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# Tui Motu

## InterIslands

November 2023

### LIFE, DEATH AND AFTERLIFE

NICHOLAS THOMPSON, WAYNE TE KAAWA & OTHERS

### LAUDATE DEUM

NEIL DARRAGH, MARY BETZ

### ABOUT SEXUALITY

MARTHA HEIZER, A MOTHER

Death and the Mystery Beyond  
Tangihanga — Haere ki te mea Ngaro

INDEPENDENT CATHOLIC MAGAZINE

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#### COVER PHOTO

*From Chrysalis to Butterfly*  
by Eki Rothblack



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# Editorial

## Our Dead Inspire Us

IT IS OUR TRADITION to remember the dead in November. Most are family members or friends who died after a long life, but some died suddenly, and a few violently or in ways we can't explain adequately to ourselves. Even though we believe they have passed into the mystery beyond death, into the fulness of divine Love, we grieve our loss. The dead remain our kin. Remembering them emphasises how short and precious life is and that the deliberate waste of life is unbearable. Back in 2020 the world was in the grip of the pandemic. This November the world is watching the wars against Ukraine and Palestine grinding civilians and military into the dust, careless of life and the resources that sustain life. It is intolerable.

The prophets would call the leaders of the warring sides "stiff-necked" in their refusal to listen to reason. Despite Pope and other Christian, Muslim and Jewish leaders, the UN Secretary General and thousands of people around the world pleading for mercy and peace, these leaders persist with war, blinded by their own agendas.

Consequently, families are wiped out or dislocated and traumatised and cast into homelessness and hopelessness. The warring leaders continue to waste their country's and their allies' resources. In their fixation to prove might is right, they're unheeding of their role in accelerating the climate crisis and endangering life in Earth.

The success of peace-making at this time can seem hopeless and our tradition of remembering the dead like a pious distraction. It's not. We can't let the Putin and Netanyahu-like rhetoric of revenge and annihilation drown the inspiration for neighbourliness, generosity, tenderness, effort and endurance that we find in our grandmothers and fathers, our parents, our best friends, our primary school teachers and people like Celia Lashlie, Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa, Dorothy Day, Te Whiti and Tohu — that host of all who have gone before us. We can't waste their memory and legacy. As they did in their lives, we need to hold to the hope that even our smallest contribution in God's mission is not in vain.

The contributors to this issue challenge us to courage. Nicholas Thompson and Farid Ahmed share how our image of God shapes our thinking about those who are responsible for death-dealing in our world. Bruce Drysdale suggests that by understanding what "turning the other cheek" means will help reduce violence in society. Neil Darragh and Mary Betz in commenting on Pope Francis's latest exhortation *Laudate Deum*, encourage us to keep working together, with urgency and efficiency.

We thank all our contributors whose thought, research, writing, art and craft give us a thoughtful and challenging issue.

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



## DEMOCRACY IS THE WINNER

NEW ZEALAND HAS JUST changed governments. We have done it without existential threat to one another or any catastrophising of the electoral process. No one has said the process was not free and fair. As we voted we were not attacked by those who suspected we were not of their persuasion. It could have been different as we know from across the world. The validity of elections in the largest and most powerful country in the world is contested routinely. Elections in some countries are plainly gerrymandered without access to just and powerful oversight. For others, democratic elections are just a dream. They have no choice.

I have now participated in 17 elections. In nearly half of them I have voted for the winning party. When MMP came along it was more complex but still roughly the same odds. In every case the process has been safe, even when the outcome took time to finalise.

Is it because we have a small population that we have so little angst about our process? We had a high voter turnout, but are we missing something significant? Nearly 20 out of every 100 people eligible to vote did not turnout. What do we know about these non-voters? Their silent absence and choice not to participate provide us with no reasons or insight into their circumstances. While many countries would give their eye teeth for our nearly 80 per cent turnout, I don't think we know enough to be able to judge if it was really good enough for us.

My instinct is that this "no-show" might actually be a silent yet big red strobe-like alarm. Could it be alerting us all is not well with some of our neighbours? Nobody is stopping them from enrolling and voting. Should we care?

We should care because our democracy is precious and it needs constant attention. It is designed to serve us all and we should know when some of us are not being served. I have heard that some people choose not to vote as resistance — "a plague on all your houses". That is a legitimate choice because under our system voting is strongly encouraged but it is not compulsory.

But is that true for everyone? Do we have a kind of constitutional alienation at play? This is why I think it matters if not all of us are voting.

I think that some people can be overlooked. In every

part of our social system there are entry level pain-points for people. For example, it should be possible for everyone to navigate the essential requirements for getting their child into preschool, enrolling in kindy, getting to school, enrolling into a GP practice, applying for benefits, producing a CV for a job application or getting on the electoral roll. For many of us these are ordinary facets of a reasonable life. But that is provided that we have the necessary education and can speak English, or we have friends and a support structure that assist us. I suspect, too, some may not get this help.

I saw such assistance in play on election day at our local voting station. I observed an elderly woman on her own seeking help from the assistant for each aspect of the voting process. The assistant behaved as if nothing, even translating, was too much trouble. The woman walked out smiling — a small human triumph of participating in democracy.

How good it would be if the stuff people find challenging and bewildering could be sorted with such attention and charm. Decency is the antidote for much that could confuse us.

In this post-election time, I will be looking for signs from those in power of intelligent inclusion, particularly in the way they articulate the nuance of looking out for the interests of all of us. This should not be difficult for them. Ambition is not the enemy of kindness nor does inclusion defeat the drive for excellence. A just and civilised government makes meeting the needs of citizens its primary goal.

The election in Aotearoa was a successful demonstration of democracy. We now need to watch that everyone is included. ✦

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







# The Return of Purgatory

Nicholas Thompson *discusses the problems in believing that not everyone will go to heaven.*

EARLIER THIS YEAR, the International Criminal Tribunal issued an arrest warrant for Vladimir Putin, charging him with unlawful deportation of children during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Alas, I doubt that Putin will end his days in a Dutch prison. He seems likelier to die in a coup or even in bed surrounded by loved ones (assuming he has any left). If Putin evades the consequences of his self-evident crimes against humanity, it will be an affront to justice.

## Belief in Hell but Not in God

But it would not be the only affront to justice in this world. A recent survey of beliefs and values in the United Kingdom found that members of Generation Z (born in the late 1990s and early 2000s) were more likely to believe in hell than older generations (32 per cent, as opposed to 18 per cent for Baby Boomers). Oddly, the same survey found

that Gen Z was less likely to believe in God (37 per cent as opposed to 48 per cent for Baby Boomers).

In a recent essay, the cultural critic Sam Adler Bell shrewdly identified the psychological itch that hell scratches, even in the absence of God:

“Never in human history have we possessed so capacious a knowledge of the various and specific iniquities of the world — and so little hope of them ever being rectified. Evil abounds; justice is scarce ... In this context, the promise of otherworldly damnation is a solace ... Hell ... is our consolation prize for the futile dream of justice — a damnation deferred. My enemies are in power, but I can picture them in flames.”

## Post-Death Punishment in World's Religions

Punishment after death features in a few of the world's religious traditions — for example, in some strands of

Hinduism and Buddhism — but an eternal hell is central only to Christianity and Islam.

In contrast, the Hebrew scriptures that comprise most of the Catholic Old Testament offer no clear sense of an afterlife. If anything, there's the shadowy realm of Sheol. But everyone ends up there, rich and poor, master and slave (Ecclesiastes 9:5-10; Job 3:13-19). If justice is served, it's served in this life or not at all.

It was during the so-called intertestamental period — the two or three centuries before the appearance of Christianity — that apocalyptic Judaism began to develop a conception of fiery punishment with a *dramatis personae* of demons consigned to it. Christianity took these fleeting allusions and, over centuries, systematised them — sometimes with vindictive glee — into the eternal conscious torment we now recognise as “hell.”

### Inconsistency with Tradition

The problem with these theological systems is that they nearly always paper over the mess of Christian belief and practice that preceded them. For example, the early third-century *Passion of Perpetua* contains the oldest text by a named Christian woman, the African martyr Perpetua. Her so-called prison diary records the prophetic visions she received before she went to her death.

In one vision, Perpetua sees her brother Dinocrates in the underworld. He had died of a childhood illness before he could be baptised and Perpetua grieved that he would not join her in paradise. But by the end of this vision, she was confident that her intercession had saved Dinocrates. According to later systematisers, escape from hell was impossible, but *The Passion of Perpetua* was not the only early Christian text to suggest there were routes out.

### Hell as a Painful Path to Rehabilitation

The Orthodox philosopher David Bentley Hart has recently drawn attention to the paradoxes and contradictions in early Christian attempts to make sense of New Testament allusions to “fire”, “prison”, “Hades”, “Gehenna” and so on. In *That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation* (2019), Hart argues that it makes better overall sense of the Christian tradition to think of hell not as eternal separation from God but as a painful path to rehabilitation and ultimately God's embrace.

In Hart's view, the only hell consistent with the finality of Jesus's victory over sin is one that ends in *apokatastasis*, the word that Greek-speaking theologians used for the final return of all creatures to God.

### Hell and Purgatory Merge

From a Catholic perspective, Hart has merged hell with purgatory. The Western Church tidied early Christianity's temporary and eternal hells into purgatory, a rehabilitative punishment for repentant sinners, and hell, an eternal retribution for the unrepentant (not to mention most non-Christians, unbaptised babies, and anyone else whose misfortune was not to be predestined to glory). Protestantism tidied still further, offering only heaven, hell, and predestination to one or the other.

### Don't Make God into a Monster

Hart argues that the tidy logic of Catholicism and Protestantism made God a monster. Apparently, God's goodness, love and justice required him to punish a portion of the human race forever (most of them, if you believe Augustine and Calvin).

So, Hart argues, goodness, love and justice were emptied of any recognisable meaning when applied to God. This infernal logic also demanded the neglect or abuse of texts like John 12:32 and Romans 15:18-19, which pointed towards the final salvation of all.

**“If the memories of others are removed, or lost, or one's knowledge of their misery is converted into indifference or, God forbid, into greater beatitude, then what remains? Some other being altogether, surely, ... the residue of a soul that has been reduced to no one.”**

### Challenge to Our Humanity

So, back to Putin. There's a vindictive corner of my soul that would take satisfaction in his suffering. And there's an unattractive strain in Western theology, which argues that the saved must rejoice in the punishment of the wicked if only to appreciate the gratuity of their own salvation.

This, for example, is the claim Aquinas (or one of his students) makes in the “Supplement” to his *Summa Theologiae* (Question 94).

But, as Hart argues, this joy in the fate of the damned robs the saved of their humanity; to enter the kingdom of heaven, they have to shed the loves and attachments that bound them to other human beings in this life. As he puts it: “If the memories of others are removed, or lost, or one's knowledge of their misery is converted into indifference or, God forbid, into greater beatitude, then what remains? Some other being altogether, surely ... the residue of a soul that has been reduced to no one.”

Heaven, in other words, is not really heaven unless everyone gets there.

This, I think, is the ancient logic of Perpetua's intercession for her brother in the underworld. It's a prayer, not just for the “faithful departed,” but for all humans in their fragility, ignorance, and, in some cases, utter depravity.

However improbable and arduous the journey, even a man like Putin may return to his senses and come home. ♦

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# Tangihanga

**Wayne Te Kaawa** explains the significance of tangihanga for mourning the dead in Māori society.

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TANGIHANGA INCLUDES weeping, crying, mourning, funeral, rites for the dead and obsequies. It is one of the most important institutions in Māori society, with strong cultural imperatives and protocols. Tangihanga is perhaps the last surviving authentic expression of Māori culture stemming back to ancient days — it is where the best of Māori values are seen and put into action. Tangihanga has an important role in bringing people together, giving people honour and recognition, transforming identity, constructing and reconstructing communities, returning to origins and grounding people in a place and land.

## Origins of Tangihanga

Tangihanga arises out of pūrākau (origin stories) that provide the origins, meaning and context of death. Stories revolve around Hinenui-te-pō, Maui and Tawhaki. Hine-titama, the daughter of Tāne and Hine-ahuone fled to Rarohenga (the underworld)

when she found the answer to the mystery of who her father was. In Rarohenga, she took on a new name, Hinenui-te-pō (great lady of the night) with the self-appointed role of caring for her descendants in death.

When I spoke with my elders about this pūrākau they explained to me that this was not so much a story of death but more about resurrection. Maui did not accept death as the final outcome of human life. He became the first person to experience a physical death when he unsuccessfully tried to overcome Hinenui-te-pō by reversing the birthing process.

Following the pūrākau of Maui is a series of pūrākau of Tawhaki, who sought to liberate his mother, Urutonga, who was held captive by the ponaturi (hostile creatures) who had killed her husband and suspended his bones from the rafters of their house.

Upon approaching the house,

Tawhaki began to karakia (ritual chant), and the bones of his father began to rattle at the sound of his son's karakia. Hearing her husband's bones rattling, Urutonga sensed that her son Tawhaki was close by and let out a karanga (ceremonial call) and tangi apakura (lament) to welcome him.

This story gives the origin for both the karanga and tangi apakura which are still practised today during tangihanga.

## Core Values of Tangihanga

Each iwi (tribe), hapū (subtribe) and whānau (family group) has their own variations of the practice of tangihanga but the tikanga (right way of doing things) involved is universal.

At the core of tangihanga are the values of aroha ki te tangata (love/compassion for people), whanaungatanga (the importance of relationship), manaakitanga (hospitality) and wairuatanga (spirituality).



Traditionally, tangihanga are held on marae for three to five days. The tūpāpaku (deceased person) is held in state on the marae, in the wharenui (meeting house) or a wharemate (house of mourning). They are surrounded by the kimate, their closest female relations, who are supported by the female elders of the marae. The role of the immediate whānau is to tangi, to cry, weep, mourn, shed tears.

This time to grieve is a gift and possibly the only time that the whānau will have to mourn while supported by a wide network of people.

### **Tangihanga Is Communal and Public**

Death, dying and grieving is a public communal event, not held privately behind closed doors.

The immediate family is assisted by others who take responsibility for the finer details such as welcoming visitors, providing hospitality and digging the grave.

The business of dying is an expensive event and the whānau, hapū and iwi often rally around to help with the financial aspects of the tangihanga. They include different ways of giving, such as koha (donation, contribution) moni whakaaro (considerable money) and kōkohu, which is not only monetary but includes food, energy, time and skills.

Tangihanga is a communal event. In Māori society the value is that when a person dies, they no longer belong to the whānau, they belong to the hapū or iwi who will make the major decisions concerning their tangihanga. The sole role of the whānau at this time is to tangi, to weep. At times there is a clash in values as by law the next of kin takes precedence in decision making.

### **Adapting Tangihanga to Circumstances**

With most of the Māori population living in large urban centres now the tangihanga are held in homes, halls, sheds, funeral homes and other venues. But this does not mean that the integrity of the underlying values is compromised. The tangihanga is the same as one held on a marae, though it may be modified.

The international diaspora has also seen tangihanga change and adapt as whānau in Australia return their tūpāpaku (deceased one) to their tribal home in Aotearoa New Zealand.

**At the core of tangihanga are the values of aroha ki te tangata (love/compassion for people), whanaungatanga (the importance of relationship), manaakitanga (hospitality) and wairuatanga (spirituality).**

A custom now emerging, especially since the pandemic, is that tūpāpaku are held overnight on the marae and buried the next day.

At different stages of the pandemic, Covid-19 also meant restrictions around the number of people able to gather under social distancing protocol. QR codes and scanning needed to be observed. There were also restrictions concerning the serving of food and sharing the hongi (to press noses in greeting), both of which have deep theological meaning.

In spite of these restrictions, the principles remained the same: aroha ki te tangata, whanaungatanga, manaakitanga and wairuatanga.

### **Role of Kaikarakia**

During a tangihanga everyone has a role to fulfil, based around care of people. One important role is that of kaikarakia (religious leader). When a death happens people will immediately look for a kaikarakia, a religious leader whose task is to

lead karakia. That includes morning and evening prayers, closing of the coffin, the funeral service, the burial service and takahi whare (blessing of the house).

Karakia can also include prayers at the time of death, the blessing of the room where the person died if it was in a hospital or hospice and prayers at the funeral home before the deceased travels to the place where their tangihanga will be held.

The late Pā Henare Tate once said to me that throughout his ministry he had officiated at least 500 funeral services at tangihanga, especially in

the Hokianga. He felt that, as a priest, it was important for him to be there.

Māori have a value of kanohi kitea (the seen face). If you are seen at tangihanga fulfilling your responsibilities, your mana is enhanced; if you are not seen, the respect from the people towards you diminishes considerably.

The role of the kaikarakia includes not just the tangihanga itself, but also the dying process and the post-tangihanga context, including the hura kōhatu (unveiling of memorial headstone), which is normally held one year after the tangihanga.

While at a time of death and grief some people are falling apart and others are bravely holding it together, ministry in te ao Māori cannot afford to be one-dimensional. It has to keep pace with the constant changes in our world while remaining grounded to the principles of aroha ki te tangata, whanaungatanga and manaakitanga.✦

*Aroha* by Robyn Kahukiwa © Used with permission Fletcher Trust Collection, Tāmaki Makaurau

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# TO GOD WE BELONG, TO GOD WE RETURN

*Zain Ali shares about Muslim beliefs and practices around the death of a loved one.*

IT IS EARLY AND DARK — perhaps 3 or 4am — and a message appears on my phone. I usually ignore messages at such an hour, but this time I am drawn to check. It's from my good friend Zaid, who lives in Australia. The message sends me into a headspin for a few minutes. I reread the message several times in utter disbelief.

Our mutual friend Magdi has died. I refuse to believe the message, hoping it is a scam of some sort. Magdi is not much older than I am. How could he possibly have died? What makes it worse is that Magdi moved back to Sudan some years ago, so it's not like I could go to his home and simply check. Zaid assures me it is true: Magdi has indeed passed away.

According to Muslim tradition when you hear of a person's passing you recite the following verse from

the Qur'an: "*Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un*: Indeed, to God we belong and to God we return" (Q2:156).

Being in denial, I resisted reciting this verse. But as the news slowly sunk in, I eventually resigned myself to reciting it, tears welling up deep within me.

Another Qur'anic verse also came to mind: "Every soul shall taste death" (Q3:185).

Magdi was a friend, but more than that, he was like a brother — we always looked to him to lead us in prayers; he had even cooked for us. His smile was infectious.

## **Signs of Mercy and Love**

Grief and loss are not easy. I am reminded of an anecdote about Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, and his own grief at losing his infant son Ibrahim: "The Prophet took hold of Ibrahim, kissed him, and smelled

him. Then, we entered after that as Ibrahim was breathing his last breaths. It made the eyes of the Prophet shed tears. Abdur Rahman ibn Awf said: 'Even you, O Messenger of Allah?' The Prophet said: "O Ibn Awf, this is mercy." Then, the Prophet wept some more and he said: 'Verily, the eyes shed tears and the heart is grieved, but we will not say anything except what is pleasing to our Lord. We are saddened by your departure, O Ibrahim.'

Muhammad's grief and sadness is palpable as he holds his dying son in his arms. His friend Abdur Rahman sees him crying and is concerned. The Prophet was his leader in prayer, and perhaps in battle as well, yet here he was in tears.

Muhammad's words remind Abdur Rahman that tears are a sign of mercy and love. He may be a prophet, but



he is also very much human. He had a heart and he was responding to grief.

### Preparing the Body for Burial

Muslim tradition, as with many religious traditions, has a prescribed process following the death of a person.

Once a person dies the body is washed, usually by family, and shrouded in white cloth. There is often a sense of urgency as well. The body should be buried as soon as possible.

Muhammad is reported to have advised his followers: "Be in this world as though you were a stranger or a wayfarer." Death brings an end to our earthly journey and the funeral and burial are steps in the next phase of our journey. This journey is not to be delayed; accordingly, there is a sense of urgency.

### Burial of a Loved One

I recall the passing of my grandmother, who was in her 90s, and I was involved with her funeral.

Her body was taken to the local mosque and bathed by female members of the family. Her body was shrouded then brought to my uncle's home. Family and friends gathered, prayed together and recited portions of the Qur'an. A commonly recited part of the Qur'an for such occasions is the 36<sup>th</sup> chapter, known as *Surah Yasin*. It is a vivid reflection on life, death and the resurrection.

### Life after Death

The Arabs at the time of Muhammad were sceptical of the idea of life after death. In response, the Qur'an reminds them of the desert and how it is transformed after rain. The desert is hot, dry and dusty, a place that feels hostile to life. Yet when it rains the desert blooms with lush greenery and colour.

God's mercy is life-giving, even for those that have long become dust.

### Burial

We recited the Qur'an for our grandmother, then took her to the graveyard where we lowered her body into a grave.

Burial is the norm for Muslims. As part of the burial ritual we place three

**"GOD, YOU  
HAVE CREATED  
US FROM EARTH,  
WE RETURN TO  
THE EARTH, AND  
GOD, YOU WILL  
RAISE US  
FROM THE  
EARTH AGAIN."**



handfuls of earth into the grave. As we drop each handful into the grave we pray: "God, you have created us from earth, we return to the earth, and God, you will raise us from the earth again."

After the funeral we gathered at a mosque to pray and share stories about my grandmother. I remembered her sharing a recipe to cure my receding hairline — onion juice! Yes, that's right, I was to apply onion juice on my head morning and night.

### Three Blessings Continue

According to Muslim tradition, when a person dies their good deeds come to an end, except for three things.

The first is ongoing charity. For example, if you had donated towards a water well, you would continue to be blessed for as long as people benefit from the well.

The second is beneficial knowledge. This could include something like if you had taught a person to read. You would continue to be blessed for as long as people benefited from being able to read.

And the third blessing is a

righteous child who will pray for them. It is common practice that after a person dies, families will hold prayers in the days following the funeral.

I was fortunate to be there for my grandmother's funeral. It hurt not to be there for my brother Magdi. I am not sure what his funeral was like but a group of us who knew him well gathered at a local mosque to recite *Surah Yasin* and pray for him.

At such moments I reflect on my own mortality, the state of my own soul, the looming departure from those that I love and the feelings of hope and trepidation of meeting with my Lord.

I also have in mind the words of Rumi: "It looks like the end, it seems like a sunset but in reality it is a dawn. When the grave locks you up that is when your soul is freed. Have you ever seen a seed fallen to earth not rise with a new life? Why should you doubt the rise of a seed named human?" ❖

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# My Heart Will Be Loving

FARID AHMED MOVED TO Christchurch over 20 years ago after a drunk driver ran him over and he became a paraplegic. His wife Husna Ahmed was killed at An-Nur Madjid mosque in the 2019 terror attack in Christchurch. Farid describes how his Muslim faith and beliefs enabled him and his daughter to forgive Husna's killer even while they were grief-stricken with loss.

## Faced with Choices

"There is a prayer: 'All believers, practise whatever you preach; act whatever you say. Because God does not love anyone who says one thing and does the opposite.' So when it happened [Husna was killed], I took it that God was testing me. And I had two options: pass or fail. I chose that I had to pass. And it was a test, too, for faith communities — because [the shooter's] anger was not against my wife as an individual; his anger was against the faith. This attack on faith was a test for the faith community.

"And it was a test for New Zealand, which often says: 'We are the most peaceful country in the world'. And yes, New Zealand had a very good reputation. But now this was a test of how New Zealand would react: with hate, with violence, with peace, with compassion? In this test, New Zealand showed compassion.

"[I don't feel conflicted.] I think that I have one heart; I don't have two hearts. Imagine you are a rose. Now, if you chop the rose, there will be a rose smell. If you squash it, there will be a rose smell. If you tear it, there will be a

*Farid Ahmed shares with Ann Hassan the importance of forgiveness even towards the man who massacred those praying with him in the mosque.*

rose smell. So my heart is a loving heart and I do not find any hate, whatever challenges my heart faces. I believe that a hating heart is a sick heart. Anger, rage, selfishness, greed, cruelty — all this makes our heart sick, and it has psychological effects. If anyone is suffering from hatred, they are not healthy."

## Decision to Be Loving

"If someone is hating me and inciting me to hate back, the way I look at it is this: they are trying to control me, trying to control my heart. I don't want him to control my heart because it's mine — this is my heart. I have decided that my heart will be loving and if someone is trying to put hatred onto me — No, I won't have that."

## Prepared to Forgive

"It did not take me time [to forgive the shooter]. I think my heart was ready because of our faith. Our faith is that humans are brothers and sisters, children of Adam and Eve. Our duty is to be loving, to be caring. When one of our human brothers and sisters does something terribly wrong, would you say: 'No, God, I don't accept that he is my brother or sister. I don't accept that he is also a child of Adam.' I have accepted, truly, sincerely and honestly — and this is what I have been teaching — that yes, humans are genuinely brothers and sisters. As I said before, what we say, we need to practise. And that belief was a good start. And that's why when a TV journalist asked me: 'How do

you feel about the attacker?’ I said: ‘I do not support what he has done, but I love him as my brother.’ And I meant that and I truly mean that.”

## Stories of Reconciliation

“I think of the prophet Yusuf — how his brothers tortured him, sold him as a slave, and after all this, when Yusuf was established in Egypt, his brothers asked him for food. Prophet Yusuf could have arrested or expelled them. But instead he entertained them, gave them accommodation, the best food, and then at last he said: ‘I forgive you and on top of that I have asked God to forgive you.’

“Stories like these — I had them in my mind. So when I was tested, I had no anger, I had no hate for him. My heart was full of love. And as a result, the only thing that came out was love. Allah says, and I think it’s in the Bible also: ‘If



somebody does you wrong, does bad things to you, then continue to do good to them.’ We don’t do bad for bad. [The shooter] gave me hate, gave me cruelty; I decided to give him love.”

## A Way Forward

“I think my heart was ready, my mind was ready. At the end of that night my daughter, she was 15 and she was — you can imagine — extremely upset. She spent four hours talking to her three classmates. They were three girls: one Christian, one atheist, another who did not know. She talked and talked and after four hours she came out from her room and she asked me: ‘Dad, did I do anything [in anger] to you?’ And I said: ‘Yes, you did, but you were upset.’ Can you imagine where she was emotionally? And she came out with wisdom, no longer

emotionally overwhelmed. She came and she asked me this — and I was very relieved that her mind was working. Three friends, not from her same community, helped my daughter to calm down. Remember this: look after your friends; you can save lives.

“So we sat down and I said: ‘You are my leader today.’ She said: ‘Dad, I’m only 15 years old.’ And I said: ‘Do not underestimate your age.’ I asked her two questions. First: ‘What is your reaction? Shall we break down with grief and become pathetic, depressed, selfharming or harming others? Or shall we take the opposite route: be resolute, be stronger, use this gift as a motivation and power to be stronger in mind so that we can work to save people’s lives, to make people’s well-being better?’ She said: ‘The second one’ and I said: ‘Good’.

“My second question was: ‘What should we feel about the killer of your mother?’ I gave two options. One was anger, grudge, hate, retribution — the other was forgiveness. She said: ‘Forgiveness.’ We did not need any other work. Still, now, my daughter thinks that we should not burden our hearts with revenge, with anger. We should free our hearts so that we can move on and do good.

“Forgiveness heals your heart, because it is an internal process that pushes the pain out of your heart — it’s self-healing. Forgiveness breaks the chains of anger and removes all the negative thoughts that are harmful not just to yourself but to other people. Forgiveness allows your heart to be loving and compassionate — which is the best thing for you and for others.”

## Hope for the Perpetrator

“I do not know whether [the shooter] accepts or does not accept my forgiveness. But that should not worry me. I need to focus on what is my duty. I need to be happy. I don’t know what his thinking is. I pray for him. I don’t hate him. I don’t want to see him in pain, because what happiness would it be to me to see someone in pain? I pray for God to give him guidance. In history we have seen people who were terrible people, but have changed their lives.” ❖

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## BE RESPONSIBLE! BE URGENT! BE EFFECTIVE! BE DEMOCRATIC!

Neil Darragh discusses *Laudate Deum*, Pope Francis's Exhortation on the climate crisis which he published on the feast of St Francis of Assisi, 4 October.



### An Ecological Conversion

In his earlier Encyclical entitled *Laudato Si'* (2015), Pope Francis called for an "ecological conversion". We are used to the idea that Christianity calls us to "conversion", a change of mind and heart resulting in a change of lifestyle. An "ecological conversion" is a deeper and wider conversion which includes a conversion of how we interrelate with the other beings of planet Earth, our "common home".

In this new Exhortation, entitled *Laudate Deum* (2023), the pope continues what is essentially the same call but with increased urgency and

with updated applications. We are invited into the "marvellous concert of all God's creatures" in which human beings have a unique value, yet where human life is incomprehensible and unsustainable without other creatures. All of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, "a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect" (*LD* par 67).

Francis's call is now more urgent than it was eight years ago and has a sense even of exasperation. It seems our response has been too slow.

And the dangers of climate change in particular are now more serious.

### The Technocratic Paradigm

In *Laudate Deum* Francis emphasises again the destructive nature of what he calls the "technocratic paradigm". This is the mentality, often subconscious but disturbingly influential, which regards reality, goodness and truth as automatically flowing from technological and economic power as such. The immense technological development of the last few decades has not been accompanied by a sound ethics or spirituality capable of setting

limits and teaching self-restraint. Francis comments: “to suppose that all problems in the future will be able to be solved by new technical interventions is a form of homicidal pragmatism, like pushing a snowball down a hill” (LD par 57).

## Climate Change

Among the many ecological issues that cause us concern today, this Exhortation focuses particularly on climate change. Today, Earth's climate is changing in unexpectedly dangerous ways. Not all climate change is the result of human activity, of course. Some of it is natural change inherent in the long-term cycles of an evolving planet. But some of it is, indeed, a result of human activity particularly over the last few decades. Some of this activity, like greenhouse gas emissions, we just need to stop because it results in an increase in the heating of the surface of the planet.

Even if some of the heating of Earth's surfaces is a result of “natural” processes, we need to find ways to cope with the sheer speed of these processes today. Yet we still have not understood nor devised the means to limit the destruction and death that can result. A key point here is that climate change is not just happening. It is happening *faster*.

## Different Levels of Responsibility

*Laudate Deum* is addressed to all people of good will. It has an expectation or at least a hope that everyone will participate in the needed remedial action. But this will differ according to what we may call the person or group's level of responsibility.

For most of us, our effective action is limited in outreach. Whether my outreach is *local*, *national*, or *international* it is still important. The pope notes, for example, that efforts to combat environmental destruction can be quite effective at the level of households and local groups. Perhaps even more important than the actions themselves, efforts by households to reduce pollution and waste and to consume with prudence, are creating a new culture. The mere fact that personal, family, and community

habits are changing is contributing to greater concern about the unfulfilled responsibilities of the political sectors and indignation at the lack of interest shown by the powerful. At this basic level, we are helping to bring about large processes of transformation rising deep within society.

## What Does It Mean for Us?

What could be the “take-home” messages for Aotearoa New Zealand from this Exhortation?

***Laudate Deum* is a call to take our own responsibility for the planet, but to be focused, do it quickly, do it at whatever level we can be effective, and do it democratically.**

## Our Local Involvement

*Households* and small groups at the local level like *local churches* and local organisations, play an important role in conservation and in mitigation of environmental destruction, but also in changing attitudes and lifestyles.

## Our National Responsibilities

Some remedies, however, require action at a *national* or regional level. Energy transition is one of these. The use of fossil fuels for transport is a major cause of greenhouse gas emissions. We need an energy transition towards clean energy sources such as wind and solar energy and the abandonment of fossil fuels. There is already a movement in Aotearoa New Zealand towards this objective. Yet it is a massive task to reduce transport emissions.

Just as most of us in our homes and work have learnt to follow the principle “reduce, reuse, recycle” so in our use of transport we need to follow the trajectory of *avoid* (the need for motorised transport), *shift* (to more sustainable modes of transport such as walking, cycling and public transport), and *improve* the energy use

of existing means of transport.

There is a sign of hope that in Aotearoa New Zealand greenhouse gas emissions are now on the way down with annual emissions of carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels the lowest since 1999. And for the future, Aotearoa has untapped resources of renewable energy, wind, solar and geothermal. An even bigger supply of offshore wind is now being explored. Yet these shifts will require a national will with political coordination from all the major political parties.

## Our International Responsibilities

At the *international* level Pope Francis has an eye towards COP28 (the annual meeting of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) in Dubai later this year. He notes that at this level we need a new process marked by three requirements: that the procedures decided upon be efficient, obligatory and readily monitored.

## Democratic Processes

The central focus here is not, however, on how we can better manage the environment. It is about how we manage our own attitudes and behaviour, that is, it is about our own conversion, including how we make decisions together. It cannot be achieved through autocratic decisions by the powerful.

Following on from his hope for a development in human responsibility, values and conscience, Pope Francis notes a need for conversation, consultation, arbitration, conflict resolution and supervision, and in the end, a sort of increased “democratisation”.

Essentially, *Laudate Deum* is a call to take our own responsibility for the planet, but to be focused, do it quickly, do it at whatever level we can be effective, and do it democratically.✦

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# URGENT CALL TO TRANSFORMATION & ACTION

**Mary Betz outlines Pope Francis's newly released apostolic exhortation on the climate crisis, *Laudate Deum*, addressed to all people of good will.**

ON THE FEAST of St Francis, at conclusion to the Season of Creation, and upon the advent of the Synod on Synodality, Pope Francis released *Laudate Deum* (*Praise God* in Latin) as a follow-up document to his 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si'* (*Praise Be* in Italian). He enjoins us to change because "the world in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing the breaking point".

So far, our collective response to climate change has been woefully inadequate, and in the words of the African bishops, manifests "a tragic and striking example of structural sin". *Laudate Deum*, while lacking the breadth, synthesis and poetry of *Laudato Si'*, is nonetheless a grave and urgent call to transformation and action for individuals, communities and nations.

## Climate Crisis

Well aware that many people, including Catholics, have attitudes toward climate change which are "dismissive and scarcely reasonable", Francis reviews current climate science and its implications. He notes with sadness that "the climate crisis is not exactly a matter that interests the great economic powers [or even *lesser* economic powers like Aotearoa] whose concern is the greatest profit possible."

Worth pondering is Francis's observation that some climate effects "are already irreversible, at least for several hundred years", like the increase in ocean temperature and acidity, and its decrease in oxygen, as well as continental and polar ice melt, deforestation and permafrost melting. These changes make many of our brother and sister species



victims of our action and inaction: "What happens in one part of the world has repercussions on the entire planet" and "everything is connected" — lessons we well know from recent climate-influenced floods and cyclones.

## The "Technocratic Paradigm"

Francis revisits this paradigm from *Laudato Si'*. The "technocratic paradigm" is a way of thinking which deludes us into believing that we can exploit the natural world for its minerals, water and other resources because there will always

be a technological fix for what goes wrong. We even exploit other human beings, putting relentless economic growth before people's health, homes, land and livelihoods. This paradigm is dangerous because a few people with money and technological knowledge can and do have "impressive dominance" over people, nations and Earth.

This paradigm sees creation as an *object* for resource use and human ambition, a mere setting for human endeavour. Often cloaked in terms of economic "reasonableness", it has led to the destruction of much



of the created world, as well as relationships between humans and with non-human creation. Indigenous cultures largely retain a respectful and harmonious relationship with nature, understanding our dependence on its life for our own. Only living this latter relationship will enable us to live long and peacefully with one another in our common home.

## International Politics

Francis believes that respectful relationships with all creation which challenge the technocratic paradigm must constantly be worked at, as he observed in his last encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (2020): “Goodness, together with love, justice and solidarity are not achieved once and for all: they have to be realised each day.”

He suggests that multilateral agreements between states are the best way to do this. Above all, we need “more effective world organisations, equipped with the power to provide for the global common good, the elimination of hunger and poverty and the sure defence of human rights.”

At the same time, a multilateralism “from below”, not determined by power elites, can rise where “activists from very different countries help and support one another” to pressure “the sources of power”.

Using the example of the Ottawa Process, through which nations committed to ban anti-personnel mines, Francis says that nations, civil society and citizens are often “capable of creating effective dynamics that the United Nations cannot.” And because our world “has become so multipolar and at the same time so complex ... a different framework for effective cooperation is required”.

## International Climate Conferences

For several decades, most nations have gathered each year at a Conference of the Parties (COP) to try to agree on targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, compensate vulnerable countries for

loss and damage already suffered, and help developing nations adapt to climate change. While the COP21 Paris Agreement aimed to keep overall warming within 1.5°C of pre-industrial levels, there are no sanctions if countries do not live up to their commitments.

Concerns about the COP process are real: Earth is currently on track to heat to 2.7°C above pre-industrial levels by 2100 ([www.climateactiontracker.org/global/temperatures/](http://www.climateactiontracker.org/global/temperatures/)). This high level of warming is projected because 1) each country’s voluntary targets for emissions reductions are collectively not enough to reduce warming, and 2) most countries have not committed to policies or legislation which would meet even those too-low targets.

The environmental and human consequences of such a temperature rise would be disastrous. As Francis points out, necessary changes will

certain countries or businesses”. He asks a question — certainly pertinent to our politicians in Aotearoa — “What would induce anyone ... to hold on to power, only to be remembered for their inability to take action when it was urgent and necessary to do so?”

## Faith

Our faith, imbued with the goodness of the created world, gives us hope in the possibility of transformation for ourselves and our relationships with all creation: “Human life is incomprehensible and unsustainable without other creatures.” While so much needs to change at national and international levels, every little bit we can do also makes a difference.

Even if individual and community efforts seem small in their ability to slow climate change, they “generate indignation at the lack of interest shown by the powerful” and create “a new culture” which demands political change. Transformation can thus arise

Pope Francis asks: “What would induce anyone ... to hold on to power, only to be remembered for their inability to take action when it was urgent and necessary to do so?”

be financially costly, but costs will only increase the longer changes are delayed.

## COP28

COP28 in Dubai begins at the end of this month. Francis hopes for recognition that climate change is a human and social issue, not simply an ecological one. He hopes for “binding forms of energy transition that meet three conditions: that they are efficient, obligatory and readily monitored”.

Francis asks conference participants to consider “the common good and the future of their children, more than the short-term interests of

“from deep within society”.

In a pointed penultimate paragraph, Francis notes that per capita emissions in the USA are twice that of China, and seven times the average in the poorest countries. Along with political change, he begs each of us to change the “irresponsible lifestyle connected with the Western model” to “genuine[ly] care for one another”. Will we be able to tell our grandchildren, truthfully, that we have done all in our power to protect their future from catastrophic climate change? ♦

*Yamima* by Tina Spiro © Used with permission [www.tinaspiro.com](http://www.tinaspiro.com)

**Mary Betz** lives in Waitākere, West Auckland, and is a writer with a background in ecology, theology, justice and peace. She has two daughters and is a proud grandmother.





## Najwa's Song

I am in a holy place.  
I am still with solitude.  
I hold the bowl empty of stars and justice.  
I wait.

Beyond the wall I hear soldiers  
zealous with guns.  
Shots repeat history.

My mother said justice  
is a fruit left on a tree.  
No one has a taste for it.  
My mother is the blue of wisdom.  
My grandmother is the kiss of tattooed lips.

I remain in a holy place.  
I hold the bowl empty of stars and justice and  
I wait.

By Anne Powell © *Tree of a Thousand Voices*  
Steele Roberts 2010





*Life by Zehra Saldirdak from Pixabay*





## Who Does Catholic Sexual Morality Help?

**Martha Heizer** raises questions about the adequacy of Church teaching on sexual morality for Catholic people at this time.

THE RIGHT TO self-determination as a human right was affirmed by the UN General Assembly in September 2014. Everyone has the right to self-determined sexuality. This right includes the freedom to decide our sexual orientation, our choice of sexual partners, sexual practices and the form of our sexual relations.

But even modern societies have problems with this self-determination definition. The German government has only recently passed a new self-determination law. Until now, psychiatric reports and courts have determined sexuality, including whether non-binary people are to be recognised as such.

The Catholic hierarchs have the biggest problem with: "Every person has the right to choose their own sexual orientation". Modern science tells us that no one chooses their sexual orientation voluntarily. So bishops and modern science seem to agree on this point. Yet the Vatican thinks it has to fight modern sexual science with its undefined gender ideology.

### Teaching Is Far from Sexuality as God's Gift

From a Catholic Christian, philanthropic point of view there is still something to be added to this legal definition. The task of Christian

sexual morality is to show what it means to see sexuality as a gift from God. As the text from the German Synodal Path says: "A Christian sexual morality should promote a life-serving shaping of sexual pleasure over the entire span of human life that is mindful and dignified. It should sensitise people to its moments of joy and thus protect it from a trivialising blandness. And above all, it should exclude violence and brutality". Official Catholic sexual morality is miles away from this.

### Warped Attitudes to Sexuality

So, who does Catholic sexual morality help? It is important to

have guidance in an area that affects us all existentially. But I have experienced time and again that Catholic sexual morality doesn't help. I offer a few little episodes from my personal experience.

Before my mother got married, she had to take "bridal lessons" from a priest. He advised her not to be too loving to her husband so that he wouldn't get the idea of wanting to have sex with her too often. She told me that with a smile: "I didn't follow his advice. As a celibate man what does he understand about sex in marriage."

When I was 14 in a Catholic school, our class attended a retreat day with our parish priest. He admonished us that when we had a bath we should sprinkle sawdust on the water so that we couldn't see our naked bodies and have bad thoughts. At that time I didn't really know what "bad thoughts" were. "Sawdust" was the running gag in our class for weeks.

Our neighbour told me that she and her fiancé had to wait 12 years to get married. They didn't want to have sex before marriage in accordance with church teaching. "So we suppressed our desire," she said, "and after 12 years the desire had just vanished. Why were we so stupid as to believe the Church?"

A colleague, the same age as me, spent his secondary school years in the seminary. He told me that they had a wooden stick on their bedside table to use to tuck their shirts into their trousers so as not to use their hands. The spectre of "masturbation" hovered over everything and seemed the direct path to hell. Their own body became a danger to their salvation!

When I was at university in the late 1960s, the students' revolt, the women's movement and the sexual revolution reached us. We learned about flat-sharing communities in Germany and "free love". I can still hear the enthusiastic calls: "You can't deprive the children of the joys of sexuality!" The members of those communities were convinced that sexual "taboos create self-consciousness in children so that they come to believe that there are unclean, even disgusting body parts." We thought that sexualising

children was deplorable and must be prevented at all costs.

### Relational Ethic in Sexual Morality

At that time my head was spinning because it called into question everything we had learned. We had intensive arguments and long discussions about meaningful sexual education not only for children. Catholic moral theology was no help. Yet for how to deal with sexuality in a loving way, we knew guidance is important and meaningful.

## Christian sexual morality should promote a life-serving shaping of sexual pleasure over the entire span of human life that is mindful and dignified.

Then we read a booklet by Alex Comfort, professor of biology, sociology and physiology at Trinity College, Cambridge. In *Plea for a Humane Sexual Morality* written in 1950 he emphasised that sexual morality must always be a relational ethic. Comfort had two commandments:

First: Thou shalt not recklessly exploit a person's feelings or wantonly expose him/her to disappointing experiences.

Second: Thou shalt under no circumstances risk the procreation of an unwanted child.

We thought about what this meant. It means trusting our partner and not taking advantage of or disappointing our partner's trust. It means fidelity in the relationship, or, as the generations after us call it, exclusivity for as long as the relationship lasts.

We decided all those years ago to live in good conscience by these principles. With them it

doesn't matter whether a partner is of the same or a different sex; or your personal sexual identity and orientation; or the form of contraception chosen — as long as both agree and no life is destroyed.

We realised that Augustine was right when he proclaimed: "Love, and do what you will."

### New Articulation in Synod Discussions

Catholic sexual morality lags behind these simple principles. Only now in the Synodal Path in Germany have theologians, church activists and clergy (including bishops), drafted a human-friendly, sexual morality based on responsible freedom.

The basic text of Forum Four of the German Synodal Path says: It means "binding friendship, fidelity, respect, mutual tender affirmation and acceptance of responsibility in the case of parenthood." It means no violence and brutality. Dependency relationships and the exercise of power-over have no place in sexuality. Paedophilia is unbearable and unacceptable.

We do not know if this draft will find acceptance in the Vatican and worldwide clergy at the Synod on Synodality. It would be gratifying if it did as it would end the exclusion and disrespect of non-binary people. It would give the Church a positive impulse again particularly in the field of sexuality. This is important for us because we still love our Church despite all the bad that happens within her.

If the Synod decides not to agree I can say: "Bishops, life, love, our conscience and our relationship with God teach us the right thing. In our confrontation with your sex-hostile, misogynistic canon laws you have already lost. We have already won!"

But to all others I call out like Augustine: "Love and do what you want!" ♦

**Martha Heizer**, a German educationalist and psychologist, set up We Are Church Austria, now a world-wide reform movement We Are Church International. She gave this talk at Spirit Unbounded 'Human Rights in the Emerging Catholic Church', Rome 13-14 October 2023.





# Is Love Enough?



*A mother shares her experience of coming to understand her daughter's sexual orientation and relationship.*

BACK IN MY youth I sang along with the Beatles: "Love is all you need" — but is it?

I remember when my faith led to me to see the world in very clear terms of right and wrong according to what I thought the Church said. I remember saying that homosexuality was a perversion. I did not know anyone who was not "heteronormal" until I had left home.

The world I inhabit today is more open about and accepting of differences in gender and sexuality, and I am changing too. But how accepting is the Church?

## Initial Shock and Struggle

My three children have all had relationships with members of the opposite gender, so it was quite a bombshell when my beloved youngest daughter, Georgia, announced that she has discovered she is bisexual, has a girlfriend, and that they wanted to marry!

Georgia was worried about what my reaction as a Catholic would be. After the initial surprise, my gut reaction was to affirm my sensitive, intelligent daughter in her decision. I did struggle with what it all meant. Did "bisexual" mean that she would be flitting between male and female lovers, or be in a polyamorous relationship? Looking back on her personality and the choices she's made through her life helped me to make sense of her orientation. I read and prayed and confided in good friends. Most people were excited for my daughter and caring of me. In the end I had to follow my conscience — and also my heart.

## Challenge for Family

Our next task was to inform the grandparents, all of whom were devoutly religious and elderly. When we announced to my late mother that our daughter was going to marry her girlfriend, her reaction was: "What went wrong?" Mum had some friends who were gay, but she didn't think any of her descendants would "deviate" from the traditional orientations. She still had the idea, I think, that Catholics should keep to the same moral norms she had grown up with. My Protestant mother-in-law recently asked my husband if Georgia "had come to her senses yet".

Sadly, my new daughter-in-law, Nat, has not met any of Georgia's grandparents and probably never will. All of our family love Georgia, but some things are hard to deal with when you're over 90 and set in your ways. As well, distance is a barrier as Nat and Georgia live on another island and the

grandparents are now past travelling.

We have met Nat's family and they are welcoming people. Together we were able to celebrate the engagement and wedding of our offspring with joy. Many of our family and friends also celebrated with the couple or sent their good wishes. My daughter and her wife love each other and we think they are a well-suited couple. I have to say that their wedding vows were more sentimental and sloppy than ours were!

## Fear of Church Reaction

I have asked that this article be anonymous and I've used pseudonyms. I am not ashamed of my daughter and her new status, but I am mindful of my position. I work within the Catholic Church — the Church founded on "love one another as I have loved you". Most people I work with greeted the news with enthusiasm and asked me to pass on their congratulations. Many have shared similar experiences of a child, sibling or friend.

Same-sex marriage has been legal in New Zealand for 10 years, and in Australia for the past six years. However, officially the Church does not support this orientation or relationship. The *Catholic Catechism* states that homosexual acts are "intrinsically disordered" and "contrary to the natural law" (par 2357).

There are people within the Church who accept such statements literally and with no flexibility. Thankfully there are also pastors within the Church who take a more pastoral, and perhaps more realistic view. I know of pastors in other Christian churches who are married to their gay partners and continue to minister within their congregations.

I find myself in the position of many others who love





the Church and have made a decision that may not be approved of by some in the Church. I want to keep my job in the Church. I don't advertise my daughter's new status. I don't want an argument with the powers that be.

Unfortunately, there are teachers working within Catholic Education and employees of other Church agencies who must keep their orientation or the gender of their partner under wraps. There are people, often the ones in positions of power, who hold that same sex relationships are sinful, unnatural and disordered. These are the people who readily judge others and force some employees to become hypocrites.

On one of my Catholic digital forums, a member asked if she should attend a same-sex wedding. Many of the respondents said to attend the wedding would be to condone sin. I was shocked and I sincerely trust that such voices are in the minority. Pope Francis famously said: "Who am I to judge [a homosexual person]?" and went on to clarify: "People should not be defined only by their sexual tendencies: let us not forget that God loves all his creatures and we are destined to receive his infinite love" (2016).

Along with the *Catechism*, critics of same-sex marriage often cite Scripture verses and natural law. Their view is literal, legalistic and inflexible and most often has no room for enquiry.

### My Position and Hope

Some Scripture scholars say that the biblical texts used to denounce same-sex relationships (Romans 1:27; Leviticus 18:22; 1 Corinthians 9:9-10) don't refer to a committed long-term relationship, but rather are critical of abusive, promiscuous actions.

Natural law is an ethical framework devised by men who gave much thought to how humans fitted into the eternal scheme. It has served the Church well, but the findings of psychiatrists, the experience of many families and the law of love may be calling us as a Church to look again at the rules derived from that framework.

Joseph Fletcher, who devised Situation Ethics in the 1960s, thought Christians should always ask what the loving thing is to do in a particular situation. Surely that idea has some validity too.

I am informed by the experts and the frameworks, but I really have to trust my personal experience and the challenge that presents. I know Nat, my daughter's wife. I have seen the two of them together over the last two years. I can see the positivity and love in my daughter's relationship. I see the love and happiness their relationship gives these young women, their friends and families. My hope for them is what I hope for my other children's relationships.

There have been many challenges to love and inclusivity in our family. We have accepted partners who are not married, we have former Catholics who no longer "practise", we have members from other Christian traditions, now we have members with a different sexual orientation. We've all grown — we all share, sometimes we fight and disagree, sometimes we cry, many times we celebrate — and mainly, deep down, we love. "Beloved, let us love one another for love is of God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7).

Perhaps, love is really all we need. ✨

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## SYNODAL DISCERNMENT & WOMEN IN THE DIACONATE

Phyllis Zagano *explains why the Church needs to reintroduce the tradition of women's diaconal ministry.*

THE PEOPLE OF GOD have asked. The Synod may answer. What about women deacons?

The *Instrumentum Laboris* states: "Most of the Continental Assemblies and the syntheses of several Episcopal Conferences call for the question of women's inclusion in the diaconate to be considered. Is it possible to envisage this, and in what way?"

Persons and pressure groups on both sides of the issue are making their opinions known. But opinion is not fact, and lobbying is not discernment.

The Synod on Synodality is an exercise in discernment and true discernment depends on the tripartite formula "See, Judge, Act". The first

requires facts. The second requires prayer. The third requires consensus.

So, the process begins with facts. While some interpretations differ, the facts about women deacons are well known and accepted by scholars. These must be considered in the light of the Holy Spirit. Then, and only then, can consensus be sought.

The five points following are critical to the discernment of whether the Church can restore women to the diaconate.

### **Women Ministered as Deacons**

Without question, women ministered as deacons in the early Church, at least through to the 12th century. The enormous amount of evidence begins

with Saint Paul introducing Phoebe as "deacon of the Church at Cenchreae" (Romans 16:1-2). While no one claims Phoebe was sacramentally ordained, she is understood to have served in an equivalent ministry to that of the seven with masculine names called by the Apostles in Acts, none of whom is called "deacon" (Acts 6:1-7).

Multiple sources attest that, from time to time and place to place, women assisted with the baptism and chrismation of women, were responsible for the catechesis of women and children, carried the Eucharist to and anointed ill women, cared for parishes, managed social services and performed diaconal altar service.

## Women Were Ordained to These Ministries

It is impossible to state that every diaconal ministry was undertaken by every woman deacon whom history memorialises with liturgical and epigraphical evidence.

There are several extant liturgical ceremonies for ordaining deacons; at least one is meant to be used for both male and female deacons. Five liturgies are held by the Vatican Library and others are in libraries and monasteries throughout Europe and elsewhere. The women were ordained as deacons by their bishops within the sanctuary during Eucharist, in the presence of the clergy through the imposition of hands by the invocation of the Holy Spirit; they self-communicated from the chalice; the bishop placed the stole around their necks and, importantly, they were named deacons.

## Diaconate Is Not the Priesthood

As Church practice developed and grew, the diaconate was essentially subsumed into the priesthood. By the 12th century virtually no one was ordained as deacon unless he was to be ordained as priest.

First, men were tonsured and so became clerics. They then progressed through the steps or stages leading toward priesthood: porter, lector, exorcist, acolyte, subdeacon, deacon, and finally priest.

The practice, known as the *cursus honorum* (course of honour), existed until soon after the Second Vatican Council, which affirmed: "At a lower level of the hierarchy are deacons, upon whom hands are imposed 'not unto the priesthood but unto a ministry of service.'" (*Lumen Gentium* par 29).

Paul VI's Apostolic Letter *Ministeria Quaedam* (1972) suppressed the practice of tonsure, the so-called minor orders and the sub-diaconate, replacing them with the lay ministries of lector and acolyte.

Today, the ordinary means of entering the clerical state is by ordination to the diaconate. In 2009, Pope Benedict XVI codified Pope John Paul II's modification of n. 1581 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*,

so that Canon 1009.3 of the Code of Canon Law reads: "Those who are constituted in the order of the episcopate or the presbyterate receive the mission and capacity to act in the person of Christ the Head, whereas deacons are empowered to serve the People of God in the ministries of the liturgy, the word and charity".

## WHILE THE ROLES OF WOMEN AND MEN DIFFERED IN THE EARLY CHURCH, THERE IS NOTHING BARRING WOMEN FROM UNDERTAKING ALL THE TASKS AND DUTIES OF DEACONS TODAY.

### Orthodox Churches Are Recovering the Tradition

Orthodoxy has a clear tradition of women deacons — "deaconess" is their preferred term — and there is significant discussion within the Orthodox Churches about recovering the tradition.

For example, an essay by liturgical scholar Cipriano Vagaggini, OSB Cam published in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* demonstrates the deep history of ordaining women deacons in the East. The common argument against his and others' research is that the women were not "ordained" only "blessed" and this confusion has spread to analysis of Western liturgical evidence.

Still, the liturgies for ordaining men and women as deacons are identical or nearly so, with the primary distinction often being the names of the saints invoked (Phoebe or Stephen, for example) and the pronouns used.

### Church Needs the Diaconal Ministry of Women

To argue against restoring women to the diaconate is to argue against diaconal ministry itself. While the roles of women and men differed in the early Church, there is nothing barring women from undertaking all the tasks and duties of deacons today.

The diaconal ministry of the liturgy, the word and charity need not be restricted. In 2021, Pope Francis ruled that women may be installed to the lay ministries of lector and acolyte, each required prior to diaconal ordination.

Women are already trained as preachers, but without ordination

they cannot preach the homily during Eucharist.

Women already trained in canon law cannot be single judges in canonical proceedings because they are not clerics.

Worldwide, women perform the majority of charitable works, often with outside funding and separately from diocesan and parish structures. As Vatican II stated about men "who actually carry out the functions of the deacon's office", "it is only right to strengthen them by the imposition of hands" (*Ad Gentes* par 16).

Ordaining women to the one order of deacon would send a great message to the Church and the world beyond, that women can indeed image Christ the Risen Lord, that women are made in the image and likeness of God.

The important thing is for the members of the Synod, and the whole Church, to prayerfully discern the facts of this or any other question before them in the light of the Holy Spirit and in the belief that God will not deny the Church what it needs.✠

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*Veronica Holding Her Veil*, detail of stained glass window by Sieger Köder in St James Church, Hohenberg, Germany. Photo by Zvonimir Atletic/Shutterstock.com

**Phyllis Zagano** was a member of the 2016-2018 Papal Commission for the Study of the Diaconate of Women. She holds a research appointment at Hofstra University, New York. Her latest book is *Just Church: Catholic Social Teaching, Synodality, and Women* (Paulist, 2023).





# I Was Hungry and You Fed Me

**Kathleen Rushton** *comments on the parable Jesus told in Matthew 25:31-46 of the great judgement.*

THE SCENE OF THE Great Judgement reveals a new dimension of the “Emmanuel – God-with-us” framework which unfolds throughout the Gospel according to Matthew (1:23; 18:20; 28:20).

On one hand, we see Jesus the exalted One who comes in glory accompanied by “all the angels” and who possesses, and is about to exercise, all power and authority in heaven and on earth.

On the other hand, this exalted heavenly One publicly claims and declares that he identifies with the disadvantaged and marginalised of the world – “the least of my brothers and sisters” whom he came among “not to be served (*diakoneō*) but to serve (*diakoneō*)” (Mt 20:28 NRSV) and had nowhere to lay his head (Mt 8:20).

## Self-Identification of Jesus

The self-identification of Jesus which spans the “distance” between the divine and “the least” of the humanity reveals a new depth to his two-part response to the question about which commandment of the Torah is the “greatest” (Mt 22:34-40).

Australian biblical interpreter Brendan Byrne explains that: “In loving and serving one’s neighbour in the way described here one is loving and serving Christ, and in loving



and serving Christ one is loving and serving ‘God with us.’” The two great commandments of the Torah making up the “greatest commandment of the Torah”, come together in Jesus.

## Matthew’s Community

Matthew’s community most likely lived in Antioch, the third-largest city in the Roman Empire. Sociologist Rodney Stark tells us that any “accurate picture of Antioch in New Testament times must depict a city filled with misery, danger, fear, despair and hatred.” This was a city “where the average family lived a squalid life in filthy and cramped quarters, where at least half the children died at birth or during infancy and where most children who lived lost at least one parent.” The city was filled “with hatred and fear rooted in intense ethnic antagonisms and exacerbated by a constant stream of strangers.” The city lacked stable networks.

Above all, Antioch was repeatedly smashed by disastrous catastrophes which meant a “resident could expect to be homeless from time to time, providing he or she was among the survivors.”

## World Turned Upside-Down

Matthew’s community lived in these socio-economic, political and physical realities. The collection of rents and taxes is the basis for the parable of Mt 18:23-35. A wealthy landowner and day labourers come together in the parable of the householder (Mt 20:1-16).

In this urban society, where are we to locate Matthew’s community? Although this Gospel frequently refers to Jesus’s involvement with the poor and the marginalised and to his sending of disciples among this group (Mt 10:7-8; 25:31-45), we cannot assume that Matthew’s community consisted of only

the poor and the marginalised. This Gospel was also addressed to a more privileged audience to remind them of their responsibility to engage in God's mission of mercy among the disadvantaged.

American pastor J D Greear insightfully reminds us that: "The early Church has no building, no money and political influence. And they turned the world upside-down."

## Call to Minister to Others

The significance of following Jesus by recognising him in the needy and least is found in the word which sums up all these actions: "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or in prison, and did not minister (*diakoneō*) to you?" (Mt 25:44).

While obscured in translations (eg, "take care of you" [NRSV]; "come to your help" [JB]), "minister" describes all these works of mercy. It sums up God's mission as lived out by Jesus "who came not to be ministered to but to minister" (Mt 20:28); the actions of angels who minister to Jesus when he is tempted in the desert (Mt 4:11); and of the women disciples who minister to him and the other disciples (Mt 8:15, 27:55).

Classical and early Christian use of *diakoneō* suggests an activity of an in-between kind. This word was found in classical literature in passages of a profoundly religious nature and is associated with one who is called to represent and speak on behalf of another. Earliest Christianity adapted this term to speak of ministry. And here, it names God's mission of mercy among the dispossessed. The only criterion in the Last Judgement scene is whether a person "ministered to or did not minister to" Jesus who is present in, and identifies with, our brother or sister in need.

## Heart of Our Theological Tradition

Moral theologian James Keenan sees that our entire theological tradition is expressed in terms of mercy which he defines as "the willingness to enter into the chaos of others." Attending to someone in need is no simple matter because it means entering into the entire "problem" or "chaos" of that person's particular situation.

Keenan continues: "Understood in such terms, the creation is an act of mercy that brings order into the chaos of the universe. The Incarnation is God's entry into the chaos of human existence."

## Here and Now

The Church hearing Matthew's Gospel proclaimed today also lives in socio-economic, political and physical realities akin to those in which the Christian community lived in Antioch. In a world besieged by social and structural sin, our local church may remain focused on itself rather than on our part within the larger mission of God. We are called to look where the Holy Spirit is already active outside the Church itself and to discern what is God calling the community to be.

Here and now, under God's guidance, we can contribute to the well-being of people in our local area through community development. And we can attend to needs by recognising and developing strengths, self-

reliance, capacity building and letting the voice of people be heard through advocacy. In participating in the dynamic and evolving mission of God, we minister to Jesus who identifies with "the least of my brothers and sisters."

## Eighth Work of Mercy

The expansive nature of the traditional corporal and spiritual works of mercy now includes an eighth work – care of our common home. The eighth work is both a spiritual work of gratefully contemplating God's world and a corporal work of performing daily gestures that help to build a better world. This calls for an examination of conscience in acknowledging human contribution to ecological devastation and for a firm resolution to live and act differently.

We have seen how the two great commandments come together in Jesus. In loving and serving our neighbour and care of Earth, we are loving and serving Christ, and in loving and serving Christ we are loving and serving "God with us," the Creator of our common home. ✦

Scripture Reading Mt 25:31-46 for 26 November

*The Last Judgement, Giudizio Universale* by Michelangelo Buonarroti (1534-41)  
Fresco on altar wall of Sistine Chapel The Vatican Museums Rome

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



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# Darkness, Bats & Presence



I'M LYING IN THE dark on slightly damp and very soft moss in beech forest, waiting for bats. Above are a few glimmers of stars with a sky criss-crossed by the fractals of branches. It's a cold September evening but I'm bundled up well. This is a field trip for my ecology studies, but just now all that is required is to be quiet and wait. We've had a long day talking about conservation strategies, walking around mountainous alpine herbfields and searching for and catching wildlife. I'm feeling incredibly privileged to be here and excited about my study, but right now I'm exhausted.

What should I do with this time? I start with a body meditation, noticing how my toes feel and slowly working up to the top of my scalp. There's a leaf tickling my foot. Under my back is a lump in the moss I observe, feeling how my head and feet pull downhill, away from it. My fingers, encased in gloves, are tingling in the cold. The night air meets my warm cheeks and blows under my collar. My ponytail is beneath my head. Rooted in the moment, I suddenly feel ready to pray.

I don't usually feel ready to pray. My praying muscles are mostly strengthened by structure at church or in a morning prayer group. I pray when the liturgy leaves space for it, or as a habit as I get into bed with nothing to say. It's good that liturgy and the rhythms of a church community give

the time where I almost have to pray, but I can struggle with understanding why we need to talk to an all-knowing God. The moments where I can focus on prayer in my own time feel less about telling God things God already knows, and more about remembering who God is and how God calls us to be as God's people.

To pray, I begin by thinking of those nearest to me — lecturers, conservation experts, fellow students — all of us waiting silently in the dark. "God, I don't know all that is going on for these people, but be with them." I'm breathing deeply, the only sound being the bird squeaker used to attract bats. One flies overhead and the bat detector crackles, but it's soon gone.

Then I consider my family, people I love dearly, feeling grateful for who they are, thinking of stress and injuries and pain each member is experiencing. As I pray for them, the tide floods in; I remember so many things I can pray about. Friends who

have big job decisions to face and others who feel lonely. Disastrous global events so big I can hardly fathom where God is in them — floods, fires, fighting. "God, you are there with the broken-hearted. Show me how I can respond with love to those around me and those who are far away." I know of so many people and situations in need of prayer.

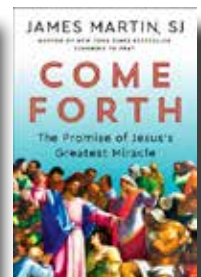
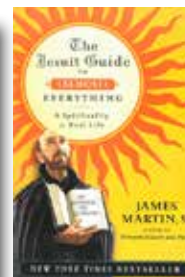
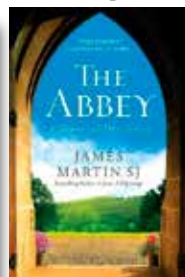
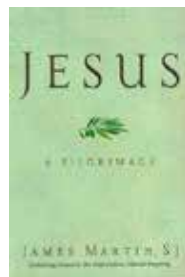
An hour has gone by, and we've caught no bats. The night is probably too cold for them this early in the season. As everyone stirs from their reveries and begins talking again, I pray for the bats as well. They are God's taonga undoubtedly happier catching the insects by their roosting tree than getting tangled in our net and ignominiously weighed.

As we walk back to the road, I feel refreshed and surprised by how much I could think of to pray for, like I've been re-called to my purpose in God's world of brokenness and beauty. I'm not sure how God is present in the places of hurt, but I take one more moment of stillness and God's presence here. In this forest, I feel small and held. "God, you are here. I choose to be thankful." Then I do a cartwheel and hop into our vehicle.◊

Shar Mathias lives in Ōtepoti/Dunedin where she is engaged in postgraduate studies. She writes, explores the mountains and enjoys cooking. She spent most of her childhood with her family in northern India. Shanti is her twin sister.



## Author Spotlight: James Martin, SJ



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# Reviews

## A Generous Lap: A Spirituality of Grandparenting

By Kathy Coffey

Published by Orbis Books, 2023. (USD 20)

Reviewed by Anne Kennedy

In *A Generous Lap* Kathy Coffey explores spirituality as a lens through which grandparents can focus the many experiences and opportunities we have to nurture our grandchildren's lives — and our own in the process — especially if we are lucky enough to have someone to share our lap with regularly.

Much of the book recounts Coffey's personal experiences of grandparenting in an American context. Adapted for use in our context, Coffey's experiences could enrich our spiritual identity and increase our awareness of

how God is present with us within our cultural and natural environment.

Chapter 4 "The Voices of Experts" gathers wisdom from interviews with grandmothers (sadly grandfathers do not really feature in the book).

Chapter 5 recounts stories of "Fine Models" of grandparenting — biblical grandparents, saints and even Pope Francis's grandmother Nonna Rosa.

Coffey weaves well-chosen snippets of prayer, art, poetry, music, Scripture, rituals and saints' stories and encourages us to add our own.

*A Generous Lap* encourages us to recognise how the relationship we share with our grandchildren is grounded in our own spirituality and offers the opportunity to be the spiritual models and wisdom figures we want to be for them. ★



## Always Going Home: Lauris and Frances Edmond: A Mother and Daughter Story

By Frances Edmond

Published by Otago University Press, 2022. (NZD 40)

Reviewed by Cecily McNeill

Frances Edmond's account of her sometimes tempestuous, though always loving, relationship with her famous mother New Zealand poet Lauris Edmond, is deeply insightful. Frances is the second of Lauris's six children. In *Always Going Home* she gives a sometimes blushingly candid account of family life and probes hitherto unknown areas of her mother's life.

Poetry moved Lauris in her 50s from "exist[ing] only

insofar as her family needs her to be there" to being a person in her own right. Early poems were bright and joyful though later, on the advice of friend and poet Alistair Campbell, she wrote of her pain — principally from the death by suicide of her fourth child at 21, but also from the breakup of her marriage, the decline of her husband's mental health and schism in the family. Clearly Frances has her mother's gift for writing and draws on her role as a frequent sounding board for Lauris's issues.

Lauris's drive to write is inspiring for women of a certain age. It will appeal to lovers of New Zealand's landscape and history, of poetry and of the vicissitudes of family life. ★



## Blood and Dirt: Prison Labour and the Making of New Zealand

By Jared Davidson

Published by Bridget Williams Books, 2023. (NZD 50)

Reviewed by David More

*Blood and Dirt* is the hitherto unwritten history of the role of prison labour in the making of New Zealand and its Pacific Empire. The story is largely unknown and unreported in official histories.

In his well-written and extraordinarily well-researched book, interspersed with contemporary illustrations, Jared Davidson traverses the history of unfree labour in New Zealand, commencing with Samuel Marsden's arrival in 1814 with Australian convicts to assist in the construction of Waitangi. He takes us through quarrying, road

construction, land levelling, forestry, and ends with prison farms, some of which are still operating. Much of New Zealand has been shaped by prison labour. For example, Davidson describes Dunedin as New Zealand's prison-labour capital. Prisoners removed Bell Hill, constructed the stone walls of the Leith and the harbour, built the mole at Aramoana, levelled land for the University and Otago Boys High School, and developed many streets, including the levelling of the Octagon.

I found *Blood and Dirt* a fascinating read. I had no idea of the extent to which non-free labour literally shaped New Zealand. My only criticism is that Davidson tends to view 19th- and 20th-century issues through 21st-century eyes. *Blood and Dirt* would be a good read for everyone. ★





# Reviews



## The Unlikely Murderer

Written by Wilhelm Behrman and Niklas Rockström

Five episodes, 2021, streaming on Netflix

Reviewed by Paul Tankard

The assassination of JFK, the leader of the free world, in broad daylight in a motorcade and in front of hundreds of people, and if not exactly televised at least caught on film by Abraham Zapruder, continues to haunt us. We find political assassinations, or narratives of them, compelling for the collision between radically opposed human qualities. A nation's leader represents personal character or charisma, some vision or policy, public life and national cohesion; sudden death by human agency shocks us into recognising the power of the opposite human qualities, of private choices or destinies, of violence and chaos.

When the Prime Minister of Sweden, Olof Palme, was shot in February 1986, there were no crowds, cameras or motorcades. He and his wife were on foot on the street late at night in central Stockholm heading home after seeing a movie. There were no reporters, no security guards, no CCTV and a shortage of both suspects and witnesses.

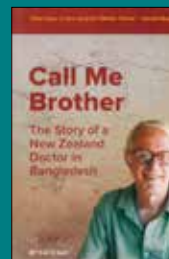
The police inevitably had a number of theories, but nothing much by way of solid evidence to recommend any of them. The account of the crime in this five-part series is based on the work of investigative journalist Thomas Pettersson, who made a case that the assassin was Stig Engström, a podgy, balding, bespectacled 52-year-old graphic designer, who worked for the major Swedish insurance company, Skandia.

Engström left his office near the scene minutes before the murder. He claimed to have been the first eyewitness to have spoken to Mrs Palme and assisted Palme as he lay dying, and to have pointed police in the direction of the fleeing assassin. But as either a witness or a suspect, he might never have come to the police's attention if he'd not phoned them himself the following day.

Police did not take much notice of Engström as he gave inconsistent accounts of his movements, had no obvious motive to murder Palme and came across as a fatuous attention-seeker. He's a disappointed man, always anxious to ingratiate himself, but who no one at work, in the community or among his friends took seriously. Played here with sympathy and a satirical edge by the Swedish actor and comedian Robert Gustafsson, he is both obsessive and banal, calculating and fearful.

The case has never been satisfactorily solved. In this twisty and compelling series, Engström's implausibility finds its perfect match in the police's cluelessness. In 2020 an official inquiry declared Stig Engström to be the prime suspect in the case, but also that there was not sufficient evidence to prosecute him — which was in any case not possible as Stig Engström died in June 2000. ★

## Call Me Brother: The Story of a New Zealand Doctor in Bangladesh



By Kate Day

Published by New Zealand —  
Kailakouri Link Group, 2023,  
(NZD 40)

Reviewed by Dennis Veal

Edric Baker believed passionately in healthcare by the poor for the poor — and he achieved it. Inspired by Albert Schweitzer, Edric became a missionary doctor. He served in the New Zealand hospital in Vietnam but when the Viet Cong advanced, senior staff were evacuated. This seemed wrong to Edric. However, when they eventually returned to the hospital they found that the local staff had adapted and were coping. At war's end Edric was interned by the Viet Cong. He came to admire their creed: Eat with, live with, work with the people.

After his release Edric travelled and arrived in Bangladesh in 1979 where he stayed. The story of young Shilpi illustrates his work. She went blind with Type 1 diabetes, both the disease and its treatment were unknown in the area, and despite every effort Shilpi was dying. She ended up at Kailakuri where Edric diagnosed the trouble and treated her. At the same time, he pioneered a diabetes treatment regime in the area that was cheap and simple. Shilpi recovered and became a diabetes health worker. Like all the staff, she was trained on the job — a real example of continuing healthcare by the poor, for the poor. An outpatient visit at Kailakuri costs just \$4.

*Call Me Brother* is the story of a life lived in service. (Have your hanky near when reading!). ★



# Cross Currents

by Jane Higgins

PROFESSOR RICHIE POULTON, who died recently, was the director of the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study, known as "The Dunedin Study". This longitudinal research began in 1972 with a cohort over 1,000 newborns. Now, over 50 years later, more than 90 per cent of the participants have remained in the study.

This has allowed extraordinary insight into the factors affecting people's health and well-being over more than half a lifetime. In his final interview, Poulton told journalist John Campbell that one of the study's most powerful findings is that "you can't really undo what happens in childhood. So the experience of intense or regular poverty is long-lasting."

This is a stark finding, as relevant now as it has ever been. Because benefit levels have never recovered from the 1991 cuts, and because the recommendations of the Welfare Working Group have not been implemented, and because the minimum wage is below the living wage, many people in our country are living with the consequences of childhood poverty. According to the Child Poverty Action Group, this includes over 180,000 children

who are right now living below the poverty line.

Our current tax and housing systems are major contributors to this situation. It was striking to see the front page of *The Press* this week championing a \$10 million mansion being built in Ōtautahi by a local property developer as a home for his young family. Meanwhile, over 700 children in Ōtautahi are living with their families in either emergency accommodation in motels, or in transitional accommodation, which is like emergency accommodation, just not in motels. No child in such temporary housing is experiencing stability in their schooling, their friendship groups or their community. All are experiencing poverty.

The contrast between those doing extremely well and those barely coping is absolutely in keeping with how we tax and house our population.

We know, from new research in the report *Public Housing and Urban Regeneration: Maximising Wellbeing*, that public housing does a great job in contributing to people's well-being. The research found that people living in public housing (such as that provided by Kāinga Ora) have higher levels of well-being than tenants in private rentals. This result holds even

though family incomes are lower for public housing residents than for private tenants. And the main reasons? Stability of tenure and the quality of the homes. Private rentals do not emerge well from this study.

The research indicates that security of tenure (which is common elsewhere, such as in Europe) has a significant impact on tenants' well-being. Security of tenure means that people can regard their house as their home. They are able to establish strong local networks. Their children can make friends and settle into school. That public housing allows this security is good to know. That private rentals tend not to, is concerning.

Housing quality was also found to be better in public housing than in private rentals: houses that are warm, dry and secure contribute greatly to well-being. The research found this to be the case not only for a family's own comfort but also because this allows people to exercise hospitality without embarrassment.

If we can't undo what happens in childhood, let's take very seriously the responsibility to house our children well. ✧



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## Hymnwriters Downunder: Methodists Sing the Praise of God in Aotearoa New Zealand

By Terry Wall

Published by Tuakau Union Parish, 2022. (NZD 33)

Reviewed by Jillian Meredith

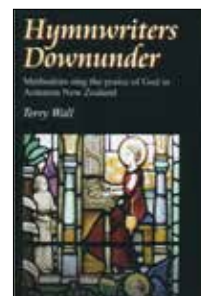
The subtitle *Methodists Sing the Praise of God...* might seem to restrict this study of New Zealand hymnwriters to Methodism, and although their heritage of English Methodism is recognised, the influence of the six writers is found in most church denominations in this country and internationally.

Terry Wall introduces six contemporary hymnwriters with a full-page photograph. They are Colin Gibson, Shirley Murray, Bill Wallace, Marnie Barrell, Norman Brooks and Norman Goreham. Colin, Shirley and Norman have died in

the last few years. As a church musician I am familiar with each one's works.

Wall's personal knowledge of the writers is of great value. He introduces each writer's journey of faith and theological exploration, paying attention also to the role of the New Zealand environment, social justice, acceptance in diversity and spirituality. Without exception, the language of these poet writers is fresh, free from religious cliché and rich in imagery.

I recommend this book. It offers an engaging mix of reflections on traditional hymnody and hope-filled future directions. I hope that *Hymnwriters Downunder* will let readers match the words with the music so that a singing faith is experienced in its fullness. ★



## I Don't Believe in Murder: Standing Up for Peace in World War I Canterbury

By Margaret Lovell-Smith

Published by Canterbury University Press, 2023. (NZD 45)

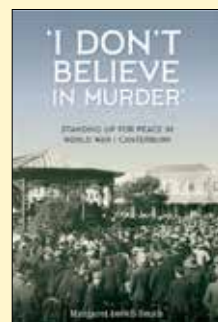
Reviewed by John Clark

If you have had the privilege of sitting in "the sea of white crosses" in one of the Belgian Military Cemeteries, you will surely have thought to yourself: What epic madness! Who allowed it to happen?

*I Don't Believe in Murder*, centred on Canterbury's 65 prisoners of conscience, provides informative, inspiring answers to many such questions. It is a story of conscientious objectors and pacifism in New Zealand during WWI. Those individuals risked their lives to challenge the majority mentality that is accepted as right when a country "goes to war".

The title is taken from the evidence of 17-year-old Harry Cooke who was imprisoned for failing to register for military training. His is just one story. The research behind this volume is evident in the 28 pages of footnotes. Every page is rich in direct quotes (and photographs) from those committed to a personal moral stance in the face of political and military battering rams. Lovell-Smith quotes from court evidence and judgements, newspaper editorials, letters to editors and the personal correspondence of those who supported resistance to war and those who opposed their stand.

This is not just a reference or textbook. It gave me an insight into the people and attitudes of New Zealand in the era into which my parents were born. It is a surprisingly rewarding read. ★



## My Theology: An Evolving God, An Evolving Purpose, An Evolving World

By Joan Chittister

Published by Fortress Press, 2022. (USD 12.75)

Reviewed by Marie Skidmore

This small 80-page book is a powerful challenge to embrace our current era and explore new answers to the three Catechism questions: Who is God? What must I do to gain heaven? Why did God make us?

Joan writes of God present in all creation — that we are swimming in the energy that is God who holds us in being and calls each to wholeness and unity in creation.

She challenges us to move from the "me" — individualistic "my salvation" — to becoming God's agents in Earth. And to move from a theology of domination and

the superiority of a Western world-view, to being co-creators, morally responsible for continuing the work of creation which God has entrusted to us.

She critiques the Church's lack of commitment to gender equality and to care for our current world. For example, missing Mass on Sunday is listed in some catechisms as a mortal sin, whereas profiteering from fossil fuels is not.

Heaven is here in our universe, she claims, and false notions of God have stopped us from seeing and understanding that "wherever I am, is the site of my union with the Life that gives life".

I give this book my highest recommendation. It has the potential to help us create life-enhancing spirituality for our personal, communal and planetary lives. Please devour it! ★





# For What It's Worth

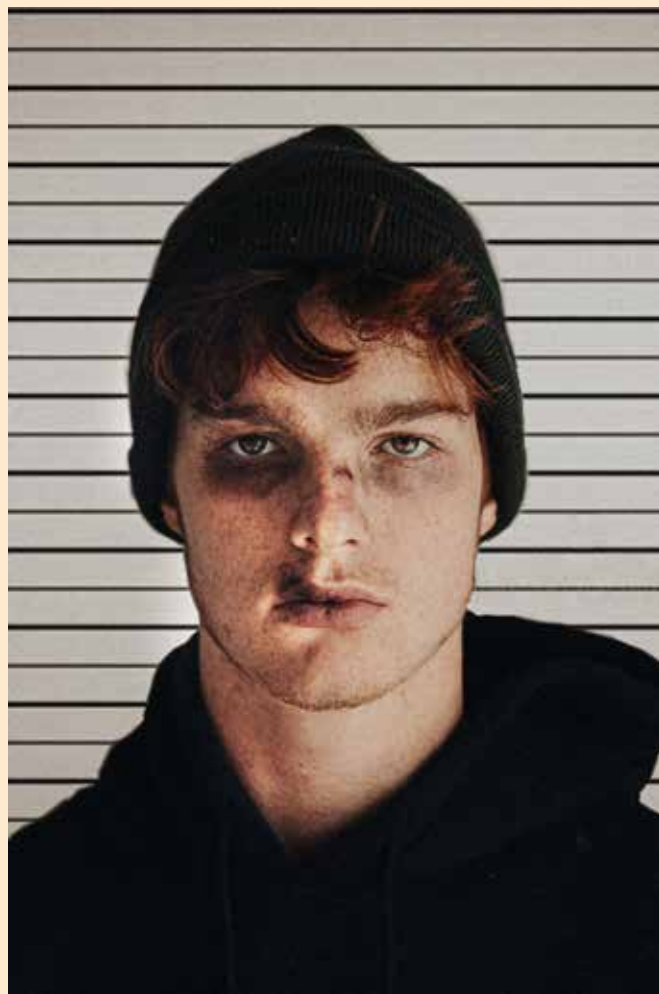
"TRENT" ARRIVED AT ABI (Acquired Brain Injury Rehabilitation) recently. The cause of his traumatic brain injury (TBI) is described in the admission notes as "a king hit or single punch to the head". Unsurprisingly, the most common cause of TBIs in our clients is vehicle accidents and the second most common cause is falls — either domestic or industrial. Running a disturbingly close third in the common cause stakes is violent assault — and, alarmingly, the king hit scenario is a frequent one.

Despite the regular occurrence of this type of violence, I am always shocked by seeing it printed in the file and by first encountering the injuries of the person admitted. The term "king hit" sounds like it might be something positive and powerful — we use terms like "kingmaker" to describe someone who holds the balance of power and "kingfisher" to describe a bird with superior fishing ability. But there is certainly nothing positive about the results of a king hit and there is no real power involved in the attack. In fact, the other name for king hit is "coward punch", but this is less frequently used by journalists, perhaps because it doesn't "pack the same punch" in a media report.

The term "king hit" seems to have been popularised in Australia during WWI referring to soldiers hit by shelling. More recently the term has developed a strong association with assaults carried out by young men in the vicinity of nightclub and hotel venues, with a single, unexpected hit to the victim's head. What does it say about our society that a significant minority see this kind of attack (often from behind) as "macho" — proof of manhood, strength, even courage — or worse, as some kind of sport?

I imagine there must be some connection between the increase in this type of violence and the rise in popularity of violent so-called "sports" such as MMA and cage-fighting. Even big-time boxing with its high monetary stakes seems to have little in common with its much more regulated predecessor, Olympic boxing. I am not suggesting that perpetrators of coward punches are all fans of such "sports" but many of them are performing to a crowd in some way, an audience which finds physical violence acceptable, even impressive. There is, then, a great challenge to the Gospel-inspired among us, to promote the message of Matthew 5:38-39. The non-violent protest of "turning the other cheek" needs to be rescued from being erroneously understood as piously accepting domination, and, exemplified as a strong, change-making position taking real power from the oppressor.

An important component of the rehabilitation carried out at ABI is education and training aimed at decreasing the chance of the client experiencing a second TBI. With



every repeat of a TBI the likelihood of permanent or fatal damage to the brain increases exponentially. Unfortunately, the victim of a coward punch has sometimes received two TBIs in short succession before they reach us — one from the punch itself and one from the blunt force occurring when they fall and their head hits the floor or pavement. Thankfully this is not the case with "Trent" but, despite his positive attitude and the advantage of youth, he still has a long way to go before he can return to work or to the many legitimate sports he enjoys. ✧

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



## Our last word

Bless our relationships  
with generosity and mana  
to connect us gloriously in this life  
and with all our dead,  
Source of Love.



From the *Tui Motu* Team