems not to be a priority. But these are surely obvious precautions against an air-borne disease.

As I write this, the end-of-month Covid figures from Te Whatu Ora report over 250 people in hospital with the disease: people in their 40s through to people in their 90s. Despite expectations, Covid has not become a seasonal disease “like the flu” and its impact is certainly not confined to the elderly. A local high school in my area had to close its doors to students at the start of term this year because 30 staff came down with Covid following a teacher-only day.

Pope Francis's Lenten address invites us to imagine a different “business as usual”, a genuinely “new normal” that supports the well-being of all. And in these synodal times, he says, let's work together for the good of all, in our parishes and other communities. ✦



**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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# Letters to the Editor



## SPEAK UP FOR GAZA

What is happening in Gaza now is nightmarish! It is genocidal bombing, starvation, disease. How will a whole generation of children, those who don't die now, mentally survive?

Every news report on Israel and Gaza begins along the line: "Israel retaliates after Hamas attacks on 7 October". Western journalism never says Palestinians retaliate. They disregard the historical background: the *nakba* – the stranglehold siege imposed on Gaza over a decade ago; the periodic "mowing the lawn" bombing campaigns – Operation Cast Lead, Operation Protective Edge.

I think Peter O'Keeffe (TM Feb 2024) was unfair to deride UN Secretary General Guterres's remark that "Oct 07 didn't happen in a vacuum".

Regarding David More's article (TM Feb 2024) I think that what is happening in the West is that fear of being accused of antisemitism is stifling speaking out against oppression. The issue is Zionism, a colonial policy to rid Palestinians of their land and water resources

in order to drive them out of Israel or to squeeze them into tiny impoverished *bantustans*. Actually, the most vocal and informed opponents of Zionism are Jews, such as Jewish Voice for Peace. Please don't be afraid to speak out. What is happening in Gaza is creating hell on Earth.

**Lois Griffiths, Te Whanganui-a-Tara/Wellington**

## KIA ORA, E WHAEA, KIA ORA, TUI CADIGAN RSM

Removing the signage of Māori place names is not just a racist insult, it is an ignorant misunderstanding of whanaungatanga and the myriad associations of each named place.

Language is the main method of communication for us humans and I grieve, like others, for its misuse in the church liturgy. After Vatican II there was a great hope of a simple, meaningful, even poetic, prayerful English liturgy, but instead we have been foisted with another peoples' idioms: Eat of this; Drink from this ..., and substituting the cup for an altogether different object – a chalice. With this comes a pompous spirituality that changes the focus of our prayer from God to us. Once we prayed that we might learn to serve God, but now the emphasis is on being in God's presence to minister to God.

Language is changing alarmingly, so I fear the liturgical plea is delayed, if not lost. But the signage of the rohe of our land is a different matter, of communication and understanding, and honouring the principles of te

Tiriti. May God be with us all.

**Jill Heenan, Whangārei**

## CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

I appreciate Christopher Longhurst's article (TM Feb 2024) highlighting the Pope's call for a "paradigm shift" towards the use of contextual theology. Back in 1992 I studied for a Diploma in Pastoral Ministry at the Archdiocesan Adult Education Centre. A course component was Introductory Theology. We were taught it was the right and duty of all the baptised to engage in theological reflection – "faith seeking understanding".

One assignment taught a method I have used in many contexts since. We were to identify a significant experience that raised a religious question for us. We then reflected in order on the event's immediate connections and stories for us, identifying the religious question at its heart, then noting cultural and other relevant stories, then all pertinent scriptures not just the usual ones, the Church's traditional teaching and newer variant ideas, and Reason, ie, common sense. How did we then see the implications of the experience and its question? Surely that process equates with Pope Francis's urging to take "into account the real-life experience of local people".

Contextual theology has been around for a while and I recommend it for general use.

**Trish McBride, Te Whanganui-a-Tara/Wellington**

## Reviews

### The Book Collector: Reading and Living with Literature

By Tony Eyre

Published by Mary Egan Publishing, 2023. (NZD 45)

Reviewed by Ann Hassan

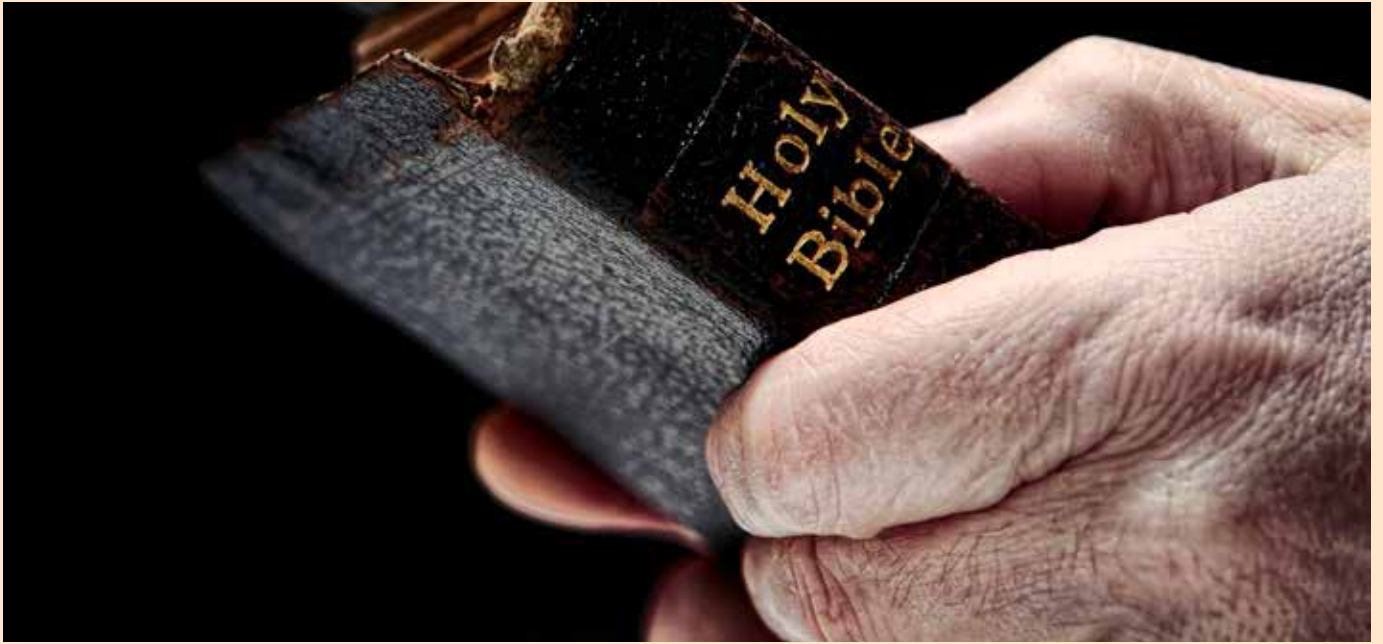
At the end of last year, a friend gifted me a book. It's a beautiful edition of a book I owned many years ago, by an author I love. Now in my home, this book becomes more than its words: it becomes handsome object, memento of friendship; it evokes another time and place. Tony Eyre's *The Book Collector*, described as a "bibliomemoir", is about this: the way books and our love of them can be woven into the rest of our lives, so that the books – objects as well as texts – are bound up with our selves.

It is the Aotearoa context that makes *The Book Collector* unique. Tony builds a world many of us recognise – the childhood, the secondhand bookshops and their singular proprietors, even that most austere and monolithic Aladdin's cave of SH1, the Chertsey Book Barn. Much of what is recorded in *The Book Collector* – little histories of bookshops and sellers, for instance – I cannot imagine being preserved elsewhere.

Tony's book surpasses memoir: it is an enthusiastic and affectionate argument for reading, a story of lifelong pleasure in and fascination with books. *The Book Collector* will appeal to anyone who enjoys reading, collecting or local storytelling. ★



# For What It's Worth



I WANT TO TELL you a story about a man of God. He came into my life when Mike and I were expecting our first child back in 1977.

Although I had been raised in the Catholic Church, as I became a young adult the church's teachings seemed less relevant, less life-changing. And so, Mike and I set off on our own journey of discovery. That led us to a Baptist Church where a friend was being baptised. The minister invited us to his home afterwards; his wife had made a delicious sponge filled with cream. And when the minister tried and failed to fit it in his mouth, some dropped right down to the inside of his shoe. Unperturbed, he scooped it up and ate it. Mike noticed this breach of etiquette and was delighted. A real man. A man of God, as it turned out.

Rev Lawrie Rankin became our minister through that year and the next. He visited us often, prayed with us and shepherded us when Mike was considering training to be a Baptist minister.

The first time Lawrie came to our home, Mike proudly showed him our bottles of homemade wine crafted from pea pods, parsnips and other unlikely vegetables. Mike was unaware that many Baptists, Lawrie included, didn't drink. But Lawrie took it all in his stride. As he did when Mike told him of his colourful past which had included a stint in a Moroccan prison.

Lawrie must have wondered how such a character might be considered suitable for Baptist training, never mind a future church. But what overrode everything for Lawrie was love. Sunday after Sunday he preached of Jesus's love for us.

He suggested that Mike lead a home group as a precursor to ministry. He and his wife Melva were always available, always encouraging. Lawrie had a pastor's heart, supported by a cheeky grin, a ready wit and a wry line in questions.

I have seen him ask, slightly puzzled, what it was that led me back to the Catholic Church. And though, through the years, our expression of faith might have developed along different lines, one thing hasn't changed. We both love Jesus.

February 4, 2024 marked the 65th anniversary of the first time Lawrie preached a sermon. Now 91, his hearing and eyesight aren't great and he walks bent doubled. But he told me he wanted to mark the anniversary and the years of ministry and so we came up with a plan. Lawrie would preach a sermon in the little chapel nestled in my garden. I would play "Amazing Grace" on the harmonium and there would be enough room for a modest congregation of six.

But the best laid plans... As the day approached Lawrie realised the spirit was willing but the body failed him. He blamed his pride: "Look at me. Still preaching at 91."

I don't buy that. Now in his final years, Lawrie remains what he always was: God's faithful steward. ♦

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



## Our last word

May the Easter blessings of life  
respect and love  
be at home in us  
and in all our communities.



From the Tui Motu Team