

## A Synodal Church:

### *communion, participation, mission*

Paul Dalziel

Pope Francis has announced the next Synod of Bishops will be a three-year journey of consultations and discernment across the globe, starting in October 2021. Cardinal John Dew has responded to say the NZ Bishops are seeking the views of every Catholic in the country. This is an important invitation.

The Synod theme is *For a synodal Church: communion, participation, and mission*. I think that Catholics in this country could discover a unique voice from Aotearoa to offer distinctive insights on communion, participation, and mission.

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Pat Marrin

mission. Suspicion, exclusion, and rejection would be closer to the mark.

Nevertheless, it is not unusual to find people with Catholic backgrounds striving in their homes, their communities, their workplaces and their public service to promote the common good. I regard myself as such a person. Typically, we are not active parishioners, but we aim to lead lives that reflect the values we

once discovered in a church setting.

#### **Being in communion**

Of course, I encounter many people with similar values and levels of personal commitment, who have different faith experiences, or no religious background at all. It is a joy to find common ground with so many people collaborating to pursue a vision of social and ecological justice. It means my experience of communion has been something much, much richer than agreement on some specific words written in a creed.

I think our country can make a distinctive contribution to the global discussion of communion by reflecting on the bicultural journey we have taken to honour *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* since Dame Whina Cooper led the land march in 1975. This journey has reinforced that communion is not uniformity. Indeed, respecting tino rangatiratanga



of different groups creates a shared life that is made stronger, not weaker, by that respect.

This bicultural journey is also teaching us to create policies to reflect our human communion with the natural environment. The Whanganui River, for example, now has legal recognition as a person. The National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 has introduced Te Mana o te Wai as a fundamental concept for restoring and preserving the balance between water, the wider environment, and the community.

A big social movement in my lifetime has been that of women successfully campaigning to win the right to participate in positions of public leadership. In 1980, there was just one woman in the Government, Marilyn Waring, now a Dame Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit for her services to women and economics. The 2020 election resulted in the most diverse government in our history, led by our third woman Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern.

The Catholic Church in Aotearoa and

internationally appears tone-deaf to this social movement. It is the only significant institution I know that once made a commitment to move away from using exclusive language but has returned to that practice. It is a scandal that parishioners are expected to say every week that Jesus came 'for us men.'

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The return to sexist language reflects a deep patriarchy in the leadership of the Catholic Church that shows little openness to inclusive participation. We need to draw on our national experience to affirm that leadership is better when participation is diverse.

It is not just leadership where the Church needs to celebrate and learn from diversity. Current practices that marginalise baptised members of the LGBTQ+ communities, and practices that refuse communion to divorced and remarried parishioners are cruel. There's no place for such cruelty in a faith community where the first and greatest commandment is love. Love is diverse. Love is inclusive.

### **Fleshing out social teachings**

The final word in the theme of the Synod is mission. When I was in my third year at university, I joined a group of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Development in the Christchurch Diocese. It was called the Mission Group. We met every three weeks and began each meeting by sharing thoughts as we went paragraph by paragraph through a simple language version of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, an Apostolic Exhortation published by Pope Paul VI after the Synod of Bishops in 1974. That Synod confirmed that the Church's essential mission is evangelisation. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* unpacked some aspects of that task, including these comments from paragraph 31:

*In evangelization it is impossible to ignore the problems of justice; of liberation; of development; of peace in the world. To do so would be to forget the lesson of the Gospel concerning love of our neighbour, suffering or in need. Jesus of Nazareth proclaimed liberation; achieved liberation. This liberation is preached by the Church. We need to understand its importance and meaning in depth.*

#### **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](mailto:jim.conse@xtra.co.nz). Layout: Barbara Corcoran [burkespass@gnail.com](mailto:burkespass@gnail.com).

**[www.catholicworker.org.nz](http://www.catholicworker.org.nz)**

Nearly fifty years later, the problems of justice, liberation, development, and peace are even more urgent as the human-made climate crisis threatens to consume us. The concentration of wealth in the hands of a few has already pushed economic activity beyond the earth's planetary boundaries, while around 700 million people continue to live and die in extreme poverty (income less than US\$1.90 a day).

In my research field of wellbeing economics, planetary boundaries and inescapable poverty are burning issues. An example is Kate Raworth's important book on *Doughnut Economics* (Penguin Random House, 2017). Her doughnut model aims to define a safe and just space for humanity that will provide social foundations for all humanity, while respecting the ecological ceiling imposed by planetary constraints.

Dr Kathleen Rushton RSM (who also was a member of the Mission Group I have mentioned) has published a book, *The Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor: Hearing Justice in John's Gospel* (SCM Press, 2020). Her book invites us 'to participate in finishing the works of God by hearing both the cry of the earth and the cry of the marginalized'. Rushton's invitation resonates strongly with the two themes in Raworth's doughnut.

That resonance does not surprise me. Kate

Raworth and Kathleen Rushton are both doing what Vatican II calls each of us to do - read the signs of the times. Both recognise the urgency of the climate crisis (the cry of the earth) and inescapable poverty (the cry of the poor).

### Conclusion

The Synod journey over the next three years is an opportunity for all Catholic faith communities to respond to these same signs.

My hope is that the Church, in this country and globally, will celebrate and embrace diversity over the next three years. May we all recognise the richness of acting in communion with all people working to promote the common good. May we all recognise the richness of opening up leadership to inclusive participation. May we all recognise the richness of encouraging everyone in the mission of evangelisation, especially by supporting those who commit themselves to what Sister Kath Rushton calls small consistent steps (*actio*) to finish the work of God by working for social and ecological justice.

Let the whole Church hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the marginalized.

*Paul Dalziel is professor of economics at Lincoln University and a long-time supporter of the Christchurch Catholic Worker.*

## Editorial Our Winter of Discontent

In the winter of 1981, forty years ago, New Zealand was embroiled in protest sparked by the arrival of a South African rugby team, selected on racially segregated grounds. For those who weren't there, it is almost impossible to envisage the outpouring of rage this selfish act by the NZ Rugby Union, backed by the Government, provoked among Kiwis, with two-thirds of the nation opposed to our welcoming a team selected on apartheid separation.

Mainstream churches, including the Catholic Church, were prominent in their opposition to the tour. For progressive Christians, this stance was merely what was demanded by an understanding of the gospel, that 'we love our neighbour' and 'stand with the poor', as Jesus did.

Within Catholicism, strong national and diocesan Justice and Peace Commissions led the way in helping people understand the notion of solidarity with dispossessed black South Africans whose skin colour made them ineligible to tour. Direct action to disrupt the tour occurred all over the motu. Our nation was morally challenged and divided as rarely before.

The tour thrust the social teachings of the Church into prominence and provided a theological backdrop to Christian social action. All around the country, people debated on moral grounds the pros and cons of involvement. What did our Christian faith mean if we couldn't stand in solidarity with the dispossessed, with those discriminated against on the basis of their race and colour? The debates were heartfelt. They divided families and communities. While it was a winter of discontent, as a nation we grew morally.

As the decade wore on, the awareness raised by issues over apartheid led to deeper reflection within Aotearoa about other social issues concerning our 'love of neighbour.' These included the threat of nuclear weapons, economic inequality, environmental destruction, gender disparity, global warming and racial discrimination. These issues have become even more stark with the passage of time as our fragile planet comes under siege from climate change, caused largely by human exploitation of resources.

—Jim Consedine

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# Thomas Merton on Peacemaking

Jim Forest

In 1961, Cistercian monk and writer Thomas Merton submitted his first article to *The Catholic Worker*. Its editor, Dorothy Day, was an outspoken pacifist who saw the works of war as being the polar opposite of the works of mercy. It was not, in her view, 'a coherent life to feed the hungry one day and drop bombs on them the next.'

In the piece Merton submitted, 'The Root of War is Fear,' he observed:

'On all sides we have people building bomb shelters where, in case of nuclear war, they will simply bake slowly instead of burning quickly or being blown out of existence in a flash. And they are prepared to sit in these shelters with machine guns with which to prevent their neighbour from entering. This in a nation that claims to be fighting for religious truth along with freedom and other values of the spirit. Truly we have entered the 'post-Christian era' with a vengeance. Whether we are destroyed or whether we survive, the future is awful to contemplate.

'It does not even seem to enter our minds that there might be some incongruity in praying to the God of peace, the God who told us to love one another as He had loved us, Who warned us that they who took the sword would perish by it, at the same time planning to annihilate not thousands but millions of civilians and soldiers, men, women and children without discrimination. ...It may make sense for a sick man to pray for health and then take medicine, but I fail to see any sense at all in his praying for health and then drinking poison.'

Merton went on sketch out a vision of how Christians should respond to the dangers facing us in the post-Hiroshima world:

'What are we to do? The duty of the Christian in this crisis is to strive with all his power and intelligence, with his faith, his hope in Christ, and love for God and man, to do the one task which God has imposed upon us in the world today. That task is to work for the total abolition of war.

'There can be no question that unless war is abolished the world will remain constantly in a state of madness and desperation in which, because of the immense destructive power of modern weapons, the

danger of catastrophe will be imminent and probable at every moment everywhere.

Unless we set ourselves immediately to this task, both as individuals and in our political and religious groups, we tend by our very passivity and fatalism to cooperate with the destructive forces that are leading inexorably to war. It is a problem of terrifying complexity and magnitude, for which the Church itself is not fully able to see clear and decisive solutions. Yet she must lead the way on the road to the nonviolent settlement of difficulties and toward the gradual abolition of war as the way of

settling international or civil disputes.

'Christians must become active in every possible way, mobilizing all their resources for the fight against war.'

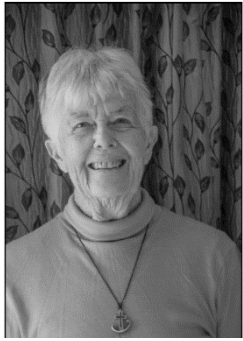
Merton took special aim at Adolf Eichmann, principal architect of the Jewish holocaust and the implications of running the death machine that thousands of bureaucrats served. In his book, *Raids on the Unspeakable*, noting psychiatrists had found Eichmann perfectly sane at his trial in Israel in 1961, Merton had this to say:

'The sanity of Eichmann is disturbing. We equate sanity with a sense of justice, with humaneness, with prudence, with the capacity to love and understand other people. We rely on the sane people of the world to preserve it from barbarism, madness, destruction. And now it begins to dawn on us that it is precisely the sane ones who are the most dangerous. It is the sane ones, the well-adapted ones, who can without qualms and without nausea aim the missiles and press the buttons that will initiate the great festival of destruction that they, the sane ones, have prepared. ...No one suspects the sane, and the sane ones will have perfectly good reasons, logical, well-adjusted reasons, for firing the shot. They will be obeying sane orders that have come sanely down the chain of command.'

Thomas Merton's warning about the dangers of war and the 'sane' leaders in charge of some nations, are as needed today as much as ever in our volatile world.



# Around the Traps



**# Retirement of Helen Goggin** – With thankful hearts we honour Sister Helen Goggin RSM who has retired as our ‘last set of eyes’ before printing *The Common Good*. Helen has reviewed every edition for us from Issue 1 in 1996 right through to Issue 97, checking for grammar, spelling mistakes and

misplaced apostrophes and commas, before we sent the final copy to the printers. She has always done this service with love and grace, showing great tolerance of our mistakes, showering us with affirmation as she went. Helen’s health has declined in recent months and, at 92, she has decided to retire her quill from this exacting task. We thank her with great appreciation and grateful hearts.

**# Death of Bishop John Osmer** – It was with great sadness that we learned that our friend, Christchurch-born Bishop John Osmer, had died from Covid-19 on Soweto Day, 16 June, in Zambia. John has been a regular guest at our Wednesday night liturgies in Christchurch for several years whenever home on his six-monthly visitations and staying with his family in New Brighton.

For decades, John was one of the great figures of the liberation struggles in Southern Africa and in later years he devoted his life to advocating justice for refugees. His last action was to deliver a letter personally to the President of Zambia on that issue, pleading for greater access for refugees. We feel very blessed to have had his friendship and support for so long. Rest in peace. Cf *Obituary p10; letters p11*.

**# The future of money** – The Reserve Bank has been gathering data on the future of cash and found a quarter of all bank branches closed between September 2019 and March 2021, going from 863 branches to 652. Of these, 355 were operating on reduced hours. The five major banks had also reduced ATM numbers, from 2,412 in 2019 to 2,231 in March 2021. The Reserve Bank survey showed most people see access to cash as a basic human right, a guarantor to personal autonomy and privacy, and vital to enable ‘vulnerable’ people to participate in their communities.

—*The Press*, 8 July 2021

**# Fake News on Vaccines** – Meet the ‘Disinformation Dozen’, the 12 US-based accounts identified by the Centre for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH), as being responsible for creating 65% of the vaccine misinformation shared on social media

platforms. A major reason is profit. The Disinformation Dozen could be worth up to US\$1.1 billion. No wonder Facebook and the other are reluctant to shut them down. They sell books and access to online material as well as so-called cures and treatments. The CCDH estimates the organisations belonging to the Disinformation Dozen have an annual revenue of at least US\$36 million.

—Dr Siouxsie Wiles, *The Press*, 5 July 2021

**# Israel receives US\$3.8 billion every year** from the US taxpayers in military ‘aid’ to oppress Palestinians. In just ten days in May 2021, Israel massacred over 220 Palestinians in Gaza, almost one-third of them children. In the West Bank, they have been shooting protestors with live ammunition. So why has President Biden just approved the ‘sale’ to Israel of US\$735 million more in precision guided weapons? It isn’t really a sale since Israel will be purchasing the weapons with the money the US gave them.

—*Code Pink*, 23 May 2021

**# Slaughter in Yemen** - The U.N. reports that by the end of last year 233,000 Yemenis have died from the war: 100,000 from military action and 133,000 from starvation, disease, and lack of basic infrastructure due to bombing and shelling. We don’t have the casualty numbers for the last five months, but they are enormous as starvation intensifies. Meanwhile U.S. corporations like Raytheon, Boeing and Lockheed have made billions of dollars by providing the bombs and other weapons to the Saudis.

— *UN Special Report*, June 2021

**# Palestinian homes demolished** – According to a UN Report in January 2021, the Israeli government has demolished the homes or properties of 7,563 Palestinian families since 2009, displacing an estimated 11,408 people. That includes 851 destroyed homes in 2020 - a 27% increase from 2019 - and 331 thus far in 2021. In November 2020, the United Nations issued a staunch condemnation after the Israeli government razed an entire Palestinian community, turning 76 structures into rubble and leaving 73 people - including 41 children - homeless.

It is hugely ironic that thousands of Jews in Israel are still getting reparations and passports from Germany because of expulsion, loss of property and persecution during the Holocaust in the 1930s-40s, yet Israel will not allow Palestinians to return to a land from which they were expelled to make way for Jewish settlers in modern times.

—*Truthout*, June 2021

## weeping for Gaza

seven years ago  
I was baby Rashid  
brown eyes, always smiling  
beautiful hair, black, curly  
bringing 'awes' and gasps  
to my crib under the stairs

yesterday my brain was splattered  
a rubber coated steel bullet  
fired by a soldier I never met  
for a reason I never knew  
ripped my eye from its socket  
blood flowing in streams  
seeping onto the concrete pavement  
where I played football with friends

today, strapped to a bier  
my mother, Leila, wailing pitifully  
my uncles, angry, crying  
carry me past the mosque  
where my father prays daily  
beyond the bombed-out classrooms  
where I loved to learn  
to burial

home to a thousand forebears  
ninety generations and counting  
Gaza, you have been here forever  
our families rooted in your soil  
growing olives, dates, almonds  
making love within your embrace

now hell erupts daily from the sky  
destroying apartments, hospitals, schools  
raining indiscriminate death  
on a frightened people

why?

*Written on 5th day of the 11-day war between Israel  
and Palestine, May 2021*

—Jim Consedine

## gazing into darkness

as fear stalks the streets  
violence rains down  
deadly confetti  
missiles designed to kill  
immoral, criminal, lethal  
elimination the game

armed militias unleashed  
Syria, Tigray, Yemen  
Damascus, Brazzaville, Kabul  
structured discrimination  
intractable issues  
racist, patriarchal, tribal, religious

yet where two or three gather  
birth the non-violent Word  
practice justice  
witness peace  
build community  
hope lives

guided by Presence  
illuminated by a billion stars  
darkness itself is not dark  
but light undercover

—Jim Consedine



Alberto Beltrán

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# Climate Crisis is also a Spiritual Crisis

Daniel P Horan OFM



What Pope Francis describes in *Laudato Si'* as ‘**the indifference**’ millions of men and women display toward climate change in general and its disastrous consequences for our fellow human beings, is at its core a

spiritual crisis.

I believe that which makes global climate change a spiritual crisis for many is reflected in at least **three major failures** that Christians and many people of goodwill demonstrate.

**First** is the failure to recognize our inherent interconnectedness. Francis talks in terms of the phrase *integral ecology*, which is the idea that ‘everything is connected.’ This pertains as much to the nonhuman world as it does to the human world in the age of globalization.

The fact that so many people have been suffering on a scale that is unimaginable for most affluent citizens of the world, yet little or nothing is done, and most people do not care, represents a clear failure. Francis says in *Laudato Si'*: ‘We need to strengthen the conviction that we are one single human family. There are no frontiers or barriers, political or social, behind which we can hide, still less is there room for the globalization of indifference.’

In the face of massive humanitarian crises, wealthy nations are putting up ever greater ‘frontiers and barriers’ to our sisters and brothers who are dying. The fact that so many self-identified churchgoers can continue to think of themselves as faithful Christians while displaying such insidious indifference is indeed a spiritual crisis.

**The second failure** follows from this indifference. It is the individual and collective inaction, which includes a failure to embrace what the Pope calls the necessary ‘ecological conversion’ required for us to begin seeing the world in a new way. Most of the affluent world can’t bring itself to even muster the energy to care. And this is indicative of a spiritual crisis because it is inherently sinful.

## Ecological sin

I am reminded of what the Boston College theological ethicist Jesuit Fr. James Keenan said in his book *Moral Wisdom: Lessons and Texts from the Christian Tradition* about the core definition of

sin. He wrote that sin is ‘the failure to bother to love’ our sisters and brothers. He explains, ‘Our sin is usually not in what we did, not in what we could not avoid, not in what we tried not to do. Our sin is usually where you and I are comfortable, where we do not feel the need to bother.’

According to Keenan, sin has a lot to do with operating from a place of strength and comfort, which leads to complacency. In the context of global climate change, there are no more strong, comfortable and complacent people than the globally affluent who only now seem to be experiencing the first tastes of our failure to bother to love one another and the planet. Sin calls for repentance and conversion. Ecological sin calls for the same, which is needed now more than ever.

**The third failure** is the narrowness of most people’s conception of what should be included in prayer. The evil of global climate change and the suffering of so many will not change merely by our prayer alone. But it is important to recognize that prayer is key to conversion and living out our Christian vocation. One way that climate crisis is a spiritual crisis is that many Christians compartmentalize their relationship with God from their relationship to the natural world.

This sort of artificial separation, one that might be motivated by a distorted view that the ‘sacred’ is different from the ‘secular,’ or the ‘supernatural’ from the ‘natural,’ leads many to exclude serious spiritual reflection on the interconnectedness of the ‘cry of the earth’ and the ‘cry of the poor.’

## Our obligations

As things continue to get worse, human and nonhuman lives continue to be threatened and killed, and decisions have to be made by individuals and communities alike, we cannot afford to ignore the spiritual dimension of the climate crisis in our midst. Indeed, as Francis regularly reminds us, *everything is connected*, and that includes not only the vast community of creation of which you and I are a part, but it also includes what we bring to prayer and what flows from it in terms of action.

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# Honouring the Prophets

## Joan Baez – prophetic voice of song

Jim Consedine

In May this year, the music world was all agog celebrating the 80th birthday of Nobel Prize-winning singer and poet Bob Dylan. The music and comment went on for a week or more. It may well have been richly deserved. Bob will certainly be remembered as a gifted singer and poet, an enigmatic personality and a phenomenon of our time in the music world.

Four months earlier, another important singer's 80th birthday had passed virtually unnoticed. On 9th January 2021, Joan Baez turned 80.

Both being the same age and having similar folk-singing roots, it is hard not to compare the two. But there is nothing enigmatic about Joan Baez. You get what you see and hear — which is a rich voice, a deep commitment to the underdog, the peace movement, the marginalised, the immigrant and a phenomenal 60-plus years of public performance of folk singing, country, gospel and folk-rock music.

But while I love her singing, it is her values and commitment to social justice that marks her out singularly as someone both deeply spiritual and prophetic. From this perspective arguably she stands head and shoulders above every other singer of her generation.

Her style is simplicity personified, and she has taken it to nearly every country in the world. I had the pleasure of hearing her perform in both Dublin (25 years ago) and Christchurch last year. Without fanfare, she walks onto the stage, guitar slung over her tiny shoulders, and starts to sing. Within seconds, she has the audience in her hands. Gradually her band materialize behind her and she proceeds through her repertoire of love ballads, protest songs, gospel melodies, indigenous songs (including Māori) with the odd semi-rock numbers thrown in. She is nothing if not versatile.

At the interval, the band go for a break, but Joan stays onstage, perched on a stool, chatting to the audience about politics, morality, and world events, before resuming for the second half of her concert when the band returns suitable refreshed.



### Prophetic voice

More than anything, it is Joan's consistent commitment to social justice that singles her out as a prophetic voice for over half a century. She has an acute political and social understanding and a spirituality nourished by her pacifist Quaker roots and her father's Mexican immigrant background. Recognising that she had been given a beautiful gift

by God, she has never taken her voice for granted and has always felt that she should use it whenever it was needed.

Use it she does. And she is still performing. For six decades, she has stood in the front lines of many justice movements around the world and particularly the US, freely lending her voice to sing out about the poor, the marginalised, prisoners, native Americans, the unemployed, the homeless, war victims, those without a voice of their own. Among many others, decades ago she marched with Martin Luther King Jr in Mississippi, farmworker organiser Cesar Chavez in California, civil rights advocate Mairead Corrigan in Belfast, and Lech Walesa in Poland. She marched and she sang.

Her trademark songs highlight injustice to workers, immigrants, victims of poverty, and people of colour, and they promote peace in the face of war and violence. She started singing them at the Newport Folk Festival in 1959, and some remain part of her standard programme 62 years later.

Joan Baez has a heart for justice. It is a huge spiritual gift. She has a deep empathy for the needy and an abiding passion for justice, nonviolence and peace-making. Through the years, her heart has expanded so much through the love she feels for the people 'who have no voice'. In the madness of our all-pervasive consumer culture, she stands out as a holy and prophetic voice in our time.

Despite being 80 years old, may she remain, 'forever young'.



# Obituary Bishop John Robert Osmers (1935-2021)

The mission of Jesus in Luke's gospel for today (Lk 4/16-21) set the tone for the life of Christchurch-born Bishop John Osmers. Whatever else John was, he was a man of huge belief in the mission of Jesus, 'to spread good news to the poor, liberty to captives, sight for the blind, free the oppressed'.

For John, God wasn't simply a dogma to be believed or not. God was an everyday reality and experience, a source of spiritual nourishment he turned to daily in prayer and Eucharist as if at a breakfast table where, wherever possible, he loved to dine with others.

The mission Jesus took on in Luke became John's mission. Nothing John did in his long and fruitful life did he do alone. John saw himself as a face of Christ's love, compassion, mercy, and justice in the world and lived accordingly. Like St Paul, he often faced peril and hardship. Such was his faith.

John was a prophet and always had a heart for justice. For him, justice and love were two sides of the one divine coin, together forming the creative essence of God, the Great Spirit of love and of life. His Christian faith was at the root of all that he believed and did. It provided him with a vision of what might be if justice was delivered and peace reigned in the hearts of people.

John's life's work of more than 60 years was with the poor and dispossessed in Southern Africa – South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana and Zambia. His heart expanded with the passing of time and grew to such an extent that it would embrace not only Africans marginalised through colonisation and apartheid, but also the vast numbers of refugees and the poor excluded from a reasonable life. John had identified rampant capitalism as a root cause of poverty and discrimination long ago and saw it as a sinful and oppressive economic system, a festering sore creating and fuelling the racism he fought against all his life.

People of faith see it as no coincidence that John died on 16th June, the 45th anniversary of the Soweto uprising, commemorating the day which in 1976 began the unravelling of the apartheid regime. John was involved with many of the refugees who fled to Lesotho from the violence that erupted in South Africa. He died also on the eve of World Refugee Day. Again, no coincidence.

John's theology was liberation theology whereby

he identified, as did the people at the time of Moses, with the desire for freedom from slavery and a better life. He had the ability not just to learn about liberation and freedom but to put it into practice. For this he paid a huge price over time, including frequent assassination threats and a parcel bomb attack in 1979 that severed his hand and nearly killed him. But like St Paul, he was never deterred.



Jim Consedine and John Osmers

On a personal note, I first met John 40 years ago when he returned to New Zealand to help lead the protests against the

pending arrival in July 1981 of the nearly all-white Springbok rugby team. He spoke at anti-tour meetings and rallies up and down the country and made a huge contribution towards public awareness of the evil that was apartheid. He was a powerful speaker, waving his shorn-off arm around to illustrate his points and speaking with passion and integrity from experience.

At the time, I was a chaplain at Addington Remand Prison and twice took John in to meet the inmates and share ideas about the pending tour. The inmates thought he was fantastic!

Despite being an amazing Christian leader, a giant of the spiritual life, a legend in Southern Africa, a towering figure for social justice internationally, John was a very humble man and was happy to simply be part of local communities in Christchurch on his return visits.

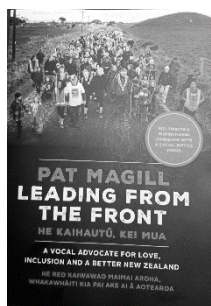
His connection with the Anglican churches of St Faith's and St Luke's in Brighton and his regular Wednesday night visits over several years to the Catholic Worker in Addington were important to him and to us. At the CW, John would arrive, take his place, add a comment or prayer when appropriate. Afterwards, he would adjourn to the dining room where he would consume gallons of Tony's soup before starting on his veggies and dessert! We loved him and were delighted to claim him as a member.

Few people in our time have lived today's gospel on the mission of Jesus 'to stand with the poor and free the oppressed' as well as John Osmers.

Well done, good and faithful servant. May you rest in peace.

*This is an abridged version of the homily Jim Consedine preached in the Christchurch Transitional Cathedral at John's memorial service. John died of Covid-19 in Zambia and was cremated there.*

# Book Reviews



**Pat Magill – *Leading from the Front*. Edited by Jess Magill, 282 pages, 300+ illustrations. Published 2021. Reviewer: Jim Consedine**

There are biographies and there are biographies. And then there is *Pat Magill – Leading from the Front*. Beautifully produced by his whānau

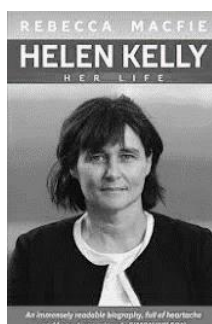
and edited by his daughter Jess, this is one remarkable story. Drawing on a range of more than 20 friends sharing their reflections, it traces the amazing life of Napier's Pat Magill, one of New Zealand's most colourful, socially-conscious and thoroughly decent characters, and it provides a smorgasbord of insights into his life.

If anyone needed a quick summary of Pat Magill's thinking, they need only to look at the billboard on his front lawn – 'Build Community, not Prisons'. Pat is quite the most remarkable nonagenarian you are ever likely to meet. A social activist most his life spent mainly in the Hawkes Bay, in his nineties he is still active in community activities. Pat has been bicultural before the word was invented and committed to the Treaty of Waitangi since long before it became government policy. In fact, he has played a significant role in making the treaty mainstream in our nation's journey.

A weighty tome (1.5 kg), this most beautifully presented book covers the life and times of a man committed to our fragile planet, transformative justice, the poor and marginalised, *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* and the good of his neighbour. Pat is variously described as unique, fantastic, an inspiration, a driving force and in about a hundred other positive ways by the various contributors. He has influenced so many it is hard to know where to start. Many have placed their appreciation of him between the covers of this remarkable testimony.

Pat's daughter Jess Magill is to be commended for doing the impossible and pulling all the threads of Pat's life together in a very accessible way in this coffee table book, which should win awards for its production and content.

For purchase - deposit \$37 into account J. Magill 060293 0001137 02, using your initials and surname as reference. Then email [Jess.magill@gmail.com](mailto:Jess.magill@gmail.com) for prompt despatch of a copy.



**Helen Kelly – *Her Life*, by Rebecca Macfie, Awa Press, Wellington, 2021, 410 pages. Price: \$49.99. Reviewer: Eileen Brown**

Rebecca Macfie's goal in writing this book was to write a story that was readable, accurate and accessible. Macfie has more than met this goal.

She has pulled together the strands of Helen Kelly's life to produce not only a riveting biography but a detailed account of New Zealand's trade union history from the 1970s to 2018.

Macfie provides a background and account of the context and the political climate that led to the weakened state of New Zealand unionism when Helen Kelly became NZCTU president in 2007. Major disputes while Helen was CTU president are detailed succinctly: the Auckland Port Workers, the Affco Meat Workers lockout, and the notorious Hobbit dispute, among others. Macfie emphasises how Helen Kelly advocated for unions to speak for all workers, not just union members, and describes the change in unions that Helen viewed as necessary.

From the disputes and Helen's relentless mahi, we get a clear picture of her courage and her vision. Her advocacy for a young Sikh worker, Charanpreet Dhaliwal, who was killed less than five hours after starting on his first night of work on an isolated site, shows Helen's fierce determination and her relentless quest for justice for working people.

Helen Kelly's strong personal qualities come through continuously in the book, showing her natural and exceptional leadership abilities. All this is amplified by quotes that are woven throughout the text from the more than 200 people that Macfie interviewed and who tell the story of the Helen they knew, her values and qualities.

The values that Helen Kelly lived by resonate deeply with the Catholic Worker Movement – values of justice, solidarity, collectivism. Manaakitanga was central to her as she shared her life, her family, her time, and her home to support those struggling with injustice, fighting with them and for them.

This book contains so much more including the tragedy of Helen's illness and early death at just 51 years of age. But it is hope-filled book too, the story of a remarkable person and leader. Read it. It will enthral and inspire you.

—Eileen Brown is a trade unionist, former YCW leader and ally of the Catholic Worker.

# Letters

Institute for the Healing of Memories,  
Cape Town  
20 June 2021

Dear John Osmer,

It is just a few days since you left us to join the ancestors. To me you were always an older brother...as we often say in our part of the world, a brother from another mother. When we first met, you were already the priest at Masite parish in Lesotho and beginning to receive the Soweto generation of young people fleeing apartheid violence. When I was expelled from South Africa as part of the class of 1976, you were there to meet me.

We were kindred spirits, both of us New Zealand born, both Anglican priests, both members of the ANC with a lifelong commitment to South Africa's liberation struggle and to the welfare and rights of refugees everywhere. Both of us survivors of attempted assassination.

I only discovered since your passing, that like me, your conviction that apartheid was evil and should be ended, came from reading Trevor Huddleston's *Naught For Your Comfort*. Our voices were important also for the anti-apartheid struggle in New Zealand, as two Kiwis immersed in Black communities in Southern Africa.

All of us were in awe of how you responded when you were grievously injured by the parcel bomb attack in 1979. Your indomitable spirit and even humour, in the face of that act of state terror, inspired and gave courage to many.

Throughout your ministry, you have embodied the relationship between faith, compassion, kindness, and transformative justice. Across Southern Africa, you were a comforter, a confidant and an advocate for countless freedom fighters and refugees.

When you had to leave Botswana under further threat of assassination, I was honoured to receive you in Zimbabwe. You never wavered in your belief in the justice of our cause as something noble and godly. Your ministry from Lesotho to Botswana to Zambia touched the lives of thousands, inside and outside the Church. Indeed, all those who love peace and justice were your companions.

Even as we considered you to be part of our families, we have rejoiced that your birth family, Elizabeth and Derry, John, Susannah, Margaret and Charlotte and their children, were by your side in every way possible, over the decades

Even blindness did not deter you from your

advocacy and support for Rwandese refugees in Zambia. Only John Osmer could commute between Christchurch and Lusaka not for selfish ends, but to get the resources to support and educate your extended Rwandese family.

My dear John, your life is both an inspiration and challenge to each of us to continue as you did, until God says our time is up.

We consider you to be a hero. We wish more bishops and leaders of faith communities were like you. Across the world, we will tell Father John Osmer stories even as we carry you in our hearts.

Rest well, good and faithful servant. Your work is over, your battle won.

*Michael Lapsley SSM*

*NZ-born Rev Michael Lapsley SSM was also a victim of an apartheid bomb attack.*

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PO Box 5279  
Terrace End,  
Palmerston North 4441

Greetings Jim.

You and your team do a great job in publishing *The Common Good*, but I am risk of not receiving it unless you change the postal address to the above. Congrats also on your address to the Vincentians.

Kind regards

*+ Peter Cullinane*

Bishop Emeritus  
Palmerston North

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2349C Palolo Ave  
Honolulu, HI 96816

Aloha Jim,

I really enjoy *The Common Good* in my email box, but still prefer the hard copy. I'm 'old school' as you can see. I loved the 'Herod' headline in the CG96 issue, along with the letter from good friend Jim Albertini. We are anxiously awaiting the arrival of a young couple from California, both with CW experience. They will spend three months as residents at our house. Youthful energy is badly needed, as us old folks struggle along.

Our best to you and your Worker community.

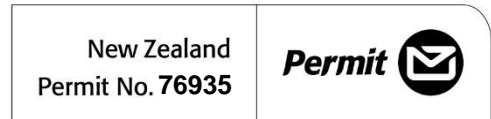
Peace,

*Wally Inglis*

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**The Common Good**

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



**Remembering Hiroshima and Nagasaki**

*The taproot of violence in our society today is our intent to use nuclear weapons. Once we have agreed to that, all other evil is minor in comparison. Until we squarely face the question of our consent to use nuclear weapons, any hope of large-scale improvement of public morality is doomed to failure.*

—Richard T. McSorley, SJ