

The Common Good

Taking a Preferential Option for the Poor

A newspaper of the Christchurch Catholic Worker

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‘Entertaining angels’

Jim Consedine

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. (Vat II, GS, para 1)

Dorothy Day used to often quote an ancient Greek belief that in offering hospitality to strangers, we could be ‘entertaining angels.’ To drive the point home, a film about her life was titled *Entertaining Angels*.

I met such an angel in Christchurch recently. Like the Advent angels who came to Mary and Joseph, it was most unexpected. Shortly after leaving a book shop, I was halted in the middle of the footpath by a man of unkempt appearance, who politely asked for money. He said he needed it for food. I asked where he had spent the previous night and he said in his council flat in an area where I know mental health patients are often housed. He said he was hard-up and would be unsettled until his injection (anti-psychotic) on the coming Friday. He said he had no food and was hungry.

I glanced at his drawn face and mouth and found virtually no teeth left – only a couple of stumps visible. A sure sign of poverty and deprivation.

I had Christmas money for books. He had none for food. I said I was happy to give him something and asked his first name. He immediately told me his name was Steven, and he was a friend of the Archangel Gabriel. Recovering from this insight and knowing angels to be often messengers from God, I wondered what message Steven was bringing me. He asked my name and I told him. He said he would speak to Gabriel, with whom he was in frequent dialogue on my behalf. I thanked him, he hugged me and was gone.



Dorothy Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker

It seems we meet Christ at a deeper level when we allow ourselves the time to really encounter the poor and engage with them. Dishevelled and largely toothless, quite unwell in psychological terms, but bearing an open heart and spirit, his was the face of Christ in Hereford Street that day. I know that.

Option for the Poor

On the masthead on all 92 editions of *The Common Good* since our first in 1996, we have placed the call of the 1971 Synod of Bishops for the Church ‘to take a preferential option for the poor’. It is a phrase that had emerged in 1968 from the World Council of Churches world assembly in Uppsala, Sweden, and came at a time when the Roman Catholic Church was seriously considering its response to the call of the Second Vatican Council to engage with the world and witness in it.

Like most institutions, we have departmentalised our structured responses, not only to peace, environmental and justice issues, but also to the poor, so that maybe, a few specialists from Catholic Social Services, St Vincent de Paul or Caritas get involved but the rest of us don't. Generally, in New Zealand, they remain almost totally outside our realm of contact.

Given its general acceptance at the time by all the major Churches, the phrase crystallised the developing insight of modern scripture scholars as to the nature of Jesus, his mission and what the mission of the Church should be: ‘to bring good news to the poor, liberty to captives, new sight to the blind, free the oppressed.’ (Luke 4/16-20). It reflected also the desire of the Church to take seriously the teaching of Jesus about the danger of riches, the abuse of power and the need to share resources more



justly. Indeed, as the Synod specifically challenged us to see social justice as an ‘essential component’ of preaching the Gospel. An ‘essential component’!

It was clear at the time was that the Western ‘Christian’ world was exploiting the Third World for its resources and maintaining its grip on the power mechanism of those countries through proxy wars like the CIA-backed Contras in Nicaragua, and military dictatorships in Brazil, Guatemala, Bolivia and Argentina to quote only a few. Continued access to resources and cheap labour were the aims with the wealth flowing to the West, leaving home countries impoverished.

Little has changed these past 50 years, except that the Western Church has become less engaged and less conscious of its mission as defined by the Synod. More and more the challenge to engage with the poor and strive for justice as an ‘essential component’ of gospel living is being ignored.

Church Social Teachings

The Catholic Church has great social teachings on the poor, on their dignity and sacredness, on how they have found primary favour with God. On these points, the scriptures are clear. Yet, the structured Church’s commitment to them is lukewarm and often almost non-existence. Most Christians seem much happier – in the

Who are we?

Members of Te Wairua Maranga Trust, which publishes this paper, have since August 1989 been operating as a community following a Catholic Worker spirituality. We view the Treaty of Waitangi as our nation’s founding covenant. We try, however inadequately at times, to live the Sermon on the Mount and its modern implications. We operate three houses of hospitality in Christchurch named after Suzanne Aubert, Joseph Cardijn and Thomas Merton. We offer hospitality to people in need either on a temporary or more permanent basis. We have a continuing outreach to a number of families offering friendship and support. We promote non-violence and a ‘small is beautiful’ approach to life, practise co-operative work and peace-making, focus on issues of justice, support prison ministry, help create intentional communities, and try to practise voluntary poverty and personalism.

We engage in regular prayer and we also celebrate a liturgy every Wednesday at 6:00 pm at the Suzanne Aubert House, 8A Cotterill St, Addington, (off Poulson St, near Church Square), followed by a shared meal. Anyone is welcome – phone Francis, 338-7105.

We do not seek funding from traditional sources. We hope to receive enough to keep our houses of hospitality open and our various works going. Catholic Worker houses do not issue tax receipts since they are running neither a business nor a church social agency. We invite people to participate personally and unconditionally. Should you wish to make a regular contribution, you may do so through our Te Wairua Maranga Westpac Trust holding account (number 031703-0036346-02). Donations may also be made to **Te Wairua Maranga Trust, Box 33-135, Christchurch.** *The Common Good:* Editor: Jim Consedine, jim.conse@xtra.co.nz.

www.catholicworker.org.nz

West in particular – living the life of the middle-class with all its attached values. Consumption appears more often to be the sign of our god, rather than compassion, social justice, understanding and mercy. There is little sign of ‘an option for the poor’. Rather, signs of a big push towards devotional Catholicism, which has its place but is complementary to the major mission of Jesus.

The end result is that, with some exceptions (and Pope Francis is clearly one), the Church is simply not where the Gospel calls us to be. We don’t know the poor the way Jesus knew them and was able to respond to them. Too often, we have forgotten how Jesus listened to the poor before engaging them and offering them ways forward. There is little evidence we care.

Like most institutions, we have departmentalised our structured responses, not only to peace, environmental and justice issues, but also to the poor, so that maybe, a few specialists from Catholic Social Services, St Vincent de Paul or Caritas get involved but the rest of us don’t. Generally, in New Zealand, the poor remain almost totally outside our realm of contact.

‘Without a vision, the people perish’, says Proverbs. No wonder the youth have walked away and our parishes are struggling. The poor bring a presence of Christ to the table. Yet, there appears little passion for them in our society from Christians, except some Evangelicals with their limited message but desire for outreach. There is little sign of Catholic youth engagement despite the huge resources going into our schools!

Yet the Gospels are clear. It is in in the poor, the Stephens of this world, that we meet the Risen Christ more easily. They can empower us. They can teach us so much of God’s love and mercy, simplicity and care. Their gift to us is to teach us compassion, sensitivity, patience and love. They call us to respond. Our gift to them is to engage and take them seriously, to share our skills, our resources, our time, our ‘good news’. It can be hard work, and often is. But ultimately, we are the beneficiaries and so is our Church.

The challenge of Francis

Pope Francis is well aware of the problem of our lack of contact with the poor. That is why he has become their champion and insisted on building freely accessible showers for the homeless inside the Vatican; why he regularly visits prisons and washes the feet of prisoners; why he is so welcoming about immigration; why he often has urged his bishops and priests to ‘smell the dung’ and ‘get their boots dirty’, meaning engage with the poor, don’t shut them out.

He knows that inasmuch as we are present at the coalface of interaction with the poor, we can bring them ‘good news’, hope and freedom from that which enslaves. And they can free us from our addictions to mediocrity, self-interest and consumerism. That is their great gift to us.

Francis teaches us that when the Church presents itself more like a corporate club than the face of the poor, we are not living our divine mandate and truly are in danger of becoming irrelevant.

And we deserve to be.

Editorial Lies, fake news, and climate change

Almost weekly, a new international report is released stating the obvious evidence of our planet, Mother Earth, entering a more perilous state of existence. Oceans, forests, the atmosphere, waterways, rivers, the soil itself are under siege. Climate change affects every living person now and future generations even more. What sort of a planet have we created through exploitation and degradation and what will we be bequeathing future generations? Their future existence is largely in our hands.

The effects of climate change unquestionably pose the most challenging moral issue of our time. Satellites show us, there is 'a tiny onion skin of atmosphere surrounding our world', that we lie in a womb not unlike a pregnant mother's and just as fragile. And like the unborn child, need to be nourished and protected.

Already the climate scientists are saying that by 2040 we will be able to paddle across the North Pole! That Greenland will have virtually disappeared due to ice melting. That there will be a rise in sea levels of several metres which will swamp many Pacific Island countries. That drought will further devastate large portions of Africa, Australia, Central and South America and even Europe, causing an even bigger flood of refugees to seek a home elsewhere. Climate refugees will be a common sight.

The biggest rainforests in the Amazon, the Congo Basin, the Daintree Forest in Queensland, and Sumatra in Indonesia, continue to be logged and burnt for farmland and timber - destroying the very lungs of the planet. In Indonesia, 80% of the rainforest has been destroyed to grow palm oil, a cheap component of much of what we buy in our supermarkets. What we're doing to this fragile, interconnected world we live in is an issue for everyone.

All this is public knowledge. However, much of it is rejected by 'climate deniers', people often with high qualifications, many also in political office, who are in the pay of corporate interests, with fossil fuel, mining, oil and coal corporates. Shelling out billions of dollars per year to buy their allegiance. For example, hundreds of US senators and congress representatives accept big money to help fund their campaigns.

Such bribery is not restricted to the US. It is

Report Northern CW hui

We had a great low-key northern CW hui in the Hokianga on St Francis Farm, Maikio in late January.

We gathered together under the marquee on Monday afternoon and after welcoming people, ideas were put forward for discussion. After the list of topics was made, a team got together to work out a timetable for the hui. Topics included: meth addiction and anger management, parenting and hospitality, capitalism and money, the unborn and social justice, consensus decision making, Christian peace-making in Iraqi Kurdistan, the Adani coal mine protest in Qld, Jim's seven items for the CW spiritual backpack, crafting circles and pit sawing.

Some great discussions were had with people from different backgrounds and passions sharing their insights. There were hard discussions too, as there always are.

worldwide and well documented. Many make false claims about the issue. Many media are devoted to lies and 'fake news' stories (a word popularised by Donald Trump) to discredit the science. Satan is alive and roving the world in our time!

Pope Francis speaks

Recently we celebrated the 5th anniversary of the proclamation of *Laudato Si'*, the prophetic environmental encyclical of Pope Francis. In it he placed before the world the imminent crisis that global warming and climate change was posing and begged the world to act before it was too late. His teaching has become a central plank of Catholic Social Teaching.

His appeal has been picked up by many – but not enough. 'We need to accept the world as a sacrament of communion, as a way of sharing with God and our neighbours on a global scale. It is our humble conviction that the divine and the human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God's creation, in the last speck of dust of our planet.' LS #49

How widely have we promulgated this message? How many parishes have heard a sermon on climate change or *Laudato Si'* in the past five years? How many have instituted programmes to implement it at a local level? There are lots of things we can do personally. The possibilities include changing our diets to reduce meat intake, refusing to buy goods at the supermarkets with palm oil in them, using more public transport, cycling and walking when possible, growing more vegetables ourselves and sharing them, switching to solar power, becoming conscious of our carbon footprint and reducing it in as many ways possible.

But we need to be better educated. Homilies, sharing the science linked to God's Word would be a good place to start. But words aren't enough. More nonviolent direct action is becoming an imperative as political action is sluggish.

This is a crisis.

—Jim Consedine

Among the ideas we took away for the next hui were that having 'Around the Traps' input at the beginning is vital, with important topics raised needing to be dealt with at the hui. It meant that we were talking about things relevant to the people there at the time.

Meals were prepared by four of the households in Maikio. The home people were glad to share their life on the land which is so dedicated to growing food as a way to live justly and kindly.

We were very lucky to have an Australian CW contingent present thanks to Tim and Sarah's wedding. It was great to have the cross-Tasman sisters and brothers to share their stories and experience. There was plenty of time for swimming and conversation which helped make the hui a great success -

Melissa Dowling

Staying human in Palestine

Lois Griffiths

My husband, Martin, and I follow very closely what's happening in the Middle East, ever since we went to Israel and the West Bank in 2009. Frankly, I was reluctant to go. I feared Palestinians would resent outsiders witnessing their situation and then going away. But it wasn't like that. The Palestinians are welcoming and eager to share their stories with visitors. Seeing first-hand the reality of what Palestinians go through and yet retain their dignity and tradition of hospitality is a life-changing experience.



We returned three more times, in consecutive years. Each time we combined independent travel with participating in educational tours, 3 times with the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions and once with the Joint Advocacy Initiative olive harvesting project. We met people, Palestinians and Israeli human rights activists. We learned things and saw things that don't get mentioned in mainstream media. Ever since our visits we've talked to anyone or any groups who will listen to us. We read avidly, learning more every day.

Quoting Arundhati Roy, *'The trouble is that once you see it, you can't unsee it. And once you've seen it, keeping quiet, saying nothing, becomes as political an act as speaking out. There is no innocence. Either way you are accountable.'*

Invasion, demolition, confiscation

We met Palestinians whose houses have been demolished or taken over by Zionists, whose land has been confiscated, whose olives and other trees have been deliberately cut, who are denied access to their traditional water sources. We learned so much from human rights lawyers: the shocking way children are abused, taken away in the middle of the night by IDF soldiers...the huge numbers of Palestinian prisoners, under 'administrative detention', no charges laid, no lawyers ...the way Palestinian schools are invaded... the everyday humiliating restrictions on life...the violence of Israeli police, soldiers, settlers.

We discovered that movement is so restricted that it is very difficult for a Palestinian Christian or Muslim in Bethlehem to enter Jerusalem to pray. In the Negev, that's in Israel itself, we met Bedouins whose village, that existed and paid taxes before there even was an Israel and is threatened with demolition, is classified as 'unrecognized' - meaning no water, electricity, clinic or schools. Each time we went, we quickly discovered that

the situation, the oppression, had gotten worse. And now, 2020, with Trump's blessing, the extreme right-wing Israeli regime openly mocks international humanitarian laws and is set to confiscate even more Palestinian land.

As for Gaza, poor Gaza, the UN reported some time ago that it would be 'uninhabitable' by 2020. Many commentators say it became uninhabitable before this year. We never got to Gaza. But we've met a few Gazans and we've met a few Kiwis who have been there, and in 2 cases even worked there, with the UN or with a human rights group. Noam Chomsky has described the Israeli regime's treatment of Gazans as sadism. The water is undrinkable, the Israeli regime regularly sprays poison on the soil, regularly attacks fishermen. The children, severely traumatised, see death and destruction all around them. For all Palestinians, but especially Palestinian Gazans, what hurts most is the feeling that the world has turned its back on them.

'We're human', we heard Palestinians say. I strongly believe that is why we, civilian society here in NZ and worldwide, should take up the Palestinian cause, a just cause, because they are human, our fellow human beings.

One must be careful with language. The situation in Israel and the Occupied Territories is not a religious confrontation. Zionism is a settler colonialist project. The agenda has always been to control resources and restrict the presence of Palestinians: by force, demolishing Palestinian houses and even whole villages, or by squeezing them into tiny isolated Bantustans or by making their lives so unbearable that they will go away.

Zionism, a separatist ideology, is not Judaism

Don't make the mistake of equating Zionism with Judaism. Some of the most articulate, passionate, well-informed critics of Zionism are Jews. Israeli-born Jewish historian Ilan Pappé, researching Israeli military archives from 1948, was shocked to discover that what really happened then was not what he had been taught in school. He published his findings, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. For this, he received death threats and now lives and lectures in England.

An American NGO, *Jewish Voices for Peace*, is banned from Israel because of its commitment for justice for all people. American Jewish woman Anna Baltzer, after visiting that part of the world and witnessing the reality, became a strong advocate for the Palestinian cause.

She has explained that some people identify themselves as Jews because of their religion, others for cultural and/or family tradition reasons. She adds that some Jews, but not all by any means, are Zionists. Furthermore, not all Zionists are Jews. So-called non-Jewish Christian Zionists, who favour Armageddon believing it would hasten the return of Christ, are an influential political force in the US today.

‘Divide and rule’ is always a favoured tactic of oppressors. Zionists would like the world to believe that Palestinians Christians and Muslims are enemies. Yet Bishop Riah, former Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem, has pointed out that: ‘Arab Palestinian Christians are part and parcel of the Arab Palestinian nation. We have the same history, the same culture, the same habits and the same

hopes.’

In the 1980s, Christian leaders in apartheid South Africa, pleaded for outside support with a *Kairos Declaration*, *kairos* being a Greek word meaning the time for urgent action has arrived. Now, Palestinian Christian leaders of all denominations have issued, ‘*Kairos Palestine – A Moment of Truth: We Hear the Cry of our Children*’.

This heartfelt plea from Palestinian Christians is an urgent plea to all of us, on behalf of all the people of historic Palestine, for justice in our time.

Lois and Martin Griffiths are long-time supporters of Palestinian rights and live in Christchurch.

Palestinian Rights Plea

A group of Catholic bishops from throughout Europe, North America and South Africa have called on their governments to insist on the application of international law in Israel and Palestine.

The plea by 34 bishops of the Holy Land Coordination, followed their five-day visit to the region. Billed in the Palestinian city of Ramallah In January, the religious leaders toured key locations in Jerusalem and expressed support for the local church in promoting dialogue and peace.

They added that they had also been inspired by the enduring resilience of the people they met in Gaza, East Jerusalem and Ramallah despite the worsening situation.

Jamal Khader, pastor of the host Latin Church in Ramallah, told *Arab News* that the choice of Ramallah for their residency was excellent because they had the chance to meet the local community.

‘The bishops were extremely moved by their visit to the Comboni Missionary Sisters outside of Jerusalem. The convent was divided in half as the Israeli-built wall divided their community and made it impossible for many to reach the school and nursery that is part of their mission.’

The bishops also met with PLO executive committee member Hanan Ashrawi and Deputy Prime Minister Ziad Abu Amer in addition to the visit to Jerusalem with the leader of the Catholic church. Fr. Ibrahim Shomali, secretary of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, told *Arab News* that the visit and the final communique had been well received. ‘We welcome the visit of the Catholic bishops and we applaud their statement that calls on their governments to follow the position of the Holy See and recognize Palestine.’

However, Shomali feared many governments would not listen. ‘While the visit is very positive and we hope that the church’s voice will be heard, we are not sure that this will happen because many of the Western governments are not listening to the voice of peace and justice.’

Kamal Shamshoom, a member of the Ramallah Latin, said the bishops, many of whom had visited the area

before, had ‘a good idea of the situation’ and made a strong communique. ‘While we welcome such visits, it is important to note that we don’t want just sympathy, we need action that is effective.’ Shamshoom, who is also an elected member of the Ramallah city council, added that the church leaders must use their moral authority with their political leaders. ‘They are bishops and it means something if they decide to do something concrete. What I would like is for them to talk to their leaders like bishops and make a strong intervention for peace and justice.’

The final communique of the bishops spoke about the importance ‘of the application of international law’ and the need to ‘follow the Holy See’s lead in recognizing the state of Palestine; addressing the security concerns of Israel and the right of all to live in safety; rejecting political or economic support for settlements and resolutely opposing acts of violence or abuses of human rights by any side.’

The local bishops also warned that people were facing further ‘evaporation of hope for a durable solution. We have witnessed this reality first-hand, particularly how the construction of settlements and the separation wall is destroying any prospect of two states existing in peace.’

In the same message, the local bishops sounded the alarm about living conditions becoming ‘more and more unbearable. This is painfully clear in the West Bank where our sisters and brothers are denied even basic rights including freedom of movement.’

In Gaza, the bishops noted that the ‘political decisions of all sides have resulted in the creation of an open-air prison, human rights abuses, and a profound humanitarian crisis.’ They said they were welcomed by families ‘whose focus is now day-to-day survival and whose aspirations have been reduced to bare essentials such as electricity and clean water.’

The bishops added that they ‘encourage Christians in our own countries to pray for and support this mission. The increase in people making pilgrimages to the Holy Land is encouraging and we call for those who come to ensure they encounter the local communities.’

Around the Traps

Christmas Dinner – A crowd of close to 60 turned up for our annual dinner on Christmas Day at Suzanne Aubert CW in Addington. Master-carver Jock was in early to prepare the meat and was joined by a swag of Italian visitors, including Maria, Sandra and John, Carolina and Lucas from Brazil. Sister Judith, Tui, Tony, Francis, Jim, Marama and Louise all chipped to help serve and make it a most enjoyable gathering which continued well into the afternoon. Thank you to all who made the dinner possible with donations of food and manual help.

Happy 70th birthday – to Francis Simmonds on 25 January. Francis helped found the Christchurch Catholic Worker in 1989 and has been a fulltime CW ever since. His hospitality and outreach to the poor is legendary. Modest as ever, he didn't want a big party to celebrate his 70th - just a quiet dinner with family. Thank you Francis for your life's commitment and your gentle daily presence. Ad multos annos, Francis!

Annual Appeal – Once again we have had a generous response to our annual appeal. Our budget each year to help run our houses of hospitality and print *The Common Good* comes to \$25 000. This year we have raised \$13450 towards that amount, from 89 donors. This is a wonderful response and we thank you all sincerely.

Ocean's floor threatened – Commercial fisheries are 'bulldozing' ocean floors, according to Greenpeace. In the 2017-2018 season, New Zealand commercial fishing vessels destroyed up to 3000 tonnes of coral and other valuable species through bottom trawling. In a statement, Greenpeace said, 'NZ is one of only seven countries still trawling in international waters. It is such an archaic practice and such a destructive process. We really need to stop,' More than 40 000 New Zealanders have called for the Government to ban bottom trawling. *The Press*, 20 November 2019

Report – 148,000 NZ kids in hardship – More than one in 10 children in New Zealand are living in material hardship, and tens of thousands are going without healthy food., according to the latest Child Poverty Monitor report. The report said that 148,000, or 13 percent, were without six or more essentials, such as lacking two good pairs of shoes and the ability to see a doctor when needed – meaning they suffer material hardship. A total of 65 000, or 6 percent, were without nine or more of the essentials – therefore living in severe material hardship. Children's Commissioner, Andrew Becroft, said, 'That's a city bigger than Dunedin, full of children whose families can't afford the basics, like having enough to eat, sturdy

shoes and warm clothes.' *The Press*, 9 December 2019

NZ middle-aged meth users – More than one-quarter of middle-aged New Zealanders have tried methamphetamine at least once, according to a recent study. The study in the *Drug and Alcohol Dependence Journal*, found 28 percent of participants among the 1000 surveyed reported using the drug at least once between the age of 18 and 35, 11 percent used it monthly at some point and 4.9 percent weekly.

Modern Slavery - According to *Emmaus International*, after the arms and drug trade, human trafficking is the third most lucrative and widespread form of criminal activity and exploitation. It generates 32 billion euros a year. Every year, around 2.5 million new victims – mainly women and children – are recruited and exploited worldwide.

In today's world, slavery is common. In every country, there are enslaved people. Most of 24.5 million victims are women and 33 percent are children. They are almost always very poor, unemployed, not well educated and vulnerable. They are victims of organized crime syndicates and used for forced labour or underpaid work that includes working in factories, on fishing vessels and as farm laborers or held in sexual enslavement.

Other victims of human trafficking in Europe are refugees, asylum seekers and migrants fleeing poverty and violence. The exploitation and abuse of these people happens in migrant reception centres and refugee camps on the doorsteps of Europe. Many of them and their families are ruined by war and having sold their land and property to speculators and paid traffickers to get them to Europe, many more borrowed money and are in debt bondage to traffickers. —*Rev Shay Cullen SSC, Preda Foundation, the Philippines*

Greenhouse gases escalating – Levels of greenhouse gases that are the main contributor to climate change hit a new high last year. The levels of both methane and nitrous oxide also hit record highs. There has been a 43 percent increase in the warming impact of greenhouse gases since 1990. Methane, which contributes about 17 percent of this warming, comes mostly from human activities including cattle farming and rice growing. Forest fires and fertiliser use contribute to nitrous oxide emissions, which also increase warming. About 25 percent of emissions are absorbed into the atmosphere, and CO2 stays in the eco-system for centuries, and even longer in oceans. *Report: UN World Meteorological Organisation, Nov 2019*

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that great American myth

robed in court, unruffled
moral discussion banned
the Pentagon's legal arm
makes the case for Wall Street
corrupted politicians, constant war

confronting demonic power
poured blood, kneeled prayer
living faith becomes flesh
probes fake news, public lies
hears only hammers

prophets nailed to the Cross

—Jim Consedine

siege

God help us, she screams
when bombs rain down
slaughter unleashed
on children, youth, the elderly
the crib where her baby lies
wide-eyed sucking milk

when from clear blue skies
barrel and cluster bombs
helicopter gunships
guided cruise missiles
even chlorine gas
target indiscriminately

when in Moscow, Ankara,
politicians strut their stuff,
psychotic generals in Damascus
medals glinting on puffed-out chests
move human pawns around
this jewel of antiquity, Aleppo

repent she cries! weep bitterly!
in this insane war
the innocent
shed tears of blood

—Jim Consedine



Trident 7 protesters continue to await sentencing for their disarmament action on a Trident submarine in Kings Bay, Georgia, USA. Sentencing is expected in April.

Syrian Boy and other poems

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The Baulking Donkey and 5G

Anne and Martin Gastinger



In the First Testament Book of Numbers (22:21-34) is the story of Balaam and the Donkey. In this tale the animal sees what the rider can't - an angel of God set

to kill them if they try to pass. Naturally the donkey baulks. Frustrated and angry Balaam, not seeing the danger, spurs the creature forward leaving the donkey no option but to veer sideways into a stone wall. In the ensuing mayhem Balaam's leg is badly injured and things come a halt.

In a similar way the ordinary people can sometimes see more clearly what's ahead than their blinkered leaders can.

In our situation the Telecom industry is hastily rolling out 5G (fifth generation) cellular technology in New Zealand and the politicians like Balaam are riding in full support of this initiative. No existing research can assure 5G is harmless for living creatures, humans, insects, other mammals.

Whereas independent scientific research raises serious health concerns about the type of electromagnetic radiation (EMR) wireless technologies like 5G emit. In all fairness, there are scientists with 'Donkey tenacity and seeing qualities' as evidenced by the numerous appeals and resolutions from medical and scientific groups around the globe warning of the dangers of artificially created EMR.

Resistance

Some communities are baulking. Belgium's capital, Brussels, has a moratorium on 5G, as have parts of Ireland, Switzerland and Italy. Likewise, US cities such as Los Altos and Mill Valley, have passed protective ordinances outlawing 5G antennas in residential zones. In January there was a Global Protest Day and people in 19 communities throughout NZ participated.

Due to a NZ governmental regulation - the *National Environmental Standard 2772:1* - New Zealanders cannot contest for health reasons the placement of a cell tower in their neighbourhood. Within five years, 5G transmitters will litter our streets every couple of hundred metres.

New Zealand, like Italy, uses the *International Committee for Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection standard* for the radio frequency radiation used in wireless communications. These standards are not universally accepted or scientifically agreed upon.

Little victories for the Donkey

In Italy six court cases have determined worker's acoustic neuroma's (a benign tumour in the ear) were caused by permissible levels of cell phone radiation

exposure.

In the US, the Supreme Court upheld the Berkley City 'Right to Know' ordinance. People in Berkley must now get a written warning when buying a cell phone about the radiation health risks of carrying it close to their body.

Why, given the known science, the academic outcry and judicial recognition of the dangers, is our government prodding us, the donkey, into a 5G saturated world? New Zealand is well serviced with existing cellular infrastructure. Our cities have an abundance of free Wi-Fi and fast fibre connections to homes and businesses. The Balaams of this world seem only able to see the positives and not the downsides.

Balaam's donkey sees a more complex picture. Without 5G the heralded 'internet of things' - so called machine to machine communication - cannot proceed. 5G's non-visible radiation is the force linking armies of small street cells, 5G capable LED streetlights, 5G cell phones, household smart meters and smart appliances. Joining these lines of transmission will be an estimated 50,000+ satellites in low earth orbit beaming microwave radiation across the planet.

Our government profits in selling airwaves. City and regional councils as landlords administering public land used by Telcos for their infrastructure benefit from rental. The market profits from the sale of 5G enabled products, Media benefits from advertising 5G and people pay in more ways than health. With all these vested interests, who is left to speak up... if not the donkey?

5G's purpose is to enable Artificial Super Intelligence (AI) technologies that will revolutionise all sectors of work and military warfare. How will we cope with loss of work and income as jobs disappear? Besides the rights to work and income, the right to privacy is also increasingly under siege. Smart cities are embedded with surveillance systems capable of gathering and storing data about our every action.

Is our vision for the future about the right to own and use 'God gadgets'? Is having that sense of all-knowing at any time and at any cost worth the damage that science foretells?

In the Balaam story the donkey is finally given the gift of divine speech to convince his rider. People who are aware of the harm of 5G can also use their gift 'to speak up' for the common good:

- express your concerns to family, friends and work colleagues
- speak to your MP and local council member about your concerns
- protest about 5G
- sign petitions against the roll out of 5G
- support court action against 5G

Anne and Martin Gastinger are members of the Emmaus Community in Christchurch and long-time supporters of the Catholic Worker..

Reimaging Imprisonment

Anton Spelman

As the sun sets on another day in the New Zealand prison system, the cell doors clang shut on the lives and backstories of close to 10 000 of our people who have been removed from the community for committing crimes, or who are ‘on remand’ awaiting trial. The cost of this level of community safety is high and there is little to be proud of knowing that in 2019 we rank fifth among OECD countries for incarceration rates.

There are two main problems with imprisonment in New Zealand. First, we have too many people incarcerated for our population size – 9969 in June 2019. The rate of incarceration of Maori is unacceptably high at 51.7 percent of the total prison population. While there are some attempts at rehabilitation in New Zealand prisons, the work is complex and some contest its value.

The problem of mass imprisonment needs to be seen in the context of New Zealand history. The principal challenge for New Zealand is how to engage and work with divergent worldviews historically represented by mana whenua and the Crown through Te Tiriti o Waitangi. We have done good work to understand the original relationship through the Waitangi Tribunal process. In a contemporary setting, however, the relationship is more complex.

A different approach

A Treaty relationship approach emphasises the importance of mutuality whereby tangata whenua can work with the Crown yet still exercise the power to protect, define and decide important features of the practice of rangatiratanga. This approach offers assistance to those working to reduce the size of the prison population generally and the rate of Maori incarceration in particular.

If we approach the problem of Maori incarceration via the law, rehabilitation service effectiveness or human rights, we will simply add to the list of failed initiatives in this area. If we want to reduce prisoner numbers, especially Maori prisoners, we need a proposition that would see significant numbers of current prisoners released. And we need a way to think about the possibility that is both robust and sustainable.

Using a Treaty Relationship Framework

If we decide to imprison only those people who were a serious ongoing danger to others, a Tiriti/Treaty of Waitangi Relationship Framework could help us think through the issues and their implications.

There are three steps to follow. The first involves at looking at the proposition from the perspective of tangata whenua and tangata tiriti values. The second step is asking what is the same and what is different about those values. And the third step we ask how a set of values could be expressed across both worldviews so that each party can see an acknowledgment of their perspective, particularly where there are worldview differences.

From a Tangata Whenua worldview perspective, a person who is a serious ongoing danger to others in the community is likely to demonstrate their unwillingness to practise whanaungatanga and manaakitanga; consistently choose to trample the mana of others as the preferred approach to conflict resolution; and act in ways that destroy the tapu of the victims who fear for their safety.

From a Tangata Tiriti worldview perspective, a person who is a serious ongoing danger to others is likely to pose an actual threat to the safety of others through repeated attacks on a victim; cause victims serious harm and sometimes death, acting for the most part without remorse; and develop a track record, or the potential for repeat behaviour, that poses a serious ongoing threat to the safety of others.

From the perspective of both worldviews together, ‘a serious ongoing danger to others’ could now be understood as an individual offender who rejects the relationship and accountability requirements for living with others such as might be set out in a code of conduct; is willing to impose their will on others outside existing accountability relationships and regardless of cost; and through their actions seriously threaten physically or psychologically, the wellbeing and the life of another.

The elephant in the room

It is important to acknowledge that a significant number of New Zealanders believe that we need more not less imprisonment and the very strength of that view may reflect the speed of change in this area. This does not reflect a lack of resolve to address the matter. We need to commit to working differently. Proponents of growth in the prison service often analyse the issue in a severely monocultural fashion leading to racial bias in both the analysis and outcomes. This is a matter that needs to be worked through.

Working forward

We need to develop a community level programme to address the current ‘New Zealand punishment mentality,’ and replace it with a ‘care and protection ethic’. The programme would focus on strengthening community relationships and building a more compassionate culture across communities.

We also need to apply a Tiriti/Treaty of Waitangi two-worldview analysis of ‘a serious danger to others’ to:

- The sentencing Act 2002
- The sentencing provisions in current legislation
- The rules around Bail
- The conditions that apply to parole

We need a consequential review of the way we understand the therapeutic or restorative dimensions of non-custodial sentence administration in the light of the two-worldview analysis of ‘a serious danger to others.’ And we need a review of the accountability framework

operating within State agencies to manage sentence outcomes and processes as well as give advice to the Court.

Finally, we need to improve the coordination of criminal justice issues with community development initiatives in health, housing and employment for families and education for children. Alongside this, we need a commitment by agencies to fund and support relevant cross-agency change initiatives and to be accountable for performance to the Government.

The picture is complex. But the call to think

differently and act decisively is a call to justice for all of us.

Anton Spelman lives in Tamaki Makaurau and belongs to Ngati Hikairo ki Kawhia. He works with organisations trying to develop Maori initiatives in line with the Treaty of Waitangi. This article was printed in Tui Motu, October 2019 and is reprinted with permission.

Film Review

For Sama, directed by Waad al-Kateab and Edward Watts - Channel 4, Great Britain, 2019 - 98 min. Reviewer: Maria Fresia.

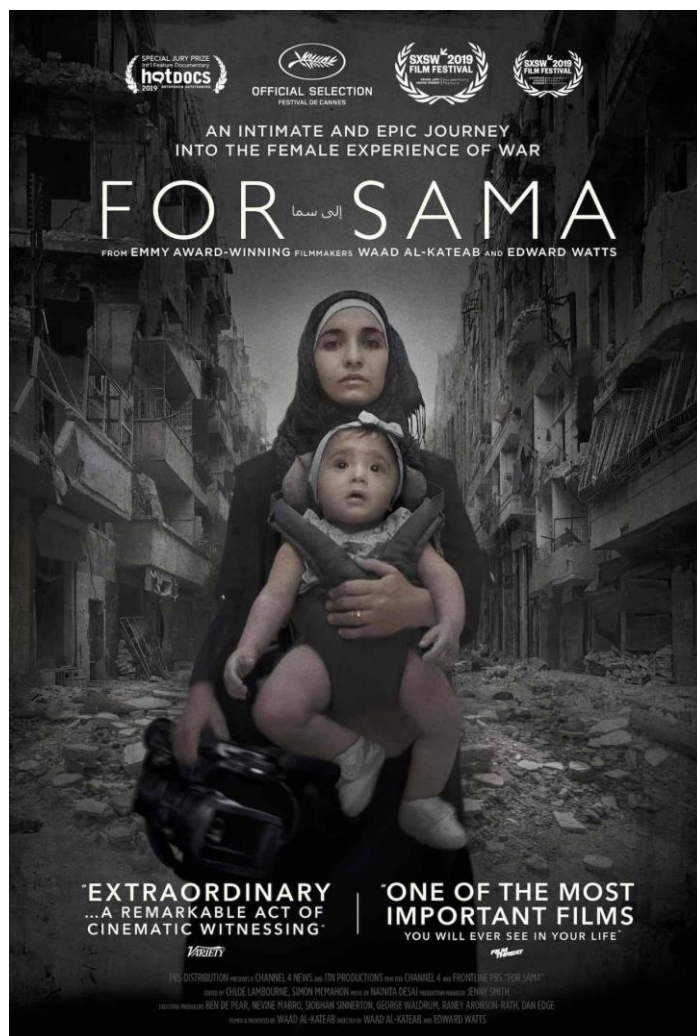
In 2012, a Syrian young woman, Waad al-Kateab, (the name is a pseudonym), a university student and journalist in Aleppo, Syria, began to film the protests of her fellow students against President Bashar al-Assad and his dictatorial regime as the so-called Arab Spring unfolded. From this early footage we see how full of hope the students were and sure that soon the political situation would change for the better. Instead the regime response is violent, merciless and disproportionate.

Many people flee but Waad stays and continues filming for the next five years, documenting her personal life and the life around her. The result is a profoundly moving documentary of rare depth, filled with horror and hope.

During the siege of Aleppo which followed Russia's intervention in the war on the side of Assad, her affection toward Hazma, a Syrian doctor, grows. They are both caught up in the struggle and committed to a more just future for their country. Between bombing raids, they get married and have a baby girl, Sama, meaning Sky, a miracle in itself! So, in the midst of the daily chaos, a love story unfolds, a new family is born.

While Hazma relentlessly devotes himself to the wounded and the dying, Waad with her camera shows us the makeshift 'hospital' with numerous graphic and heart-breaking scenes, the birth of her daughter, her family and friends, the streets of Aleppo and the constant Russian planes bombing the city. Eight out of nine hospitals were bombed, including their one!

In the middle of all this chaos and constant danger, children are born, go to school, play, eat AND are seriously traumatised by having to witness the death of their brothers and sisters, their friends, the terror of the daily shellings of all types and shapes – cluster bombs, barrel bombs, missiles, chlorine gas bombs - the deadly noise of planes flying above them, the shelter they have to run to, the growing mountains of rubble. Aleppo, a city originally of 4.6 million people, is reduced to ruins.



By the end of the documentary, we are left speechless. Shocked by the fact that the western world has watched this tragedy unfold without doing anything to protect the innocent Syrian children. But amazed by the courage, strength and resilience of Waad and Hazma and their desire to fight for a better future for Sama. It has rightly won best documentary at the Bafta and the European Film Awards 2020 and was nominated for an Oscar.

There is nothing Hollywood about this film, a must see for those who care about the on-going Syrian war.

Letters

Stephen Kelly SJ, Prisoner #915634
Glynn County Detention Centre
Brunswick, GA, USA

Dear Padre Jim,

May the peace of Jesus be with you and with all in CW, and your ministry, community and all whom you care to include in such peace.

Today, Saturday, 7 December, is 26th anniversary of the 'Pax Christi Spirit of Life Ploughshares' action – Phil Berrigan, Bruce Friedrich, Lynn Fredriksson, Rev John Dear. Yesterday I received your poem 'Disarming Trident' on 17th anniversary, 6 Dec, of Phil Berrigan's death RIP. So grateful for time and eloquence at your unfolding the truth poem, relayed by Nukeresister@igc.org.

May God bless us in yourself. I'm benefiting from your prayers. I join them.

Steve Kelly SJ

Malu 'Aina
P O Box 489
Kurtistown,
Hawaii 96760

Dear CW friends,

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the work of Malu Aina, the work for justice peace and a living planet in Hawaii.. From the start we decided not to seek foundation money, corporate money or government grants to maintain our independent and critical voice on important issues.

A donation of 21 acres of land was the starting seed. Our vision was to start small and stay small, to be kipuka of resistance, a base rooted in the principle of nonviolence, to learn and share sustainability skills, to grow food, build simple structures, live off the grid, and organise for justice, peace and protecting the earth. We still do.

Over time, we have built several small structures, used rainwater catchment, planted fruit trees, served as an emergency food pantry helping thousands, and conducted 950 consecutive weeks and counting of a Hilo Peace vigil at the downtown federal building, writing a new leaflet each week. We continue efforts to stop the bombing and demilitarize all Hawaii and protect Sacred Mauna Kea from further desecration.

It all starts with respecting native peoples'

cultural and religious beliefs and practices. It means protecting the sacred. Sacred before dollars!

Thank you for your continued support. A Pay Pal account (Donate button) has been set up on our webpage, www.malu-aina.org. Also click 'Subscribe' to receive our weekly peace vigil newsletter. With gratitude and aloha.

Solidarity for justice, peace and the earth,

Jim Albertini

Te Awahairangi
Lower Hutt

Dear Trustees,

Because it is the season of goodwill, please accept five dollars (\$5) to support The Common Good expenses. I've been on the breadline years ago and am now able to support the poor.

Prayerfully,

John

Hesed House,
167 Palmer Ave
Syracuse, NY 13204

Dear Father Jim,

I read the first conclusion of your article 'Towards an integrated ecology' (CG91) as the end of it. I wouldn't have believed it came from the hand of a Christian or a believer in God. Something is wrong with the language the Synod is using. (Peter here is referring to the quotes from the Amazon Synod re ecological sin - Ed).

Your second conclusion is from the hand of a Christian. Which conclusion comes from the hand of Jesus? I could see the second conclusion coming from the hand of Dorothy Day or Peter Maurin. The language of the Synod in the first conclusion comes from a spirit in opposition to the spirit of the second. Can't you see this?

Yours in Christ,

Peter King.

Thank you Peter for seeking clarification. The Amazon Synod document quoted reaches out in modern language to address a critical modern problem - ecological destruction by humans. The second conclusion dovetails seamlessly in with that. I see no contradiction between the two conclusions. Ed.

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The Common Good

Te Wairua Maranga Trust
 Box 33-135
 Christchurch 8244
 New Zealand



The Gospel is a very dangerous idea. We have to see how much of that dangerous idea we can perform in our own lives. There is nothing innocuous or safe about the Gospel. Jesus did not get crucified because he was a nice man.

—Walter Bruegermann