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Tui Motu

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LENTEN JOURNEY IN CHURCH & SOCIETY

NEIL DARRAGH, KEVIN CLEMENTS
& OTHERS

CHALLENGES FOR CATHOLICISM

MASSIMO FAGGIOLI, JOE GRAYLAND

PRACTISING SYNODALITY

GERARD AYSLEY,
KATHLEEN GALLAGHER

**JUST
BE
NICE**

**Solidarity with Those Suffering
Tahi me ērā Mamae anā**

INDEPENDENT CATHOLIC MAGAZINE

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COVER PHOTO

In all the messiness of life keep doing the right thing in the right way. Image by AA on Unsplash

FSC

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



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Editorial

AND JUST LIKE that we are in Lent. This year our Lenten journey is through disturbing times. We have world leaders and new oligarchs using threats and punishment to bend the will of other leaders and governments to give them what they want. This unbridled use of power may force countries to capitulate but it won't sustain community life. The division between the "haves" and the "have nots" will grow, and so will danger and disorder, as we witness the wanton trashing of international agreements that require the cooperation and generosity of all countries.

What better motivation for Christians, and all people who work for the common good, to demonstrate that solidarity and neighbourliness are not built by fear and coercion but on mutual trust and the sacrifice of some of our resources for the sake of others. This Lent we need to dig deep into the Christian tradition of prayer and fasting. As Neil Darragh outlines in his article, we have several approaches for our practice this year. From the social justice perspective the idea of "giving up" something — for children it was often sweets — is not to save a stash of goodies to enjoy ourselves at Easter, but to focus on aligning our lifestyles more closely with Christ's mission of equality and inclusiveness in the world.

So this Lent we can practise solidarity — stepping up to support those being made vulnerable. We might refrain from pretending we didn't hear a racist or scapegoating comment and instead pluck up our courage to let the person or group know we don't agree. We might fast from visiting a café and add those funds to our Caritas donations. We might engage our young people in conversations that explore critically the messages we're receiving from social media so that they can recognise "spin", disinformation and propaganda.

We might take up some kind of study and reflection that will increase our ability to identify an authentic Christian and Catholic interpretation from one designed for purposes that will corrupt the challenge of the Gospel in our world.

We're beginning Lent with the news that Pope Francis is ill in hospital. That we know about his condition attests to a new transparency in church communications. It means that now we can pray for Pope Francis as he either responds to his treatment, recovers and is able to resume his papacy, or journeys into death and the mystery beyond.

We are grateful to all who have contributed to this March issue. In sharing their scholarship, reflection, writing, art and craft they offer us nourishment, hope and encouragement to walk together in solidarity on our Lenten journey. Thank you!

And, as is our custom, our last words are of blessing and encouragement. ☺

Will This Make America Great Again?



SINCE THE SECOND World War, the global community has worked to create a system of checks and balances — both at the national and international levels — so that sense triumphs over madness. Countries have had institutions such as the United Nations to call on to ensure restraint for aberrant behaviour in the public sphere. But what happens if all of a sudden one of the major players, in fact one of the founders of these institutions, decides these “checks and balances” are in fact impediments to the pursuit of their own strategy for being the greatest country on earth? We may be about to find out.

Many of us will have been watching the shock and awe tactics of the newly reelected President Trump, and been staggered both by the extent of the disruption and the speed of the enactment of change. Trump’s pre-election plans are being implemented at breakneck speed and the outcome is discombobulation and chaos as jobs are lost and livelihoods are imperiled.

It would seem both political allies and adversaries are thrown off balance. No sooner is one executive order announced before another comes hard on its heels. The courts and both arms of government, House and Senate, are unable to keep pace with the extent of change and applications to judicial bodies to slow down or to turn back decisions. At present these institutions appear simply too slow to be effective. It remains to be seen if the judicial arm of the Supreme Court will see things differently from President Trump.

“Make America Great Again” is not just a slogan. It is a rationale for wholesale disruption in favour of America first. Right now, the application of tariffs is its weapon of choice. It has one reference point and one only — who is getting the financial benefit?

No matter how close an ally any one of its neighbours may be, the tariff is the signal that we are coming to get you because you have been doing better out of this

arrangement than we have. It requires no compelling evidence, no sophisticated weighing of the benefits for one country versus the other. And as Canada and Mexico know, this weapon does not discriminate.

Neither history nor national autonomy is respected. If Trump wants to rename the Gulf of Mexico as the Gulf of America, what power will object? Google — the new global cartographer — will oblige within days. And when Trump offers to take over other countries — Canada, Panama, Gaza — the world is dared to say “No”. Are these political games of brinkmanship, or is it “for real”? Time will certainly tell. For now, we remain on the edge of our seats.

What is clear is that New Zealand will not be immune from this realignment in American strategy. We rely on the dexterity of our political leadership to navigate these waters and ensure our trade routes stay open. And as our political alliances come under increasing pressure, we will be reminded that America is an elephant and we are a mouse.

Our deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters is experienced in these areas. Now, with Aotearoa at loggerheads with the Cook Islands and other Pacific neighbours as China continues to be a significant force in the region, Peters’ political and diplomatic deftness will be put to the test.

As yet we are still not directly feeling the blowtorch of the USA disruption — but our time is coming. ✦

Images by AI / Shutterstock.com

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





A LENTEN STIMULUS TO A SYNODAL CHURCH

Neil Darragh offers suggestions for how we can engage individually and as a church community this Lent. How should we approach the season of Lent in 2025? Is it the same as before or could it be different?

THE LITURGICAL SEASON of Lent is an extended period of self-discipline in preparation for resurrection. It has its own traditional themes: the theme of the *Process of Initiation into the Christian Community* and the theme of *Penitential Reconciliation* (a journey of return for those already baptised Christians who for some reason have been excluded from the Christian community).

More recently popular is the theme of *Social Justice*: “live simply that others may simply live”. Here the practices of Lent are not just about our own self-discipline (“giving up something for Lent”) but also and more directly about self-discipline (reduced consumption) which allows us to contribute to the welfare of others. The Caritas New Zealand Lenten programme this year with its orientation towards aid and development uses reflections on the Gospel readings (a traditional *lectio divina* method) for each of the Sundays of Lent.

These are approaches to the practices of Lent that have proven their worth and are still available to us today. The year 2025, however, has thrown up some new possibilities that are particular to this year. Lent can be a time not just of revising our customary practices, but also of revising our orientation to the deeper currents in church and society that call for our attention at the present time.

SOME NEW APPROACHES

We are trying to deal with the shock that as an institution our church failed to protect minors and vulnerable adults from sexual predators within the church. Lent could then become in 2025 a season of prevention, a season in which we embed the practices of *safe-guarding and self-guarding* in our personal behaviour and especially in our institutions.

Another theme that calls for our attention in 2025 to be that of the Holy Year, a year of Jubilee. The ancient Hebrew idea of “Jubilee” carries the implication that in a jubilee year relationships among the people should return to how they used to be before injustices and corruptions destroyed living by God’s covenant. In the New Testament, Jesus, following the prophet Isaiah, proclaimed a “year of jubilee” as the first announcement of his mission (Luke 4: 18-20).

Pope Francis has noted that we live in an age when many societies are characterised by “ever-increasing inequalities, increasingly autocratic and dictatorial regimes, and the predominance of the market model without regard for the vulnerability of people and of creation” (Address for the Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015, par 47). He calls us to be pilgrims of hope who announce and live out a response of hope in an age in which hope

founders and struggles to raise a contrary voice. The theme of this particular 2025 Holy Year invites us to be “pilgrims of hope” and is a response to today’s social breakdown, war and the failures of democracy.

There is yet another possible theme for Lent 2025 if we could integrate Lent 2025 into the continuing process where we have been learning how to become a more “synodal” church, that is, a people who “walk together”. Lent 2025 could then become a gathering up of the momentum of the last three years, including the 2023 and 2024 Synods, of our attempts at synodality. The *synodal way* is essentially a path of spiritual renewal and structural reform that enables the Church to be more *participatory* and *missionary*.

We are not short, then, of themes that could provide focus for our Lenten efforts at renewal: Christian initiation, penitential return, social justice, safe-guarding the vulnerable, pilgrims of hope and the strength of walking together. Several different themes, then, all of them with roots deeply embedded in Christian tradition.

The two new themes, the Holy Year theme of becoming “pilgrims of hope” and the synodal theme of “walking together” are the most challenging for us at this particular time in history. Is there more to it than we used to think?

PILGRIMS OF HOPE: THE THREATS TO DEMOCRACY

The challenge to become pilgrims of hope is a response to the current dangers to well-being in our societies. The church’s commitment to the realm/reign of God includes a commitment to the well-being of all people in planet Earth, not just some. Among the many forms of governance today, democracy is the one that comes closest to ensuring this. Today, however, democracy is increasingly under threat.

“Democracy” can be popularly described (with Abraham Lincoln) as government of the people, by the people and for the people. It has spread widely through the world since the 18th century but is now under threat through the recent rise of the old monarchies, the new oligarchies and the populist dictatorships in many countries. Although democracy is a relatively recent arrival in our mission politics, its survival could well be an objective for pilgrims of hope in the world today.

Hand in hand with the threat to democracy comes the threat to journalism. Democracy can only work if the people are well informed. The recent spread of disinformation, misinformation and lies has left most of us defenceless in the face of deceitful but well-funded campaigns. Where journalists become simply propagandists or spreaders of gossip who no longer hold themselves accountable for the truth of their communications, truth becomes a victim. If we were to commit ourselves to truth-telling as our Lenten discipline, we could be pilgrims of hope in an increasingly confused world.

THE SYNODAL WAY: LEARNING TO WALK TOGETHER

While becoming pilgrims of hope is a response to

dysfunctions in our politics, the “synodal way” is a response to dysfunctions within our church. The *synodal way* begins with a commitment to listen to others. But the pathway does not end there. Some groups within the church have taken the first step on this path, the step of listening. But after the listening comes the more difficult step of discerning which steps to take among the many proposals for the way forward. This is the stage that requires commitment to accountability and the evaluation of our current practices as a church.



THE TWO NEW THEMES, THE HOLY YEAR THEME OF BECOMING “PILGRIMS OF HOPE” AND THE SYNODAL THEME OF “WALKING TOGETHER” ARE THE MOST CHALLENGING FOR US AT THIS PARTICULAR TIME IN HISTORY.

Presently, the forward movement seems to be faltering. Among Catholic communities who have taken these first steps, the differences have become apparent. This is not just a matter of everyone being heard. Hard steps such as the equality of women in a male-dominated church, clericalism, the inculturation of liturgy, especially Eucharist, into the diverse cultures of the modern church, and the reform of decision-making in the church all remain issues that need to be negotiated, not just listened to. All these issues need hard thinking processes and hard thinking theology. Hierarchical thinking and synodal thinking do not easily mix.

If the degrading of investigative journalism goes hand in hand with the demise of democracy in society, it may be that the degrading of critical theology goes hand in hand with the collapse of walking together in the church.

Traditionally, we have not expected Lent to be comfortable. A focus on 2025 Lenten themes that lead us down into the deeper currents of society and church might make this Lent different and just what we need. ✨

On the Way to Emmaus by Janet Brooks-Gerloff © Painting is in the Benedictine Kornelimünster Abbey, Aachen
www.janetbrooksgerloff.jimdofree.com

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THE DARK NIGHT OF WORLD PEACE

Kevin Clements writes of how the USA under Donald Trump is destroying hard-won agreements for international order and cooperation and is creating chaos and further suffering in war-torn countries.

I CAN'T RECALL a moment in my life when the world has seemed so turbulent, chaotic and unpredictable. The idea of a rules-based international order seems a very distant prospect as the United States, under Donald Trump, flaunts democracy and the rule of law at home and undermines hard-fought-for multilateral institutions, agreements and conventions abroad. Of course, many countries always felt excluded from the benefits of the old liberal world order, based as it was on free markets, democratic polities, the United Nations and Bretton Woods institutions. But it did work effectively for seven decades in establishing some basic rules of the road governing international behaviour.

While the United Nations and regional organisations have always had to contend with the reality of national sovereignty and nationalism, there has been a willingness in the past to sacrifice some degree of sovereignty for the sake of international law and multilateral institutions. These are the organisations that are capable of solving some of the transnational problems that individual nations are unable to solve on their own, eg, world health pandemics, climate change, interstate and intrastate warfare, refugees and displaced persons, international development assistance. The international community has always been fragile but it has never been assaulted so systematically by Russia and the US as it has in the past few years.

A LESS PEACEFUL WORLD

The 2024 Global Peace Index (GPI) found that the world is less peaceful than it was in 2008, with a growing gap between the most and least peaceful countries. The number of conflicts in the world increased to 56 in 2024, the highest since World War II. The number of countries involved in conflicts outside their borders increased to 92 in 2024, the highest since the inception of the Global Peace Index.

This unpeacefulness has been accompanied by a rapid increase in military spending. Total global military expenditure reached \$2,443 billion in 2023, an increase of 6.8 per cent in real terms from 2022. This was the steepest year-on-year increase since 2009. The 10 largest spenders in 2023 – led by the United States, China and Russia – all increased their military spending. Donald Trump is asking for all countries (including NZ) to increase their military spending even though the world is afflicted by the negative consequences of such expenditure. The global economic impact of violence in 2023 was \$19.1 trillion and 97 countries deteriorated in peacefulness in 2024, more than any other year for which the Global Peace Index has gathered data.

In recognition of the negative consequences of expanding military expenditure, the Bulletin of the Atomic

Scientists in January moved the Doomsday Clock from 90 seconds to midnight to 89 seconds to midnight – the closest to midnight since assessments began in 1947. Each war (eg, the current civil wars in Eastern Congo or Myanmar) is generating untold tragedy and suffering, but I want to focus attention on three major violent hotspots.

THE MIDDLE EAST

The Middle East continues to face significant challenges, with the Israel-Palestine conflict, regional instability and external interventions dominating the landscape.

The Gaza conflict, now in its 15th month, has resulted in over 46,000 Palestinian deaths, 1,200 Israeli deaths and a dire humanitarian crisis. 13,319 children have been killed. Gaza has been reduced to rubble. Over 1.6 million Gazans are displaced, and the region faces severe food, water and medical shortages. Reconstruction efforts are stalled, and the international community's calls for a two-state solution remain unmet.

In the midst of near total destruction, President Trump is contemplating the relocation of 2.14 million Gazans so that the US can turn Gaza into the "Riviera of the Middle East". This would be ethnic cleansing and the second forced relocation of Palestinians in the last 76 years. It would generate even more martyrs for a free and independent Palestine.

The ceasefire agreement reached in January 2025 remains extremely fragile. Israel's far-right coalition opposes long-term peace deals, and the lack of any clear plans for "the day after" the war suggests continued low-level fighting and humanitarian suffering for many years to come.

UKRAINE

The Russia-Ukraine war, now in its third year, shows no signs of a definitive resolution, with both sides facing economic and military challenges. Despite some Russian advances, Ukraine has maintained significant resistance, ceding only 0.5 per cent of its territory in 2024. However, Ukraine faces personnel shortages and reliance on dwindling Western military aid. Russia's military casualties are approaching 300,000. This includes as many as 120,000 deaths and 170,000 to 180,000 injured troops. The Russian numbers dwarf the Ukrainian figures, which the officials put at close to 70,000 killed and 100,000 to 120,000 wounded.

President Trump's desire to broker a peace deal is contradicting all the basic rules of successful conflict resolution. Russia and the US can't broker a deal that excludes Ukraine and Europe, potentially freezing the conflict along current frontlines. However, negotiations are complicated by Russia's unwillingness to concede territory and Ukraine's fear of a regrouped Russian offensive. Russia's defence spending has surged to 25 per cent of its state budget, while Western sanctions continue to pressure its economy. Ukraine, meanwhile, faces economic exhaustion and uncertainty over continued US support.

While diplomatic efforts may gain momentum in 2025, a lasting peace agreement remains unlikely.

SUDAN

Sudan's civil war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has created a humanitarian catastrophe, with no clear path to peace.

The SAF has regained control of key areas, including Khartoum and Jebel Moya, but the RSF continues its offensive in Darfur. Both sides are propped up by international stakeholders, prolonging the conflict. More than 61,000 people have died in Khartoum state. Over 800,000 people are displaced in Darfur alone, with severe malnutrition and disease outbreaks. The siege of El Fasher has exacerbated conditions, leaving civilians trapped in crossfire. Neither side appears willing to engage in meaningful peace talks. Decentralised tribal groups further complicate negotiations, as they demand a seat at the table while pursuing their own territorial ambitions.

The lack of a unified international response has hindered progress. Without significant diplomatic intervention, the conflict is likely to continue, with devastating consequences for civilians.

TIME TO ACT

Unfortunately, these three conflicts show little prospect of easy resolution. Multilateral institutions like the United Nations and regional organisations like the European Union are being marginalised and gutted by Russia and the United States under Trump. The prospects for peace in the Middle East, Ukraine and Sudan in 2025 are bleak, with ongoing conflicts, geopolitical rivalries and humanitarian crises dominating the landscape. While temporary ceasefires and diplomatic efforts offer glimmers of hope, lasting resolutions remain elusive due to entrenched political interests, external interventions, and the absence of negotiated peace agreements and comprehensive peace frameworks. The international community's role in addressing these crises will be critical, but current dynamics suggest that reactive conflict management, rather than resolution, will define the year ahead.

The reality is that Donald Trump and far too many other political leaders no longer believe in a rules-based order and a revived and reformed United Nations. So instead of a rules-based order we have chaos, realpolitik and a reassertion of greed, power politics, and economic and political competition. We know from bitter experience that this will end with the four horsemen of the apocalypse: conquest, war, famine and death. It's up to those who believe in a common humanity to work for compassionate, collaborative, cooperative politics and a robust revival of multilateralism. ♦

19 Crucified on Teschemakers Land by Mary Horn ©
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Kevin P Clements is the Director of the Toda Peace Institute. He was the founding Professor of the National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, Otago University.



USING GOD FOR WAR

David More suggests that part of the conflict between the Palestinians and Israel is fuelled by religious fundamentalism where scriptural passages relating to specific historical contexts are used by Hamas and the Israeli government to justify war today.



AS I WRITE this there is a ceasefire in Gaza. It is not peace, simply a cessation of hostilities to enable the exchange of hostages for prisoners between Hamas and Israel. There was a recent hiccup when Hamas threatened to refuse to release further hostages on the grounds that Israel had breached the ceasefire, but following a threat from President Trump to “let all hell break loose”, the exchange has continued.

The ceasefire was opposed by the Zionists in the Israeli Cabinet, some of whom subsequently resigned. This, together with the willingness of the parties to resume their conflict, suggests the differing religious beliefs of Jews in Israel and Muslims in Palestine are at the root of the Hamas-Israeli war. There is confirmation of this in the Hamas Covenant of August 1988 and their Principles and Policies of May 2017. The 42 principles and 35 articles are too lengthy to set out here. In essence they say that Palestine is the land of the Arab Palestinian people. Jerusalem is its capital and belongs to Muslims. Hamas does not recognise the Balfour Declaration, the British Mandate, nor the 1947 UN

Partition Declaration establishing the state of Israel.

Hamas says, further, that there is no solution except through *Jihad* (war against the enemies of Islam). Resisting and quelling the enemy is the individual duty of every Muslim. Death for the sake of Allah is the loftiest of its wishes. It is possible for Muslims, Christians and Jews to live in harmony with one another, but only under the wing of Islam. It is the duty of other religions to stop disputing the sovereignty of Islam in Palestine.

FUNDAMENTALIST USE OF QUR'AN

The justification for waging war against the Jewish people is found in Surah 9:5 of the Qur'an, which provides: “But once the Sacred Months have passed, kill the polytheists (mushrikeen) who violated their treaties wherever you find them, capture them, besiege them, and lie in wait for them on every way. But if they repent, perform prayers, and pay alms-tax, then set them free. Indeed, Allah is All-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” Hamas uses this to justify their killing and hostage-taking of 7 October 2023.

However, it should be noted that many scholars

emphasise that this verse should be understood in its historical context and does not condone indiscriminate violence against people of other religions today. Islam, Judaism and Christianity are all monotheistic religions and share a common ancestor in Abraham.

LITERAL USE OF HEBREW SCRIPTURES

There are even more bloodthirsty passages in the Tanakh (Hebrew Scriptures, also found in the Christian Old Testament) which taken literally by the Israeli Government allows them to bomb Gaza, including killing women and children. For example, in the Book of Numbers, written around 1400 BCE, God instructed Moses to punish the Midianites. The army killed the men and took the women and children prisoner. The text says that Moses became angry with the commanders for keeping the women alive:

a child by her to enable God's promise to be fulfilled. Abraham agreed, Hagar became pregnant and gave birth to Ishmael, Abraham's eldest son. Ishmael is considered the father and founder of Arabs and Islam. God repeated his promise to Abraham after Ishmael was born, and on this basis, Islam claims the land was promised to Ishmael.

The Jews claim Palestine as the promised land as God repeated his promise to Abraham after Isaac was born to Sarah.

So through Abraham's son Ishmael, Palestine has been promised to Muslims, and through Abraham's son Isaac, Palestine has been promised to Jews. Is God's covenant to both Jews and Muslims to be interpreted as a justification for waging war, or a statement of unity under one God and a commission to live together peacefully?



"So now kill every boy and every woman who has had sexual intercourse but keep alive for yourselves all the girls and all the women who are virgins" (Num 31:17).

In Deuteronomy there are instructions concerning war including for the Israelites to kill every man and take for themselves the women, children and livestock (Deut 20:13-14). In I Samuel, written between 900 and 700 BCE, God instructs Samuel: "Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys."

THE PROMISED LAND

Notwithstanding the provisions of the Qur'an and Tanakh, Muslims and Jews lived peaceably together in Palestine for some 700 years. This was under Muslim rule and ended with the post-Holocaust Jewish immigration to Palestine seen as their Zion, and the 1947 United Nations Declaration establishing the State of Israel. Both sides of today's conflict share this history of peace, but they also share a belief that they have been promised Palestine by God.

In Genesis 15:18 God promised Abraham to give his descendants all the land from the borders of Egypt to the Euphrates River, which is the present Palestine. Abraham was childless when God made this promise. His wife, Sarah, had an Egyptian slave girl Hagar, and Sarah suggested to Abraham that he sleep with Hagar and have

TIME FOR TWO STATES

The United Nations Declaration established two states, and Jerusalem was to be independent and administered by the United Nations. This never happened because of the 1948 war following Israel's declaration of independence.

A two-state solution acceptable to both Palestinians and Israelis seems the only way peace will return to the area. There is no reason why ordinary Israelis and Palestinians cannot once again live in peace with each other. However, any solution will need to ensure religious tolerance and access by Muslims to their holy places in Jerusalem. This will be virtually impossible under the present leaders of Israel and Hamas. The removal of Muslims from Gaza and its development as a riviera, as suggested by President Trump, is also unlikely to find favour with Islam. ♦

Children of Abraham by Sieger Köder ©
photo: Zvonimir Atletic / Shutterstock.com

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US Catholicism & the American Dream

Massimo Faggioli writes that President Trump's second inauguration exposed deep divides in American Christianity. While some clergy embraced his vision, others, like Mariann Budde, the Episcopal Bishop of Washington, challenged it. The Catholic Church's entanglement with power now faces a reckoning.

DURING THE INAUGURATION of US President Donald Trump's second term, it was interesting to see that the most Francis-like language, rooted in mercy, came not from Catholic Church leaders but from a Protestant woman bishop. The inauguration of Trump's second presidency was, in many ways, a tale of two churches. There was a stark contrast between the invocations offered by Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York, Fr Frank Mann of the Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn and other male pastors at the inauguration, and the sermon delivered by Mariann Budde, the first female bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington. Bishop Budde became part of a long history of pastors calling out presidents of the United States. The other male pastors became part of another history involving Christian leaders who see their role in very different terms.

In those two days, we witnessed dissimilar examples of personal wisdom and courage but also diverging interpretations of the meaning of the Trump phenomenon. But there was also at work a different relationship between different churches and the United States of America. The Episcopalian Church (a member of the worldwide Anglican Communion) can be critical of America in ways that other churches, including the Catholic Church, are no longer able or willing to be. In a sense, the Episcopalian Church is one of the last vestiges of the British Empire, which ruled over North America until 250 years ago. It has preserved a unique prophetic freedom granted by its status as an established or state church within the Anglican tradition.

CHURCH & THE AMERICAN POWER STRUCTURE

In contrast, the Catholic Church in the USA has become more organic to the American power structure in ways that have blinded many of its members and even some bishops and cardinals. It is the dilemma of the established church dilemma. Counterintuitively, the established church — embodied by the papacy in the Vatican — remains one of the few bastions against the erosion of a certain vision of government and the state, against “turbo capitalism,” against the radical individualisation of human life, and against neo-imperialism in the United States today.

The present moment in US history compels us to reconsider the relationship between Christianity and the American dream. Pro-Trump Christians can no longer be called “conservative”. They are ultra-modern: it's one of the similarities with the 1920s and 1930s,

when Fascism and Nazism mixed nostalgia for a mythical Roman imperial past with an embrace of futurism and technology, social modernity and biopolitics. There are today undeniable innovative characteristics brought by the new American oligarchy, and Trumpism intends to start a new process of modernisation which mixes technological advances with post-democratic authoritarianism.

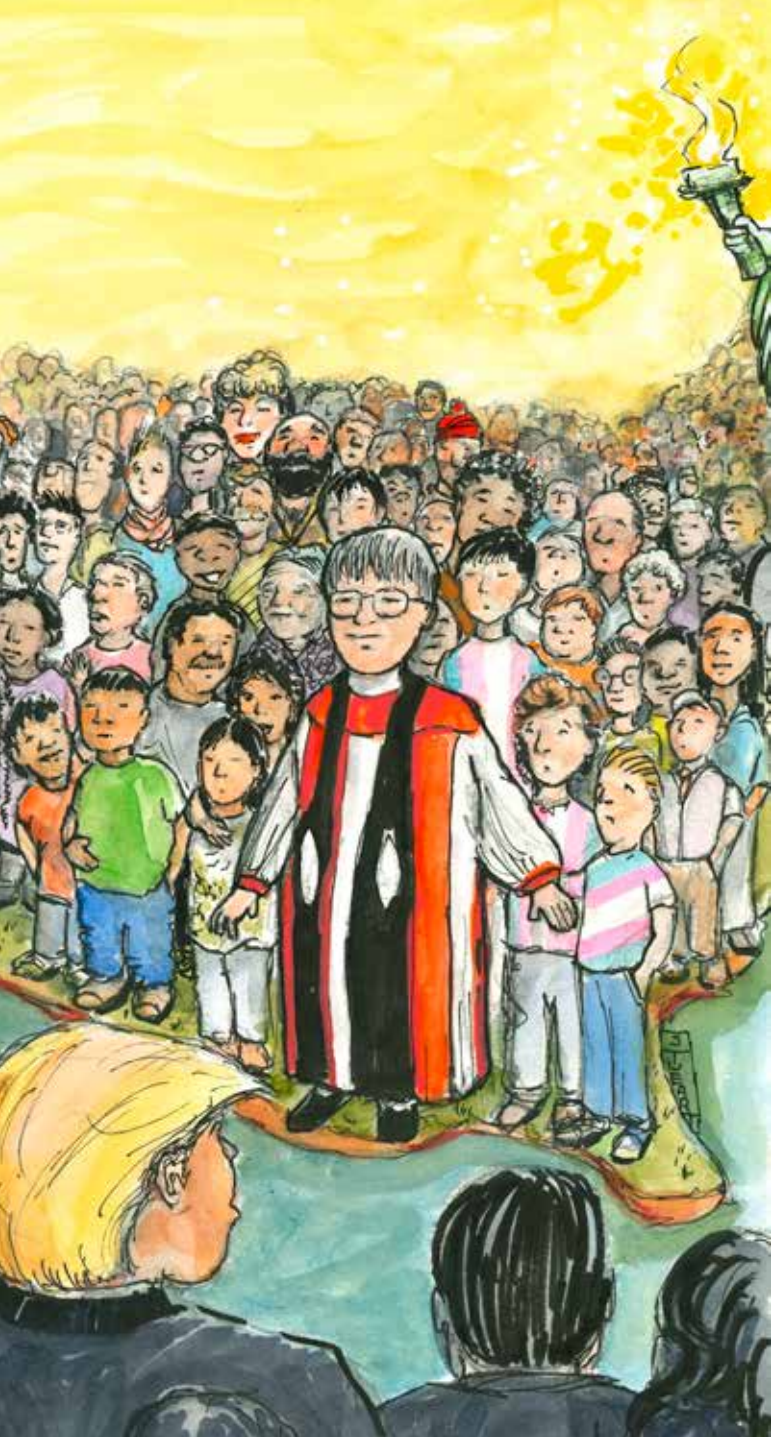
What happened between November 2024 and January 2025 in the United States is not just a transition of power, it's a regime change, and democracy is at risk. European Catholics gained during the 20th century an experience that American Catholics do not have. Defending the constitutional system and the rule of law have become a conservative posture. Ironically, the leadership of the US bishops' conference today is not conservative enough. It has become enchanted by the destruction of language brought by populism and desensitised to the most disruptive aspect of Trumpism.

What strikes me most about what some clergy or pastors say about Trump — and, more importantly, what they don't say — is not their stance on specific policies, but their silence on Trump's systematic corruption and perversion of language.

For pastors, whose role is to shepherd souls, this should be a matter of significant concern. Many church leaders have grown accustomed to Trump's marketing-style language, where his rhetoric serves as a vehicle for a politics of fear, thinly veiled behind promises of regained greatness. More than driven by a reactionary worldview or fear of Trump, many Christians today fail to grasp, both philosophically and hermeneutically, what is happening to our culture of discourse.

US Catholicism has always had an ambivalent relationship with the American dream, with both conservative and liberal voices expressing a dialectic





view of this new political-religious project. It was a precarious balance, embodying the “both and”, that is typical of Catholicism. There was a creative tension between the different Catholic worldviews and the American dream, which gave birth to a synthesis in 20th-century American Catholicism. That synthesis has now been erased by frightened, cavalier, opportunist attitudes (or worse) towards Trump’s worldview.

CHURCH’S INTELLECTUAL & MORAL RECKONING

The present moment is not a hiccup but a sickness whose symptoms were on display in the last three decades at least, and it reveals the risk of an unbalance within US Catholicism facing this regime change that is Trump II. In part, it’s a structural problem: in this church that continues to be made of immigrants, to be critical of the American dream that immigrants are chasing has always been complicated. But in part it’s an intellectual and moral

collapse that did not need to happen. The American dream within American Catholicism once had voices willing to recognise its moral and cultural flaws. One such voice was American Jesuit John Courtney Murray (1904–1967), known for his work on the relationship between religious freedom and democratic institutions. In the 1950s, he identified key issues such as technological secularism, practical materialism and philosophical pluralism, which he saw as contributing to the erosion of shared meanings.

Cardinal Robert McElroy of San Diego, who will be installed as archbishop of Washington in March, wrote on John Courtney Murray in 1989: “Like technological secularism, practical materialism has always functioned as an unarticulated principle of culture within the United States. But unlike technological secularism, which has been chastened by the spectres of ‘nuclear winter’ and the ‘greenhouse effect’, practical materialism seems only to be growing stronger as a formative principle for the cultural life of the American people.”

The political and cultural rise of Trump’s worldview is a triumph of hyper-technological secularism (AI, the conquest of Mars and Elon Musk’s project of “making life multi-planetary”), practical materialism (“Drill, baby, drill!”), and an unbridled philosophical pluralism (the expression “alternative facts” is a coinage of the pro-Trump media complex). It’s a continuation of the pre-existing ideology of limitless growth, of success as the measure of meaning, of “it’s never enough”, of religion as a commodity in a consumer culture.

This worldview is coming not just from Trump, Musk, US Vice President Vance, and the new oligarchs queuing up to be received at his court. It’s also coming from Catholics and others, across different parties and ideological trenches, who have embraced aspects of this version of the American dream or have grown reluctant to see what is problematic in American culture.

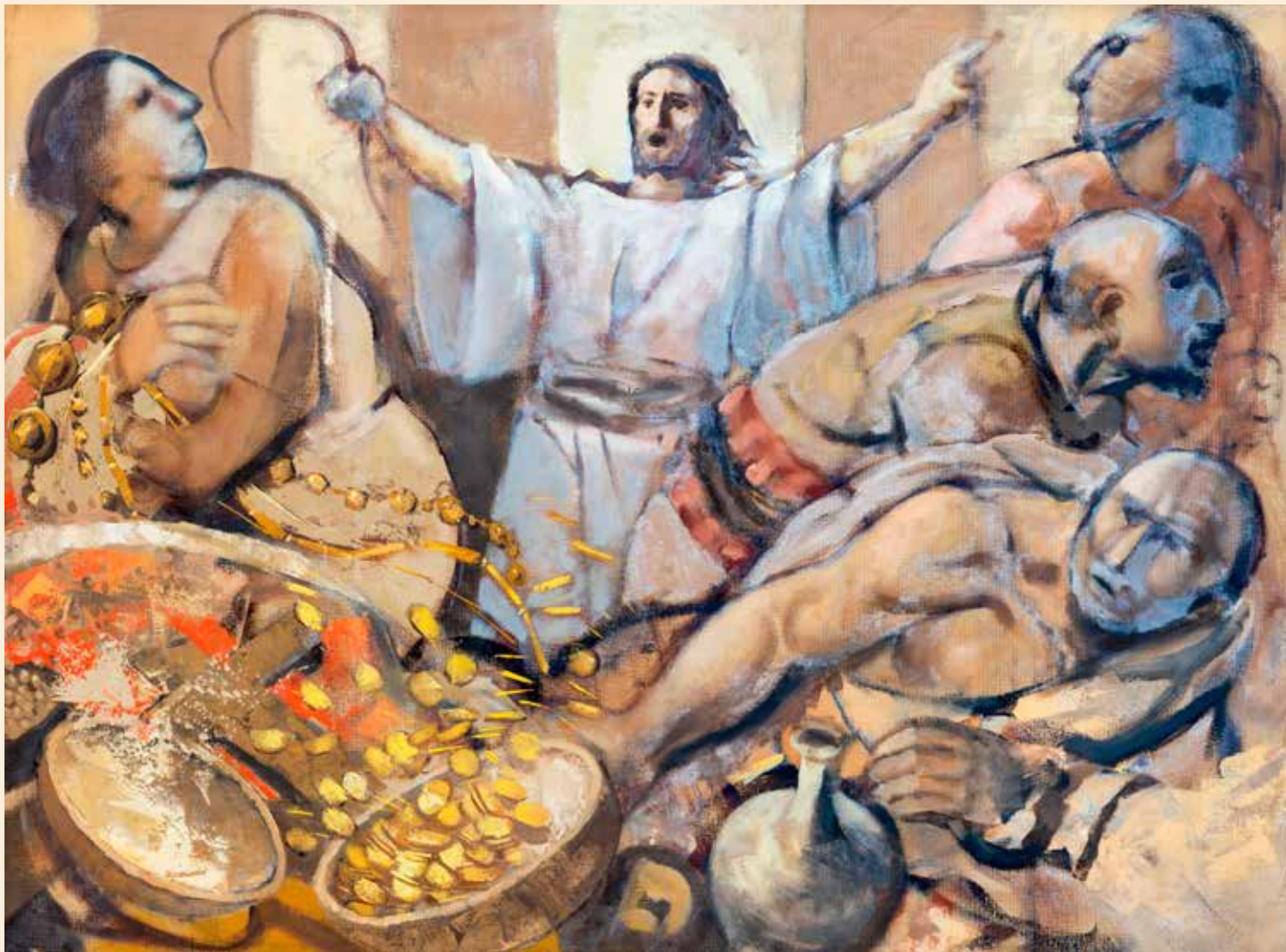
Trump is the latest, extreme, and perverse version of the American dream. The dilemma is that today one can defend an unqualified aspiration to the American dream, or one can defend democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. But it’s impossible to do both. This has been evident for a while. Now it should be evident to many more Americans and American Catholics. It’s time for a new generation of Catholic social and political thought for the 21st century. The relationship between US Catholicism and America is being changed by Trumpism under our very eyes. The question now is where to find a critique of the American dream that recognises Trumpism as one of its recurring and possible incarnations. ♦

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The Gulf of Empathy by Jerome Stueart © (11”x15” water colour and mixed media) Used with permission www.jeromestueart.com

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GOD IS MORE THAN CONVENIENT

Joe Grayland suggests that coopting God for a political agenda has consequences for genuine Christian discipleship.

DONALD TRUMP CLAIMED that surviving the assassination attempt was the work of God: "I was saved by God to make America great again," he said, with the clear inference that this "convenient God" supports his political agenda.

The homily given by Mariann Budde, the Episcopal bishop of Washington, at President Trump's inauguration was immediately controversial. Budde addressed a biblical precept to Trump: "I ask you to have mercy, Mr President, on those in our communities whose children fear that their parents will be taken away and that you help those who are fleeing war zones and persecution in their own lands to find compassion and welcome here." She also addressed him on behalf of "gay, lesbian and transgender children ... some who fear for their lives". Such an inconvenient God.

President Trump is a controversial "religious" figure with a reputation for shifting moral positions. Nonetheless, many commentators agree that his political success is closely tied to the support of evangelical Christians, Christian fundamentalists and conservative Catholics.

Throughout his campaign and first presidency, Trump

often framed himself as a defender of religious values and freedom, aligning with a deity who approved of his policies regardless of his personal behaviour or moral shortcomings. This reinforced his supporters' sense of righteousness and belief that their political battles were divinely sanctioned. The attempt on Trump's life further highlighted the role of religion and divine protection in United States politics. When the shooting took place, many of Trump's supporters immediately framed the event through a theological lens, suggesting that God had spared him or that divine intervention had played a role in his survival. Believing that God intervenes in human affairs to protect the chosen or the righteous, Trump's life and presidential narrative reassures his political base that their political and moral choices align with divine purpose.

A Convenient God

This snapshot of the beginning of a presidency shows the utility of a "God." A "convenient God" describes God's utility as a version of the "divine" that is shaped and moulded to suit human desires, needs and expectations because it

aligns with personal, cultural and political agendas.

We encounter “convenient gods” in many countries where religion is used to drive political, military and social agendas, such as Vladimir Putin’s nationalistic Orthodox Russia, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei’s fundamentalist Islam in Iran and Narendra Modi’s nationalistic Indian Hinduism. We also see the use of a “convenient God” in other parts of the Catholic Church, where exceptionalism argues against theological change, as seen in the African Bishop’s refutation of *Fiducia supplicans* (2023). We encounter “convenient gods” where individuals will not take responsibility for their actions, health or responsibilities and will wait for “God to tell” them what to do next. In the United States the convenient God is evident in the intersection between religion, politics and civil service and operative in the concept of the general understanding of democracy and national identity, which proclaims the United States as a nation of one people “under God” who are “God-fearing” and existentially blessed by God to exist for the good or the “salvation” of the world.

The “convenient God” is a constructed deity that rewards certain behaviours or supports political ideologies and is the “God” invoked to legitimise political authority or to justify the defence of specific social values, such as opposition to abortion or same-sex marriage. This “convenient God” is deeply rooted in the United States Christian fundamentalism’s literal interpretation of the Bible, which presents an oversimplified binary understanding of morality that appeals to those who seek certainty in an increasingly complex world. This approach supports a position of ideological, moral righteousness that tends to alienate and demonise those who do not subscribe to it.

A “convenient God” manipulates religious sentiments by creating a false dichotomy in which political and moral choices are framed as matters of divine will rather than human decision-making.

Moreover, a “convenient God” can contribute to the erosion of genuine spirituality, reducing faith to a tool of convenience that serves personal or partisan agendas.

US Catholicism’s “Convenient God”

The “convenient God” is observable in United States Catholicism, where it also produces a simplistic understanding of God tied to a binary morality and an approach to charity as a taxation category.

A nationalistic symbol in most Catholic churches in the United States is their national flag in the sanctuary. The flag’s presence symbolises that the Scriptures are heard in a nationalistic context and that the Eucharist is a nationalistic, partisan meal.

We also see a polarised Catholic leadership and a slew of online clergy and laity peddling a US version of grace and salvation that is generally delivered with a garnish of comfortable upper-middle-class sanctity or a dollop of anti-

Christlike vitriol. Advocates across the politicised Catholic spectrum invoke God to legitimise their theo-political-social views and rally their bases. In both Republican and Democratic Catholicism, religious language and imagery, which resonates with the nationalistic Christian identity, are used to move their Catholic bases at the ballot box.

Classical Catholicism relies on intellectual curiosity and not on an over-simplistic view of life, where God is co-opted to justify punitive social and political positions based on doubtful theology that produce a series of “isms” – “Jesusism,” “Maryism,” “Spiritism,” “eucharistism,” “ritualism” – which replace the complexity of Jesus, Mary, the Holy Spirit, the Eucharist and ritual with an intellectually impoverished and thinly-veiled Gnosticism.

As a result of this impoverished gnostic approach, knowledge is reduced to a soundbite of information and salvation to a tick-box daily workout. Having reduced

A “CONVENIENT GOD” CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE EROSION OF GENUINE SPIRITUALITY, REDUCING FAITH TO A TOOL OF CONVENIENCE THAT SERVES PERSONAL OR PARTISAN AGENDAS.

Gnosticism to a pale reminder of itself, Catholic-Gnosticism lite is prey to a dangerous ideological anti-intellectualism that breeds a hyper-clericalism, which ultimately produces an arrested faith development within individuals and religious institutions. In this way, the Catholic Church reflects their broader society’s adolescent understanding and approach to reality.

Catholics should be concerned about the presence of a “convenient God” anywhere. For those in the English-speaking Catholic world, the presence of the “convenient God” in the United States church should be especially concerning, given its influence in liturgical and theological matters and the various forms of its online presence.

Just as Trump strategically used religion to solidify support among evangelical Christians, conservative Catholics and other conservative religious groups, he made faith a central theme in his political identity. By framing himself as a defender of Christianity and frequently invoking religious language and imagery to appeal to his base, Catholics outside the United States need to be wary of the same tensions within US Catholicism and become more judicious in our use of US-based media and information sources. ✦

Jesus Cleanses the Temple by Onofrio Bramante
(Chiesa di Sacro Cuore, Monopoli, Italy)
Photo: Renata Sedmakova / Shutterstock.com

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Synodality & Parish Pastoral Councils

Gerald Aynsley *reflects on how Parish Pastoral Councils can work synodally for the life of the parish.*

THERE ARE TWO things in particular that I notice when coming to a new parish. First, I enjoy observing the number of people involved in the life of the parish. Second, it is wonderful to see how much parishioners love their parish. I think this is the synodal church in action. I am aware of how the themes of communion, participation and mission are much more than ideas — they are lived realities. Noticing this and being attuned to what is going on in the parish and wider community is what I would consider the foremost task of the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC).

Synodality Is More Than Business

When a PPC meets there are numerous factors at play. We have different personalities; some can be outspoken and forceful, while others can attend a meeting and say almost nothing. Among us we have different experiences of parish life and perspectives on what the parish should look like. Our PPC meeting can tend towards a certain issue, such as maintenance, or liturgy, or compliance-related matters, while other matters languish. The notion of synodality provides us with a theology and an approach to underpin how our PPCs function and to provide clarity to the PPC's purpose.

Listening and Discerning

Often when I am part of the celebrations of the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, I consider the implications. For example, I think to myself: "Here is the church

celebrating the presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of these young people. Will we now sit at the feet of these 8-year-old children in order to discern what God is saying to us as a Church?" Figuratively, sitting at the feet of the baptised — those who gather on a Sunday and those who don't — is what a synodal PPC will seek to do. They will ask: What is God up to in our community? How is God trying to get our attention?

A Parish Pastoral Council that listens needs also to discern. We each have our own biases. This is true of the





members of the PPC, the parish priest and each person in the parish. In discernment we may find that an idea or a concern may have been set aside or not given the regard that the person with the idea believes it should. When this occurs, we need to ask, are our biases at play? For this reason, a PPC needs to gather in a spirit of prayer and reflection. It can't just be a business meeting where we try to sort out everything going on in the parish.

Synodality Is to Invert the Hierarchical Pyramid

In his homily commemorating 50 years of the Synod of Bishops in October 2015, Pope Francis remarked: "Synodality [is] a constitutive element of the Church. In this Church, as in an inverted pyramid, the top is located beneath the base

... A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realises that listening 'is more than simply hearing'. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn."

Pope Francis invites us to turn upside down the old and rather worn-out image of the church as a pyramid (those at the top have all the answers) in order to truly listen. Inverting the pyramid — or better discarding it altogether — changes how we see one another, and particularly, changes how we go about things. Because synodality requires that we begin by listening, rather than with doing. Of course, the PPC does do something and

now the synodal vision hints at how a PPC can function more fruitfully for the parish and mission.

From Top-Down Functioning

Looking back, I can think of the times when our PPC got caught up making plans and drawn into a certain activism. We have busily thought up ideas for the parish and all the things that we should do. These are the meetings I leave feeling overwhelmed.

In hindsight I realise that if we'd taken more time

discerning the movement of God in people's lives, we would have been less inclined to start imagining that things needed to be directed by us. We didn't recognise it at the time, but we were essentially following a top-down ecclesiology, functioning as if the parish was a pyramid with us at the top deciding how things should be.

To Synodal Functioning

Other meetings have left me feeling enthused about all that is occurring in the parish and feeling a desire to engage more deeply in the mission of God that we see unfolding. Sometimes we'd spend half the meeting simply talking about all the things we saw going on in the parish and discussing what different parishioners were doing. It created a spirit of thankfulness and led us to consider how we can continue to align ourselves with these movements of God's grace.

These occasions helped us become aware of our call to serve the parish, not to imagine ourselves as in charge of organising the parish. It is opposite to the top-down approach. These were examples of the PPC being attuned to the diversity of the parish, honouring the variety of ministries and so able to support one another as we seek to engage more faithfully as disciples of Jesus in the mission of God.

Listen, Notice, Support and Encourage

In the end, the synodal vision provides us with a better way of being a Parish Pastoral Council because it elucidates an important truth: the parish is not merely an organisation that we need to organise and manage. Our parish is made up of the people of God and it's God's church. If as a PPC we genuinely listen to and grow attuned to how the Spirit is active in the lives of those who are baptised, we will see our role as important in supporting and encouraging the parish community as it grows in participation, in communion and in mission.

I think it is true that what we are attentive to will become what we attend to. As such, if as a PPC we are attentive to what God is doing in the lives of our fellow parishioners and community around us, then we will also put our energy into what God is doing. ✦

Different Nationalities by Paula McNeill © Used with permission www.thelittlegallery.co.nz Facebook: paula.mcneill.56

Gerard Aynsley is the parish priest of Invercargill Central including Bluff and Western Southland, incorporating Nightcaps, Riverton and Tuatapere. He moved to Southland last year from Mercy Parish in Dunedin South.



Pilgrims of Hope

Rain clouds darken the sky
The stars cannot be seen
War cries fill the earth
Peace is just a dream.

These times are far from certain
The path ahead unclear
Yet we dare to lift the curtain
And boldly face our fear.

Pilgrims of hope
Our journey's on its way
There's life to live — beyond the darkest days
With dreams alive and free, and so much yet to be
Our pilgrimage takes flight
And we trust the dawn to bring us light.

Family ties lie broken
Poverty is real
We need to hear love spoken
And people helped to heal.

Hope is our companion
Our reason to believe
Together we keep moving
To meet our destiny.

Pilgrims of hope
Our journey's on....

By James Lyons for 2025 Jubilee Year of Hope
Music by Chris Skinner (The song is available on Spotify)





FROM FRANCE TO SPAIN:

LOURDES TO
SAINT-JEAN-PIED-DE-PORT
TO RONCESVALLES

In this second article in a series, Barbara Henley describes crossing from France into Spain in the first leg of the Camino de Santiago.

MILLIONS OF PILGRIMS visit Lourdes every year. Anne and I joined them when we stopped off in Lourdes, found a *petit appartement* and made our way to the Marian Shrine.

I felt a little like Thomas Didymus, the doubting one, as I approached the sanctuary gates but the welcome, warmth, joy and peaceful setting soon alleviated my skepticism. We were relieved to find that like all Catholic places of pilgrimage in France there was no entrance charge. (And congrats to the Archbishop of Paris who insists there be no charge for pilgrims and visitors to enter the renewed, refreshed and restored Notre-Dame Cathedral of Paris.)

Although we didn't bathe in the famous waters of Lourdes, the Gave de Pau River which flows through the site is a powerful symbol of healing and cleansing and we enjoyed its cool and refreshing waters. Lourdes is majestic and artistic with tasteful buildings and the simple, sacred sanctuary of Mary inspires awe.

Joining in the celebration of Eucharist in the underground Basilica of Pius X alongside thousands of others, we felt as one with the joyful, faith-fuelled pilgrims. We then walked in the evening rosary procession and sang *Ave Maria* in holy harmony with the many different accents and languages around us.

Lourdes today is vastly different from the Lourdes where Bernadette Soubirous had a vision of a beautiful young woman as she wandered through the valleys and hillsides of the Pyrenees. I, too, have a strong connection with mountains, being born beneath Mount Taranaki. I remember feeling close to God as I stood on the summit of the mountain looking out over the whole world — that's how it felt to my 12-year-old self.

Feeling blessed and energised by our Lourdes experience, Anne and I shouldered our packs, headed to the station and caught a local train to Pau Bayonne. From there, we boarded the "pilgrim train" for Saint-Jean-Pied-de-

Port. The train is specially designed with convenient luggage racks for pilgrims' backpacks and comfortable seats — as if to suggest this journey was the last vestige of comfort we would enjoy for some time.

As the train sped through beautiful, green countryside, we enjoyed the company of other pilgrims. Like Anne and I, they had chosen 1 September — the first day of autumn — to begin their pilgrimage.

We found the Pilgrim Office, where we were welcomed, registered and each given our Camino Pilgrim Passport which would be stamped each day when we entered our evening resting place or *albergue*.

Danielle was the English-speaking receptionist at the passport office. With generosity and patience she shared advice, gave directions to our hostel and bid us our first "*Buen camino*" — the familiar greeting and blessing pilgrims share with anyone and everyone they met along the Way. *Buen camino* literally translates as

“good walk” or “good road”. It can also refer to a good path, both physical and spiritual. How earnestly Anne and I practised that Spanish phrase!

First we found our way to the hostel through the narrow streets of the village, then we found the church for evening Eucharist and a supermarket for basic supplies. Finally, we were ready.

When we were blessed again at evening Eucharist we felt strongly the appreciation for the pilgrim from everyone. We felt the energy generated by the many, many pilgrims who had preceded us on the ancient pilgrim path.

Day 1 From Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port to Roncesvalles

I was woken by the activity of the six-person dormitory. I hadn't shared a dorm for many years but exertion and excitement guaranteed a good night's sleep. Morning came quickly and when I opened the shutters the sun was shining and the ancient town of St-Jean-Pied-de-Port was already buzzing with activity as tourists and pilgrims mixed with the workers of the town. There was action aplenty, but me? I had nothing to do but to be a pilgrim.

“God of the peace and quiet,” I prayed “fill me with your action and creativity. Grace me with reflection and quiet. Let me see your design and my place in it. I cannot be more overwhelmed by this opportunity to wander over your hills and plains, to see new wonders, meet different people and have this time to be in peaceful connection with you.”

We had planned to take the first 26kms trek in two stages, but the 398 other pilgrims who had chosen the first day of autumn to begin their pilgrimage had the same idea. Wisely, we sent our packs ahead with the transport provided and chose a small pack to carry essential food and emergency items for the challenging climb over the Pyrenees.

It was a tough climb but the beauty of the Pyrenees, plus adrenaline and enthusiasm, lightened our steps. We were passed by lycra-clad cyclists and younger, fitter pilgrims. We paused for lunch at the border crossing between France and



Spain under the welcome shade of a grotto honouring Mary.

Indeed, Mary had pride of place, overlooking and protecting all those who passed by. I was soon to learn of the revered place Mary has in the faith story of the Spanish people. After a long, arduous mountain climb, we made a steep descent, followed by a hazardous walk through the largest beech forest in Spain, and walked into Roncesvalles. Our pain and anxiety were quickly dispelled when we were warmly welcomed by an enthusiastic group of volunteers. They stamped our Camino passports and allotted us comfortable beds in the beautifully renovated old monastery in Roncesvalles.

We were ushered into a large dining room and restored with a nourishing meal. I had my first taste of Spanish red wine which helped wash down the chips and chicken patties. We didn't know then, but our tentative conversations with other pilgrims over dinner would blossom into deep friendships as we met up with the same people time and again along the Way.

Evening Eucharist in the monastery chapel was an occasion for us. I valued the universal rhythm of the liturgy and felt at home, at peace and at one within that concelebrated Mass. Little did I realise that we pilgrims were being gently eased into the challenges that lay ahead.

Thank you, God, for bringing Anne and I safely through our initiation into the Camino. How privileged we were to meet so many people filled with the enthusiasm of their pilgrimage, first timers like us, tentative and anxious, repeat travellers keen to go through the pain all over again. Thanks to those who welcomed us so enthusiastically.

Too tired for too much more — *Buen camino. Amen.* ✧

Photos supplied by author

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Her ministries have included teaching, prison chaplaincy and pastoral care.





The Parable of the Two Lost Sons

Kathleen Rushton highlights the relationships of lostness and being restored in the parable of the two sons in Luke 15:11-32.

the relationship between humanity and God. The first and third begin: "Which one [*anthropos*] of you ..." (literally "any human out of you" Luke 15:4) and "There was a man [*anthropos*] who had two sons..." (Lk 15:11). *Anthropos*, meaning the human person, suggests the human condition. The parable concerning a woman's experience is placed between these two (Lk 15:8).

Two Lost Sons

I think naming the third parable "The Prodigal Son" puts the focus on the younger son alone (15:12-24) and disregards the lostness of the older brother (15:25-32). Calling the parable "The Two Lost Sons" draws attention to both brothers and the triangle of relationship among the father and his two sons.

Women of the Household

The story infers a wider impact beyond the men of the family. At Jesus's time the younger son's behaviour would have caused suffering also for his mother in the household. A son was expected to remain at home and not only care for his father into old age, but also guarantee his mother's place in the family. Those who first heard this parable would recognise that both parents would have been damaged by the son leaving. And this damage would have rippled out to the families living around the household.

God of the Poor

The three parables suggest a village or rural setting where life was hard and many households were poor. The characters noticing and searching for lost necessities provide images of God. The parables themselves are addressed explicitly (Lk 15:4,8) and implicitly (Lk 15:11) to the well-to-do and, maybe, to absentee landlords and owners of peasant tenants and flocks — and to all who think they know how God acts.

About Slavery

Jesus and the early Christians lived in the Roman Empire

JESUS TOLD THREE parables in response to the Pharisees and scribes "grumbling" because he "welcomes sinners and eats with them." To welcome (*dechomai*) implies hospitality, hosting a meal. Being invited to a meal means the host wants and accepts the guests. Not only were the guests eating with Jesus social and religious outsiders — "all the tax collectors and sinners" — but they were "coming near to listen to him". The three parables — the lost sheep, the lost coin and the two lost sons — invite insight into the unimaginable mercy of God.

Humanity and God

Jesus pulls out all the stops when talking to the leaders who are furiously critical of his table companions. The textual pattern of the parables reinforce Jesus's words. They begin with loss, then the finding followed by a celebration. The lost sheep and the lost coin both start with a question inviting the leaders to consider their response. The first character is a shepherd and the other a woman, both characters who would have been offensive to the Pharisees. The final celebration evokes God's mercy given flesh in Jesus's insistence that the poor and outcast are welcome as his table companions.

Each of the three parables tells us something about

where slavery was an institution — one slave to every five free adults and one to three in Rome itself. The parable infers that the parents' household depended on slaves to function. The father asks his slaves (*doulous*) to bring the best robe, a ring and sandal, to kill the fattened calf and prepare and serve the festive meal. The elder son complained he'd been working like a "slave" (*douleuō*) which literally means "I am slaving to you". Earlier, the son had asked one of the slaves (*paidōn*) what was happening at the house. *Paidōn* refers to someone under the authority of another. All slaves (*douloi*) were without rights and were the property of their owners. At the master's whim and with but a moment's notice, slaves could be sold.

Slavery continues today as an insidious evil against human persons. The International Labor Organization estimates that more than 49 million individuals are victims of modern slavery. This is equivalent to roughly one in every 150 people in the world. We have a role to play to restore these lost people to full humanity by bringing modern human slavery to an end. We can start by buying slavery-free products because slavery flows into our lives through many of the products we buy.

"Coming to Himself"

Dry climatic conditions in the Middle East make agriculture a perilous endeavour. Droughts and ensuing famine were common. The younger son had travelled to a foreign land where he is hired to feed pigs. He is taken on as a day labourer without the position of slaves or servants who were part of an extended family. He eats carob pods — the food of animals and the poor. The son then experiences "coming to himself", a Greek expression suggesting self-knowledge and an experience of realism. And he resolves to go to his father.

A Triad of Relationships

A threefold pattern unfolds which provides insight into God's mercy.

First, there is a need. When the father saw the younger son coming from afar, he knew he could be in danger from the villagers. The young man had requested his inheritance from his father and used it up — behaving as if his father were dead. This was culturally and religiously offensive. He had viewed his inheritance as his due, not as a gift. In failing to "honour father and mother," he had severed communal relationships and coming home made him at risk from the anger of villagers.

"Moved with Compassion"

Second, is the change in the father — his "heart moved with compassion". The verb *splagnizomai*, and its other forms used in the New Testament, means being moved from the depths of one's being, and echoes *rahamim*, the noun for womb-compassion which comes from the Hebrew word for womb, *rehem*. It describes the change that came over the father.

Action

Third, the father acted in a way that transformed the situation. Throwing dignity aside, the father runs

towards his son and receives him home. This welcome, extravagant in all its details, averts the neighbours' anger towards the son. The father demonstrates an unbridled welcome to the table for the celebratory meal and killing the fattened calf suggests many guests were invited — maybe even the whole village.

But the older son does not rejoice over his brother's return. Bitterness alienates him from entering into the welcome of his brother. The tragedy for the older son is that he then becomes lost, unable to see that he already has relationship, privilege and blessing in the household. James Keenan describes mercy as "the willingness to enter into the chaos of others". In reflecting on this parable of the two lost sons, we can imagine God's mercy as a radically different way of acting. So in our time, the parable invites us to see the needs, to be moved with compassion and to do something about it that shows the unimaginable mercy of God. ✦

Reading for 4th Sunday of Lent, 30 March: Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

The Return of the Prodigal Son by James Tissot (1886-1894)
Courtesy of Brooklyn Museum

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Synodal Decision-Making

THE NZ LISTENER article of 7 Dec 2024 writes regarding Charles Drennan and Larry Rustia, a Catholic bishop and a Catholic priest, each involved in a long-term consensual sexual relationship with a young woman. I am aware of writerly embellishments in this article and also of vulnerabilities and power imbalances in each of these relationships. Both priests are continuing to practise as priests albeit in different places. The NZ Listener article focuses on defrocking Charles and Larry from the priesthood to halt further abuses of power.

This is a bandaid and not really a solution at all, because the power imbalances and vulnerabilities that lie inside these relationships are the result of the Catholic Church system. These mistakes can be repeated over and over, while systems containing systemic abuse of power are practised in the church.

Nobody in Aotearoa should be given the absolute power over property, finance and committees that a parish priest can currently wield in their parish, nor the absolute power over property, finance and committees that a bishop can wield in their diocese. These inequalities can result in vulnerability, aloneness and unhealthy behaviour by both the person in power and those over whom power is held.

For a long-term solution we need to proceed with aroha, wisdom and tenderness. We need to learn to use synodal decision-making alongside Safeguarding Workshops as the key to the disbanding of systems which have

enabled systemic abuses of power.

Further, we need to become proficient at using synodal decision-making in all of our gatherings – Catholic Women’s League; St Vincent de Paul; school boards; property; liturgy and finance committees. Synodal decision-making is a gift, a seed planted that will grow as we learn, just as Safeguarding Workshops have become a useful tool for understanding and implementing protection procedures.

Synodal decision-making invites participation by the whole community in discerning where the Spirit is leading. The recent Christchurch diocesan decisions regarding the cathedral’s location and name, listened to and reflected the voices of the Catholic people of Ōtautahi Christchurch before the decision was made.

To eradicate abuses arising from power imbalances from inside the church, synodal decision-making needs to be employed in all key decisions. This includes the proposed sale of land and buildings. I can think of St Teresa’s School hall and convent in Christchurch West; the proposed sale of St James Church, Lyttelton (land and presbytery) and New Brighton presbytery in Christchurch East, as well as the proposed relocation of Sacred Heart Parish

offices in Christchurch South.

We, who have grown up inside the hierarchical church system, require training in synodal decision-making. We could lay down our practice, once proposed by John Dew, of using the titles “father” and “bishop” as these carry connotations of power imbalances for many of us. Maybe, as Joy Cowley suggests, we could call all who minister, chaplains.

Furthermore it is essential that we all, priests and bishops included, no longer feel the need to keep tenderness, sexuality and the love of our bodies hidden and shamed. Likewise, those who minister and preside at Eucharist need training in theology, spiritual practice, Scripture and synodal decision making. Chaplains may be celibate or married, women or men as is done in the NZ Anglican Community. The Chaplain who leads the diocese could be elected five-yearly, by chaplains and laity, with input from the Asia-Pacific bishops, the papal nuncio and the pope.

To end all abuses of power and vulnerability we need to proceed with aroha, wisdom and tenderness so our parishes become safe, caring places for both religious and laity. The practise of synodal decision-making alongside safeguarding workshops in our groups and church communities may take us on these first steps. ♦

Kathleen Gallagher is a poet, playwright and filmmaker from Ōtautahi/Christchurch. Her most recent film is *Rohe Kōreporepo – The Swamp, The Sacred Place*.



CHURCH HISTORY ON WOMEN DEACONS



WINSTON CHURCHILL FAMOUSLY said: "Those who forget history are doomed to repeat it." If the Catholic Church forgets history, it is simply doomed.

Pope Francis recently issued a letter "On the Renewal of the Study of the History of the Church". No matter: Francis himself seems to have forgotten the history of women ordained as deacons.

When he spoke with Norah O'Donnell, CBS News, in an interview last spring, she asked if young girls would be able to become deacons someday. He answered: "No. If it is deacons with Holy Orders, no. But women have always had, I would say the function of deaconesses without being deacons, right?"

Wrong.

For more than 1,000 years, women served as deacons (or deaconesses), depending on the language. The only person in Scripture called a deacon is St Phoebe, who travelled to Rome as an emissary of St Paul, carrying his Letter to the Romans.

As the church matured, women deacons were ordained during Masses, just as men deacons were. The ordination liturgies, bishops used over the centuries to ordain women to the diaconate, meet the standards for sacramental ordination decreed by the 16th-century Council of Trent. These women are named in literary documents and their names are

inscribed on tombstones across the lands of early Christianity.

What happened? The church eventually stopped ordaining anyone to the diaconate, as a permanent vocation, because the diaconate of men had become a stumbling block to ambitious priests. By the early Middle Ages, deacons and archdeacons managed church funds and charity, and with their administrative expertise

**FOR MORE THAN
1,000 YEARS, WOMEN
SERVED AS DEACONS
IN THE CHURCH ...**

often succeeded their bishops. More than 30 popes in the early church were never ordained a priest!

The solution was a requirement that any man ordained a deacon had to be on the path to priesthood. Because women were never priests, women were ineligible for the diaconate.

Many delegates to the recently ended Synod on Synodality, the Vatican summit on the church's future, made it clear that they believed the diaconate should be opened to

women. The best they were offered was a promise that the subject was open for further study. Even though the topic is still open for discussion — the Synod's final Document is now magisterial teaching — there is a pontifical brick wall ahead. As Francis told O'Donnell: "Women are of great service as women, not as ministers. As ministers in this regard. Within the Holy Orders."

He seems to have slammed shut the door to recovering the church's tradition on deacons, simultaneously enabling the international walkout of women and men from Catholicism.

Yes, the Catholic population is growing in developing countries, but church government and charity are supported by donations from nations where people of wealth and even moderate means have been educated to the baptismal equality of all persons. They are leaving the church. What to do?

Francis's own words must be applied here: "A proper sense of history can help each of us to develop a better sense of proportion and perspective in coming to understand reality as it is and not as we imagine it or would prefer reality to be." ♦

Basilica of Sant Apollinare Nuovo Wall Section Photo by Visual Intermezzo/Shutterstock

Phyllis Zagano is a world-class expert on women deacons and a former member of the initial papal commission on the study of the diaconate of women. She holds a research appointment at Hofstra University.





REFLECTIONS OF A PILGRIM

"The Master of the Caravan said:
But who are ye in rags and rotten shoes,
You — dirty bearded, blocking the way?

We are the Pilgrims, Master; we shall go
Always a little further: it may be
Beyond the last blue mountain barred with snow,
Across that angry or that glimmering sea,
White on a throne or guarded in a cave
There lives a prophet who can understand
Why men were born; But surely we are brave,
Who take the Golden Road to Samarkand."

THIS EXTRACT FROM James Elroy Flecker's poem *The Golden Road to Samarkand* was adopted by New Zealand, British and Australian Special Air Service (SAS) regiments as their motto. They were to be on the move responding to grim situations around the world where other army units might not be as effective or efficient.

In this Jubilee year we are reminded that we, too, are a pilgrim people, part of a long line of pilgrims. By definition pilgrims are on a journey to a holy place. They do not settle down for any length of time. And they live in tents so it is easy to pull up the tent pegs when it's time to journey on. This way of life is not easy and the journey itself is demanding. For some of us the pilgrimage will be physical, but for most of us it is a metaphorical journey.

The familiar *Servant Song* (lyrics by Richard Gillard) emphasises that ours is not a solitary journey:

"We are pilgrims on a journey
We are travellers on the road.
We are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load."

We are sure of where we're headed — at least confident that we walk in the love and care of our Creator — but we're unsure of the challenges that lie ahead and how we will cope with them. We walk with faith in God who is inviting us on.

In the Gospels we have the example of Jesus on the move to minister to the people who need him. He said: "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." Why as disciples should we expect something different? To settle down in a comfortable place risks us becoming set in our

ways, opting for a small world and ignoring the call of Christ to follow him in mission.

It's not unusual to be fearful of change. While the saying "If it ain't broke don't fix it" may be valid in many cases, complacency in our spiritual life can mean we are getting stuck and not making any progress at all. Getting stuck means we will miss the conversations on the way, the making sense of the eternal truths for our time and the insights shared among us that strengthen our commitment to the journey, to mission. We learn from ever-evolving nature that if something doesn't change it is probably dead.

Those of us who remember the church before Vatican II (1962-65) may have the advantage of being able to look back over the journey we've experienced. When Pope John XXIII "opened the windows" of the church the changes were dramatic and ongoing. We used to have Mass said in Latin by the priest with his back to us. Altar rails separated him in the sanctuary from us in the nave. At Communion the priest placed the host on our tongue while an altar server held a plate beneath our chin in case the host, or crumbs, dropped. We'd never imagined new ways of "participating": the Eucharist in our own language, priest and people together, receiving bread and wine at Communion as a fullness of the sacrament — food for our journey of discipleship.

Church members responded to the renewal and changes of Vatican II in a range of ways. Now, participating in synodality as a pilgrim people invites us to give new energy to the journey. The words of Frank Anderson's *The Galilee Song* provide the impetus:

"So I leave my boats behind!
Leave them on familiar shores!
Set my heart upon the deep!
Follow you again, my Lord!"

You, too, might like to meditate on this song and sing along on the way. ✦

Peg Cummins lives in Tauranga in a retirement village. She has a lifelong passion for women's place in the Church.



Our Beloved Peter

Marilyn Wilkinson first wrote about her husband Peter's decline into dementia in *"Loved One with Dementia"* (TM July 2023). She now shares about Peter's death in October last year.

FAREWELL DEMENTIA! It's been a long farewell. But now the time has come.

For Peter it is what I have prayed for. For a long while he could not talk and more recently he could not walk so we were unable to take him out. He is now relieved of that struggle.

But what about our dance! Beneath my feet it's rocky. I don't want to sound trite but I've had practice. I've already buried a husband, the father of my children, and I didn't do it well. I didn't live in the true "now". I kept on with my life. I didn't grieve well and looking back I can see that is why I had tummy problems for the next couple of years.

This time I'm aware of the rocky terrain. This time I can let the tears flow. I miss the physical connectedness. Over these trying months I would often ask Peter if he realised that we were indeed still married but that we had become too old to live together. He would smile broadly and say "yes", or nod — and if it was a good day he would hold my hand. The dance went on.

We called on our faith by attending the church service and receiving communion. More recently I used Spotify to play cathedral choirs singing the hymns we grew up with. We sang along and Peter often mouthed the words. "Praise my Soul the King of Heaven". The dance went on.

Five of the "angels" who cared for Peter came to his funeral. They said they loved him and really appreciated his smile. Other residents felt the same. Peter had been a radio announcer all his working life, and he could still communicate his love and gratitude — but not in words. But in saying that, occasionally he would surprise us. Like in hospital recently after the chaplain prayed with and for us, Peter said: "Thank you."

Peter went back to the rest home where his daughters continued to be at his side and his angels continued to care for him. I was there as much as my body would allow. Peter's dance was slowing down.



A practice of this home is for staff to stop work and join with residents to make a guard of honour when someone is carried out. So on the morning after Peter died we gathered to walk with him. Our Myanmar/Kiwi family came and shared their grief by saying the Rosary with and for him and after checking that it was appropriate, gently lifted his head and placed the rosary around his neck.

We did not have a waiata to sing, so Peter's oldest granddaughter carried a cross as we processed. This was made of the crucifix which had hung above our bed since our marriage. It was high on a bamboo pole enhanced by some flowering jasmine.

Peter was farewelled at the lovely St Andrew's Church in Plimmerton. It was a warm blue-sky day. Our families and many friends came to support and to mourn with us. The church was full with some standing. As this was Peter's and my last physical dance I shared details of his life that he had shared with me. This was my way of holding his hand for the last time. My last memory was when I kissed him goodbye before leaving the Home. I'd swear his mouth was turned up at the corner. Was this a little smile to assure me that all was well?

I believe so, because our dance goes on in the new now. ✦

Marilyn Wilkinson lives contemplatively, encouraged by mystics such as Eckhart, James Finley and Thomas Merton. She was a Presbyterian Deaconess and now worships in the Catholic Church.





Compost & Community

THE NEW HOUSE I'm renting doesn't have a compost heap. The simplest solution would be to toss our food scraps in the rubbish, but that seems so wrong. What to do with it? I think of composting as a metaphor — turning waste into riches.

I hear we have a nearby community garden. I haven't been there before. By the entrance is a pantry where you can share fresh produce or take it. Behind is a compost heap. It's a five-minute bike ride from our house, so I bring a bag of compost and tip it in. Thinking of the food scraps I have contributed, I take a bunch of rhubarb and a lush cauliflower from the pantry. I notice a sign: "Garden working bees every Wednesday." I bike home.

I use the compost heap and take fresh produce for several weeks before going to a working bee. When I eventually make myself available on a Wednesday morning, I arrive at the garden feeling a bit nervous. It's buzzing, with 10 or so people there working. I'm welcomed, and put to work with another newbie shovelling

compost into wheelbarrows. We chat, and lapse into silence, hearing the conversations around us about soil and seeds and harvest. We help each other take heavy loads of compost to a recently emptied garden bed. At morning tea time, everyone sits in the sun. It's an intergenerational group — there's a mother with toddlers, retired folks, visiting backpackers. I listen politely to conspiracy theories from a volunteer who welcomed me a few hours ago. I eat the home-made chocolate chippie biscuits someone brought. In the sunshine, surrounded by fruit and flowers and leaves, it's easy to believe God loves everyone there. And it's easy to think that I can, too.

The next week, I'm put to work harvesting green beans. At first, they are hard to find, tangled and nestled in leaves and vines. As I pick them, I'm able to spot more and more, subtly camouflaged in their verdant abundance. My hands get the hang of picking without snapping the tips off. I fill three ice-cream containers, and put them in the community

produce pantry, wondering who will come by and take some home tonight. I discuss garlic with a new friend, delight in a child mostly burrowed in with the carrots he's supposed to pull up. I learn how deep to sow silverbeet. The compost heap we emptied last week has already filled with new matter ready to break down. Morning tea is delicious.

Eventually, we go and talk to our neighbours, and begin to drop off our compost in their heap. It's more convenient than having to bike over to the community garden, and gives us a good reason to meet them. I remember compost as a metaphor for turning waste into riches. This time, the riches go beyond my veggie scraps into soil. In my new place, scraps have helped me build community — enriching life. ♦

Shar Mathias writes, explores the mountains and enjoys cooking. She is an ecologist and lives in Dunedin.



Reviews

Vessels of Love: Poems and Prayers for the Later Years of Life

By Joyce Rupp

Published by Orbis Books, 2024. (USD 16)

Reviewed by Agnes Hermans

Many readers will be familiar with Joyce Rupp's writing on spirituality and psychology.

Vessels of Love contains 80 poems and prayers which compassionately explore issues relating to our older years including: lessening of energy, facing mortality, dealing with regrets and losses, a growing serenity, expanding gratitude, self-compassion, and reasons for lamenting and for rejoicing.

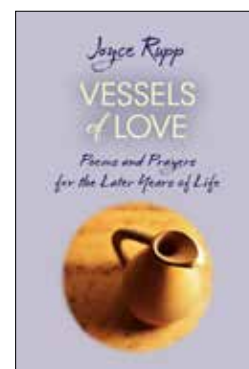
To give a flavour of the diverse range of topics, section titles in *Vessels of Love* include: "Prayer for Taking Naps", "Moving into a Senior Residence", "Getting Dressed", "Dwelling in the Natural Monastery", "When Adult

Children Take Over", "Loneliness", "The Gifts of Elderhood" and "Treated Like an Old Lady".

Rupp includes blessings and simple rituals for the reader to adapt wording to suit personal preferences or situation. Each prayer is accompanied by a question for contemplation and journaling.

I appreciated Rupp's reminder that "while our current interactions may differ from the past, our daily living continues to be a central catalyst for our ongoing transformation."

Vessels of Love is suitable for individual or group use. It would make a lovely gift for an older person and be a useful resource for those in ministry or caregiving roles with the elderly. 🌻



Tairāwhiti: Pine, Profit and the Cyclone

By Aaron Smale

Published by Bridget Williams Books, 2024. (NZD 18)

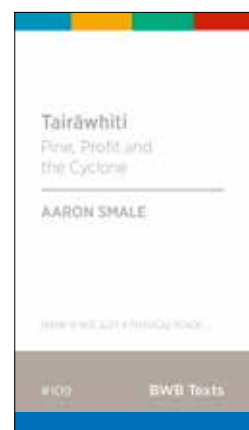
Reviewed by Ann Hassan

In *Tairāwhiti: Pine, Profit and the Cyclone*, investigative journalist Aaron Smale gives context for the destruction caused by Cyclone Gabrielle in 2023. In six chapters which were originally articles for *Newsroom*, Smale describes how the region was made vulnerable by the confiscation and mismanagement of land, and the relentless planting of pine, pine, pine.

Smale's prose is wonderful — spare and affecting. He describes how Tairāwhiti welcomed him and how he came to call it "home", albeit a home "beautiful and sad". So when he tells the story of the region, he says it's personal: "It couldn't be otherwise."

Pine had been sold to the people of Tairāwhiti as "the answer to everything". Today, the Coast's relationship with the forestry industry is uneasy, and the desecration of the land has become normal. When Smale asks a young woman at the beach what she thinks of the slash, "She gave a resigned shrug. 'There's always slash.'"

This book will appeal to anyone who suspects that looking 25 years ahead — pine tree maturity — is not enough, especially in the climate change era. At only around 100 pages, it can be read in one sitting — easily done as Smale writes so well. 🌻



Pilgrimage Aotearoa/Haerenga Tapu Aotearoa

By Jenny Boyack and John Hornblow

Published by Philip Garside Books, 2024 (NZD 49.50)

Reviewed by Thomas and William Hassan Walker

Pilgrimage Aotearoa is about visiting places in New Zealand and looking at them in a new way. For each place, the authors include a story, directions and a reflection. The places in the book are not necessarily "holy" places — some are churches but there are also memorials, monuments and places in nature.

To try the book out, over the school holidays we walked into Dunedin city and visited three of the places: the Thomas Bracken Memorial, First Church (Presbyterian) and St Paul's Cathedral (Anglican). We found the "story" sections really helpful — we've lived in

Dunedin all our lives but we never knew the national anthem was written in Dunedin or that St Paul's was built because one priest and the community campaigned for it.

We used to think going on a pilgrimage meant travelling a long way to holy places. Now we know that you can go on a pilgrimage in your hometown — you just have to think about the place you're going to and why you're going.

This book would appeal to people who love to walk, who are curious about Aotearoa, and who might not be keen or able to go on an overseas pilgrimage but still want the experience. 🌻



Reviews



CONCLAVE

Directed by Edward Berger

Reviewed by Paul Sorrell

Conclave has been described as a crowd-pleaser, and for those who regard the Vatican as a hotbed of intrigue, infighting and political manoeuvring, a setting for grandeur and opulence, gorgeous costumes and sumptuous artworks, this film will not disappoint. The other popular element is its genre — it is fundamentally a political thriller, based on the bestselling novel by Robert Harris. But while *Conclave* is presented as a blockbuster, it also deals with questions of ambition and power with subtlety and intelligence. If I have one criticism of *Conclave*, it is that it can't quite make up its mind what sort of film it wants to be.

The pope has died and the cardinals are summoned from the corners of the globe to elect a successor. The man in charge of this process is Englishman Cardinal Thomas Lawrence (Ralph Fiennes), dean of the College of Cardinals. He presents as a sympathetic character and everything we observe is seen through his eyes. From the outset, he stresses that he is a manager rather than a pastor. Part of the film's complexity is the way we are increasingly encouraged to question this self-description as Lawrence's papal ambitions emerge. He may be a manager, but is he also a manipulator?

Papal elections, with their multiple ballots, cry out for dramatic treatment, and *Conclave* extracts every drop of tension and intrigue as the cardinals, elaborately screened from the outside world, deliberate. Ideological battle lines harden with each inconclusive vote. With the exception of the extrovert hard-right candidate, the Italian Cardinal Tedesco, and Canadian moderate Joseph Tremblay, who is outed for corruption, the cardinals are depicted as men of good faith who respect one another and want the best outcome for their embattled church.

Openly hostile to Tedesco, Lawrence orchestrates proceedings, encouraging some and discouraging others as hints of scandal and controversy reach into the closeted atmosphere of the conclave. In the film, as in the curia, women play a minor role, acting as housekeepers and cooks; Isabella Rossellini offers a standout cameo as Sr Agnes.

Conclave offers much both to delight the eye and keep the pulse racing. Extravagant costumes and lavish sets, along with stunning cinematography, operate in tandem with multiple plot twists and narrative devices that sometimes strain credulity — demonstrating the film's origins as a thriller. If you can accommodate these diverse elements, you are in for an entertaining and sometimes challenging cinematic experience. 🌟



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Cross Currents

by Jane Higgins

OUR LENTEN SEASON begins with Ash Wednesday readings that include the beautiful Psalm 51. "A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me."

A steadfast spirit.

I thought of this when I heard the Rt Rev Mariann Budde, Episcopal Bishop of Washington, address President Trump during the presidential inauguration prayer service at Washington National Cathedral.

"In the name of our God," she said, "I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now." She included in her plea, "gay, lesbian and transgender children who fear for their lives" and undocumented migrants "who may not be citizens or have the proper documentation, but ... are good neighbours and faithful members of our churches and mosques, synagogues, gurdwara and temples. I ask you to have mercy, Mr President, on those in our communities whose children fear that their parents will be taken away, and that you help those fleeing war zones and persecution in their own lands to find compassion and welcome here."

Here is a steadfast spirit at work: holding, with courage, to the loving

kindness God calls us to. Perhaps this steady, enduring and faithful perseverance is what we are called to in these turbulent times.

We know steadfastness of spirit: we've seen it in the decades of work by tangata whenua and tangata te Tiriti towards Treaty education. Now, when Te Tiriti is challenged by the powerful, their work is bearing fruit, and not only in the massive hīkoi that greeted the Treaty Principles Bill.

A recent Horizon poll indicates that nearly 90 per cent of people in Aotearoa believe Te Tiriti/The Treaty is important for everyone to feel a sense of belonging. An increasing number think harmonious race relations through honouring Te Tiriti is important: 72 per cent, up from 66 per cent in 2023. And almost four out of five people want to see respectful discussion of Te Tiriti and race relations, not political rhetoric, with a majority (71 per cent) believing that it's important that Te Tiriti is protected within New Zealand laws.

Steadfast, too, the work of the founders of the kohanga reo movement, including Dame Iritana Tāwhiwhirangi who died last month. I thought of Dame Iritana as I

watched the documentary *The Haka Party Incident*, by film-maker Katie Wolfe. This is about the tradition (from the mid-1950s) of a mock haka that Auckland University engineering students performed during graduation week.

At their 1979 "party" the students were confronted by He Taua, a group of young Māori activists. A short brawl ensued, making headlines and raising awareness. The film makes brilliant use of archival and modern footage as it hears from those involved on both sides. It shows that progress has been made.

For me, the most powerful scene was of a young Hilda Halkyard (soon to be Harawira) weeping as she describes the passing of the older generation of fluent speakers of te reo. She sees this loss as irretrievable. I wanted to stand up and call to her across the years — "Don't despair! Te reo is flourishing among our young ones!" And that is thanks to the steadfast spirit of Hilda, of Iritana Tāwhiwhirangi and of many others.

"A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me." ✧



TUI MOTU InterIslands
The Independent Catholic Magazine Limited

Tui Motu magazine provides Catholic, as well as ecumenical and inter-faith perspectives and discussion on current issues in church and society. It acknowledges its role in honouring and fostering relationships arising from Te Tiriti o Waitangi. It focuses particularly on issues affecting Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific. Its intent is to promote the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, engaging faith and the world through informed, thoughtful comment and discussion for a general readership. The magazine publishes 11 issues per year in print

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

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Letters to the Editor

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

FLOWERS FOR REMEMBRANCE

In October last year Renata Szarvas, a member of the Whanganui Palestine Solidarity Network, started a project called "Flowers for Palestine, Putiputi mo Parihitini", a flower for every person lost in the war in Gaza Palestine.

Renata said she was doing street work for signatures for Palestine and met many people who didn't know what to do with their pain. So she decided to create this wonderful project where people, men and women alike, can come together to express solidarity and find comfort through creativity and community.

The photo is of women who have contributed to the project, holding up a long piece of tapestry, showing off the flowers already finished. The project is due to finish in an exhibition on 25 May 2025, the anniversary of the 1948 Nakba, when Palestinians were forced from their homes when the State of Israel was created.

Renata said: "More and more people are coming, sitting together and stitching flowers to remember those who are innocent yet lost their lives in the war in Gaza. What started with the first stitch is now close to a 10-metre-long sheet of fabric covered with colourful blooms expressing love, compassion, grief and hope. This place is where we can communicate our thoughts through a creative exercise as well as heal through the slow, meditative practice of stitching." Renata's call is compelling: "Let us come together and create a powerful symbol of compassion and peace."

Makareta Tawaroa, Whanganui





For What It's Worth

I'VE LIVED IN my house for 24 years. As one of the longer-term residents of the street, I have had to adjust to many changes, especially as many homes in the area are rentals with often-changing tenants. My small property is down a shared right-of-way, meaning I am bordered by many neighbours — and more now than when I arrived, as the in-filling of sections continues to change the nature and density of the area. And I have made my own changes, turning a relatively bare section into a veritable jungle. Sometimes I am troubled by not having time or space to keep the garden in a more presentable order, but I am consoled by the fact that it has become a haven for myriad birds and insects and even a few goldfish.

A much older resident has been standing for a much longer period just over my back fence and has had a much greater impact on the whole area. Pūriri, a large and stately tree, was probably a survivor when the native bush that covered most of West Auckland was cleared to make way for farmland, orchards and later, houses. Other survivors — tall Tōtara and wind-waved Kānuka — grew up through the outer branches of Pūriri and Tarata established themselves around the edges.

As Pūriri are almost constantly either flowering or fruiting, this remnant of former forestation provided a haven for a wonderful array of birds and insects. Kererū were frequent visitors, feasting on the fruit;

Piwakawaka danced there daily, and Tūi enjoyed the flower nectar so much that some couples made permanent homes in the bountiful boughs. All the usual immigrants — Thrush, Sparrow, Blackbird, Mynah — occupied the trees in great number and the cooing of small Doves and the chatter of rowdy Rosellas were not uncommon sounds coming over the fence. Many native Skinks and Wētā inhabit my property, so I can only imagine how prolific they were in this neighbouring sanctuary.

Imagine my horror when I came home recently and, driving up the right-of-way, was confronted with an enormous empty skyscape! Pūriri had been totally decimated and the destruction of Tōtara and Kānuka was well underway. Over the following days (despite my protestations to the Council) all the trees were felled and chopped up and Pūriri's stump ground out of the earth.

For days afterward I was saddened by the sight of a pair of Tūi, perching in a tree on my property, looking bewilderedly at the space where their home once stood and pitifully calling out for, I presume, their chicks. Getting no response, the Tūi would take off and dive into what should have been welcoming branches only to swoop up again when no landing place presented itself. Their mournful cries reminded me of "Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted because they are no more" (Jeremiah 31:15). The grandmother of Ephraim and Manasseh weeps because her sons

have been taken away and (therefore) her descendants lost. Rachel's cries emanate from her tomb in Bethlehem but her "voice is heard in Ramah" (meaning the high place of God). Despite the odds, Rachel's children eventually return from exile and her dynasty continues.

Here in Rānui, today, trees which stood for generations are gone and generations of small creatures wiped out. Let's hope Tūi — calling to their "high place of God" — are widely heard, so that wanton destruction of flora and fauna ceases, and sentient beings find ways for all God's descendants to live in harmony. ✦

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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.



This Lent as we journey in the darkness of chaos and fear may our fast for justice and commitment to community release hope and support in the world, God with us.



From the *Tui Motu* Team