

WORD & WORSHIP

SERIES 19: 4 (Spring 2021)

<i>Editorial: Balancing Act</i>	John Meredith	2
<i>The Bible in translation</i>	John Barton	3
<i>Creation</i>	Ian Harris	4
<i>The Bible in preaching</i>	Keith Rowe	7
<i>Episodes in Christian History: Suzanne Aubert</i>	Ken Booth	12
<i>In the quiet of this day</i>	Colin Gibson	15
<i>Chapter 3 verse 16</i>	Peter Taylor	17
<i>Book reviews</i>	John Meredith	
<i>A Book of Blessings – Glynn Cardy</i>		18
<i>The Farewelling of a Home - Jane Simpson</i>		19
<i>Hand in Hand – Ian Harris</i>		20
<i>God of the galaxies</i>	Beverley Smith	22
<i>No darkness at all?</i>	Steve Thorngate	23
<i>In memoriam: Norman Goreham and John Rolston</i>		25
<i>Tributes to long-serving lay preachers</i>		27

Cover image: Balancing Act
Sculpture by Daniel Clifford
Photography: Jillian Meredith

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BALANCING ACT

Earlier this year we were in Whanganui where our attention was caught by a sculpture beside the river. Consisting of three larger-than-life pencils, two of which appear to balance on their sharpened points, the sculpture, shown on the front of this issue, is named *Balancing Act*. Crafted by Daniel Clifford, *Balancing Act* won first place in the inaugural Sculpture Whanganui 2010 event.

Balancing Act was inspired by the Staedtler pencils Clifford used during his studies in fine arts. Not visible in the cover image, words in te reo (*kōrero o mua*) draw attention to the stories of the ancestors. In Māori culture these stories are passed on in oral form while Pākehā tend to write their stories down. For cross-cultural learning there must be willingness to balance the insight of stories that come in oral and written form.

Speaking of Māori culture, Francis Tipene of *The Casketeers* has said that te reo is a poetic language and is meant to be heard. When you write something down you tend to think it is fixed. Te reo, he says, was never meant to be left lying on the page.

Much of the Bible as we have it circulated in oral tradition long before any written record was made. The word of God is not imprisoned in a book and for anyone to declare 'The Bible says', especially if relying on a specific translation, and expecting this to end all argument is really to place a gag on God. Like te reo the words of the Bible were never meant to be forever confined to the written text.

The words of the Bible were written by people using the language and concepts with which they were familiar. For readers of languages other than the original Hebrew and Greek these words and concepts have been translated from original manuscripts. Different translators have found different shades of meaning in them. The task of the preacher is to interpret the words and concepts in the biblical text in ways that speak to people in the context of the life they live. If unable to read the original languages a preacher is wise to consult a number of different translations.

Biblical scholar David Clines has said that without a reader or a hearer there is not a lot of meaning in any biblical text. It might also be said there is not a lot of meaning in a homily or sermon that relies on quoting the Bible or writers of books or internet posts and fails to take

fire within the experience of the preacher. No preacher can expect to stir a congregation to think or act in fresh ways who has not first wrestled with the text and thought about what the written words may mean outside the study and in terms of the life that passes in the street outside the church door.

Each issue of *Word & Worship* contains articles on different subjects by different writers. As the *Season of Creation* will be observed in many congregations in September articles on creation and the Bible in preaching remind preachers that biblical imagery must always be interpreted in ways that relate to the 21st century world. Balancing ancient insights with contemporary experience and stirring congregations to ask questions is the task preachers face every week.

THE BIBLE IN TRANSLATION

Almost all Christians, and many Jews, encounter the Bible only in translation. Some translations have the aim of preserving the tradition of earlier English versions ... Others set themselves the task of surprising readers and encouraging them to put themselves in the position of those hearing the word for the first time.

There can be a valid role for both approaches. But in neither case can the reader afford to become fixated on one particular version as though it somehow preserved God's word in a definitive form ... We do not possess any text as it left the hands of its original author ... The apparent fixity and permanence of the Bible as it shines out from a solid printed translation conceals an enormous amount of diversity and uncertainty that confronts anyone who peeps behind the scenes ... Knowing something of how we got our English Bibles makes it hard to respond in a fundamentalist way to the exact wording that confronts us when we open them. We should always beware of quoting the Bible to clinch an argument. We have no way of knowing exactly what was written or exactly what the writer intended to convey.

- John Barton: *The Bible. The Basics*

Reading scripture is a form of art, a creative discipline that requires engagement and imagination. It is difficult to do this well unless we attend to what we read and what we hear. — Ellen Davis & Richard Hays.

CREATION

Ian Harris

We shall marvel at the formation of planet Earth and the evolution of human life – an amazing journey from ‘a speck of organic corruption’ to creatures who ‘live in moral consequence, caught up in a process of constant remaking.’

So begins *Our Universe: Ourselves*, an Ephesus liturgy on the wonder of creation. Set firmly in the world as we know it today, it draws on the new story of our origins, which should be seen as the gift of science to the church.

A church in tune with its times would embrace this new knowledge and welcome it into its worship, just as 3000 years ago Jewish worshippers drew the understanding of the day into their creation stories. And if they could do that, so can we. Healthy religion is always caught up in that ‘process of constant remaking’. Unhealthy religion shies away from it.

One clear example of such avoidance is the \$40 million Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky. Opened in 2007, the museum was designed to prove that the Bible’s account of the creation of the world in six days is literally true – it is science – and it happened about 6000 years ago.

How can the museum’s founders be so sure? Simple: if it’s in the Bible it must be true – geologically, biologically, anthropologically, cosmologically and however else.

Emphatically not! It is a gross misuse of the Bible to treat it as a textbook for science. What is in the Bible is there for good reason, but using pre-scientific religious texts in a bid to disprove what scientists have discovered about our world in the past 500 years is not only rotten science, it is rotten religion. A closer look at the story of creation will show why.

The opening chapter of Genesis is not a story but a poem. It came out of a particular period of Jewish history and had a purpose a world away from scientific observation and assertion. (I shall leave aside a second, quite different account of creation in the Garden of Eden story that follows the poem.) The creation poem comes out of a traumatic experience in Jewish history, the 49-year exile in Babylon. In 587 BC the

Babylonian army had swept out of what is now Iraq and crushed the Jewish tribes of southern Palestine. The troops sacked Jerusalem, laid waste the temple that was the centre of Jewish religious practice and marched the king and thousands of leading citizens off into exile in Babylon.

In the manner of the day, the defeat of the Jews was also touted as a victory of Babylon's gods over the Jewish God. The humiliation was complete.

So by the waters of Babylon the exiles faced up to their plight. Hurt and disoriented, they grieved, wept, raged – and quarried deep in their tribal memory to sow the seeds of hope. The challenge was to maintain their identity as a people and their faith.

American biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann tells how the Jews responded by keeping alive their religious heritage and imagining a future beyond their present despair. No temple for the priests to carry out their ritual sacrifices? Right, the people would meet without either, and so the synagogue came into being. Social cohesion fraying under the pressures of living in a foreign land? Right, their leaders would cultivate a vision of a society of neighbourly concern. Despondency that their God had not saved them from the destruction of their national life? Right, let them sing a song of hope.

The first chapter of Genesis is that song. Despite the shattering of everything they held dear, it affirms the goodness of an ordered world blessed by a God who on the first day brought forth light from a dark void, and it was good; on the second day the sky from a watery waste, and it was good; on the third day dry land from the oceans and vegetation to clothe it, and it was good; on the fourth day the sun, moon and stars, and it was good; on the fifth day sea life and birds, and it was good; and on the sixth day animals and the first humans, male and female together, and it was good. This is not science, but a declaration of confidence in the God of their forebears and of hope that all would yet be well.

The climax comes with the seventh day when God is said to have rested and made the day holy. So, say the priestly authors, should the people. And when, long after the Exile, the editors of the Hebrew scriptures wove the varying strands of Genesis into the book's final shape they placed this poem ahead of a much older creation myth whose purpose is quite different. The poem is there to assure the Jews that they are not

cogs in anyone's imperial machine and need not wallow in despair: they are creatures made in God's image and destined for dignity.

So how today, and in that spirit, do we dovetail the factual world of modern science with the poetic, imaginative world of religion to the enrichment of both? Two sentences from the Ephesus liturgy pose the right questions and two hymns by Colin Gibson used in the liturgy offer a communal way in towards the answer.

The questions:

Dare we hope the theologians might emancipate themselves, so as to articulate or perceive another possibility for us in our quest for the sacred? Not just a new chapter, but a new story?

The hymns:

*For the blast of creation, flinging far into space
on the winds of the cosmos all the gifts of your grace,
we bring awe, we bring wonder, though darkly we see,
and we praise you who gave us our freedom to be.*

And:

*I take my share in the act of creation,
finding new wonders, new worlds to explore,
faith's evolution, hope's resolution,
loving in tune with the music of God.*

- *Our Universe: Ourselves* is published in *The Ephesus Liturgies, Volume II*. The quotation on page 4 above is from the novel *City of God*, by E L Doctorow.
- The hymn verses are from *For the blast of creation, and I am a part of the pulse of creation*, by Colin Gibson. Published on line by Hope Publishing 2013, Carol Stream, Illinois.

Every aspect of goodness, justice, joy and kindness
is a sign of God's presence in creation, of God's mission, of God's dream
for a healthy world. – Ann Gilroy.

The Season of Creation calls us to care for this planet in ways that honour the dignity of each creature and conserve the place of each in the abundance of life on Earth. This is an important theme to develop in preaching.

THE BIBLE IN PREACHING

Keith Rowe

Bible and preaching belong together. The Bible, in all its diversity, provides insights into living within the purposes of God that continue to resonate within the minds, imaginations and wills of those who seek to live within the God-pathway. Preaching is the attempt by a fallible yet diligent pilgrim to assist the People of God to walk within and to serve the purposes of God in the time and place where they live. The Bible was originally preaching, poetry and story intended to assist the people of God to walk within and to serve the purposes of God in their time and it is best read by people in later ages who are also seeking to be servants of the same journey into God-truth and God-love in their time. Without a contemporary preacher the Bible becomes an interesting cultural artefact from long ago. Without the Bible the preacher is robbed of vital insight and wisdom bequeathed to humanity from those who sought to live within the purposes of God as revealed to them as followers of the pathway of Moses and in the way pioneered by Jesus. Bible and preacher-interpreter belong together.

The Bible is such a diverse collection of books, stories, poems, myths, history, that it would be easier to write a series of articles on topics like: preaching from the book of Genesis or from the prophets, preaching from the parables or deeds of Jesus or the letters of Paul etc. That would be an acknowledgement of the rich variety of writing and backgrounds held within the Bible – each one requiring different modes of interpretation and matching styles of preaching. But perhaps there is value in making some general comments on Bible and the preaching task.

The Bible comes alive

When I prepare for preaching I imagine the congregation handing me the Bible, probably but not necessarily, open at the lectionary readings for the day and inviting me to explore and enliven the words that are read and to make their wisdom available for life in the twenty-first century. The Bible is the memory of the church without which it loses its way but memory must be released from the past and allowed to shine its light on our day and our lives. We give the Bible a privileged place in the life of the church even though it was written by fragile humans. Nonetheless, they lived deeply within the mystery of God and dared to

share their discoveries. Initially we value the Bible because we have been told, and are finding for ourselves, that these words, sensitively and thoughtfully explored, have a capacity to come alive in fresh and direction-finding ways. The Bible doesn't provide us with a simple answer to every ethical, social or spiritual question but experience demonstrates that it points us to where life-giving guidance may be found. For Christians the way of Jesus provides a starting point for our exploration of life's conundrums. The Gospels don't provide ready-made or simple answers to twenty-first century questions and issues but through the words and deeds of Jesus they provide starting points for those who seek to live within the spirit of Jesus in a later age.

When the biblical books are described as being 'inspired' this has nothing to do with infallibility or the Bible being without scientific, ethical or historical error. Such views are a relatively recent and damaging perversion of the Church's respect for the Bible. The Bible is 'inspired' in that when read thoughtfully with openness and imagination it continues to breathe life and spirit into the church and through the church into the community.

The Bible may be described as a classic collection of documents. A classic text is one that has the capacity to come alive in new settings, surprising readers with insight they would not have discerned without the text. As interpreters of the Bible on behalf of the gathered congregation preachers need to learn where and how biblical story may become our story, how we may provide the conditions under which biblical wisdom may come alive in transforming and enriching ways.

Challenging the predictability of preaching

One of the problems preachers face is that preaching has become so predictable. Read the gospel lesson and most hearers can predict the sermon that will follow. Read the Parable of the Good Samaritan and the sermon is likely to be a generalised encouragement to hearers to be good neighbours or to care for the needy. It's worth saying but it's banal and predictable. The parable will only come alive if preachers explore why it's so hard to love our neighbours or how we help the needy without belittling them or how 'neighbour' is an expanding term – including all races, all religions and a variety of sexual orientations – or how we permit others to minister to us as did the man in the ditch etc. The trick is to move beyond the obvious and allow the text to touch and be touched by our questions, our challenges, the uncertainties of our

age. As preachers we need to 'dwell' in the Bible, allowing its wisdom to seep into our very being, its pathway into life becoming our pathway, the way of life explored by Jesus becoming our way of life. Along with this we need also to 'dwell' deeply in our world, ever growing in our understanding of the pressures and possibilities faced by ordinary people, the power of economic, political, religious and social systems to hinder our pursuit of the purposes of God made known in Jesus, ever sensitive to the questions and struggles, griefs and glitches we carry within ourselves. So the preacher facilitates a conversation between the 'then' of the biblical worlds and the 'now' of our world. In so doing we provide the conditions within which 'god-word' can happen, biblical words catch fire, transforming possibility is named and spiritual energy generated.

Asking questions of the biblical text

Reading the Bible is about the asking and the answering of questions. The late Paul Ricoeur, a Christian Bible reader and philosopher of remarkable insight, described three steps in reading a Biblical text. We begin with what he called a ***first naivete*** –a superficial, naive and perhaps literal reading of the words. We revere the text because it is the Bible and simply repeat its words as though the meaning is obvious to people of our time and place. Some people stop here and that's a great shame. Beyond this first step is an important movement into critical questioning of the text (Ricoeur calls it ***critical consciousness***). We ask what did these words mean to the author, why was this story/ parable/ ethical code treasured and preserved and revisited by those who first heard it, what was the question that prompted these words, what do the 'big' or puzzling words in the text mean.... and much more. They are questions asked by scholars and by preachers alike. Ricoeur asserts and preaching experience confirms that this sort of critical enquiry is an essential part of understanding the meaning of any biblical text. We question the biblical text as though we are asking a half-known friend: who are you, what do you mean, why this word, who first heard and treasured you, why this and when that. We are like Jacob wrestling with God at the ford Jabbok (Gen 32:22ff).

Now, it is possible to get so excited by our questioning of the book that we get stuck at this stage and fail to move into the vital though frequently overlooked third step in our reading of the Bible. This is the step when we cease being the questioners and allow ourselves to be questioned by the text. Ricoeur calls this step ***the second or informed***

naivete. In the second step we hold the text at arm's length so we may walk around it, explore and question it, perhaps doubt its first (or earlier) century presuppositions, put it firmly in its original setting. Now we come closer to the text and allow the text to question us: who are you? Where do you live? What challenges, failures, possibilities surround you? What might it mean for you to live within the purposes of God as described in this text? How might the wisdom and God-truth in this text come alive in you and in the community of faith that has called you to preach? **Our interpretation of a text is complete only when we allow the text to interpret us.** This doesn't mean we agree with the text. Because we read in the Book of Joshua that God commanded the Israelites to engage in genocide and to steal the land of those already living in Palestine we don't conclude that we should engage in similar activity. So the text in Joshua becomes an example of how humanity then and now perverts the purposes of God to serve our own national or economic interests. Like Jacob at Jabbok we are asked 'What is your name?' and by implication 'What do you live for, what do you hope for and where are you going?'

Preachers as readers

The Basis for Union of the Uniting Church in Australia affirms the vital role of biblical scholars and theologians in the life of the church. I wish New Zealand churches and all preachers affirmed something similar. John Wesley described himself as a man of one book but he also encouraged his preachers to read widely. When a preacher declared he was not interested in reading Wesley suggested he cease preaching and return to his former occupation. There are some excellent scholarly aids that can provide helpful background for lay preachers. Two that are readily available are *The Harper Collins Bible Commentary* and *The Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*. The books of Walter Brueggemann provide wonderful and accessible doorways into understanding the Hebrew Bible (OT). Begin with *The Prophetic Imagination* and *The Bible Makes Sense* and move onto his *Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* co-authored with Birch, Fretheim and Petersen. For the New Testament Marcus Borg is a sensitive and thoughtful guide. Start with his *Meeting Jesus for the First Time* or *Jesus, A New Vision*.

Interpreting life experience

If you are a lay preacher never despise your experience in the workplace

or in the wider community when you come to the preaching task. You bring something unique that can help bring the text alive as you enter into conversation with the biblical words from where you live and work. Your life is a sort of acted out commentary of the gospel in conversation with the world where you live. If the starting point for biblical preaching for clergy may often be the original meaning and setting of the text, the usual starting point for lay preachers may well be life experience. In my experience good lay preachers supplement the ongoing preaching/teaching of the clergy.

When Jesus visited Nazareth (Luke 4: 16ff) the leader of the synagogue handed him a scroll to read from and to comment on the reading for the day from the book of Isaiah. If Jesus gave a scholarly discourse on the background to the passage that is well forgotten. Luke rather dramatically recalls that Jesus shared what the passage meant for his day and his hearers, his nation, his community of faith. The passage from Isaiah was let loose from its time and place of origin and allowed to come alive in a new and surprising way. There was more meaning in the words of Isaiah than even Isaiah or his editors imagined. Ancient words caught fire and faith was evoked anew. That's enough from me. Perhaps it's enough to set you thinking and reflecting on how you interact with the biblical text as preacher, as Christian and as citizen.

My experience of scripture is that it skews toward the lively when approached with curiosity and veers toward deadness when approached with certainty. In preaching, encountering people who've heard it all before, it's my hope that sharing a living word, engaging it (and them) with curiosity may help people to experience the word's vitality, to catch a bit of the spirit that would have them not marvelling at the teaching but rather asking with the good folk of Capernaum, 'What is this?' (see Mark 1:27) and having their questions carry them into the week that follows.

- Brian Maas, Lutheran Bishop

It is sometimes assumed that to take the Bible seriously means that we must believe everything in it. But there are few other pieces of literature we treat in such an all-or-nothing way. No other book is expected to be completely perfect or totally worthless. One way to loosen up attitudes to scripture is to remind ourselves that very large parts of it resist being read as either factual information or doctrine. The Bible is an invitation to curiosity and exploration. If we ignore claims and counter-claims about the Bible's truth, and if we are willing to read with an open mind, we may be in for some surprises.

- John Barton

EPISODES IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY - 6 SUZANNE AUBERT

Ken Booth

This is the final in an occasional series that looks at six periods, focused on a key figure in each of them: Constantine, Clare of Assisi, Richard Hooker, Josephine Butler, Maximilian Kolbe and Suzanne Aubert. Although not live dialogues it is hoped that these episodes will be interactive in your mind as you reflect on where we are now and what was going on then.

When Mother Marie-Joseph (Suzanne Aubert) died in Wellington in May 1926 at the age of 91, it was said that her funeral was the largest ever seen for a woman in New Zealand. This was a tribute to her indefatigable work in Wellington since 1899 and for years before that up the Whanganui River and in Hawke's Bay.

In Wellington she and the sisters of her Order worked with the poor and destitute. She opened a home for incurables in Buckle Street in 1890 and a day nursery for children in 1902 and then added a children's home to the Buckle Street complex. The day nursery was an innovation and relieved the pressure on widows, abandoned mothers and those who had to work. In addition there was a soup kitchen for people unemployed. In 1907 she opened the doors of Our Lady's Home of Compassion for disabled and incurably ill children in Island Bay. Later, it included a surgical section and nursing training was incorporated.

State involvement on a large scale for social support in society began seriously in the 1930s. Before that most of it was done by charitable organisations and the churches. Children figure a lot in Marie-Joseph's work. Quite apart from unwanted pregnancies, many poorer families found the burden of one more mouth to feed too much to cope with.

Suzanne Aubert was born into a respectable middle-class family in a village near Lyon in France in 1835. She received an education in languages, music, literature and needlework. A serious accident at a young age and the death of her disabled brother left her with a profound love for those with disabilities. By the time she was sixteen she was convinced she was called by God to join a religious nursing order. She went to Paris for nursing training and during the Crimean war served in the base hospital in France and on the hospital ships. She continued her medical studies in Lyon after the war, even though women were not allowed to graduate. She was still determined to

become a nun. Her family was not pleased. Her mother had a suitable marriage lined up for her. Suzanne was not interested in marriage. Once she turned 25 she was free to take her own path. In the mid-nineteenth century to choose a religious course was a very real option, especially for women. Women had few chances of independence. Religious life offered the perfect avenue for Suzanne to exercise her considerable talents and her independence.

Her chance came in 1860 when Bishop Pompallier, a family friend, visited the area in a recruitment drive for his Auckland Diocese. Pompallier had baptised Suzanne in 1840. In Auckland, Suzanne began her religious novitiate in the Congregation of the Holy Family, with its house in Freeman's Bay, Auckland. She took the name Sister Marie-Joseph. Marie-Joseph and the other French nuns were determined to work with Māori. They worked in the Māori Girls' school in Ponsonby. Within a couple of years Marie-Joseph was fluent enough in te reo to be sent on mission work to Northland and the Waikato. In all things Māori her mentor was a fellow nun, (Hoki/Sister Peata), an influential and gifted relative of the powerful Ngāpuhi chief, Rewa. Bishop Pompallier returned to France in 1868, and the new Bishop, Thomas Croke, instructed Marie-Joseph to go home to France too. Bluntly she told the Bishop: 'I have come here for the Māoris; I shall die in their midst. I will do what I like.' Feisty words, but totally in character.

Marie-Joseph left the Order and moved to Napier in 1871, joining the Marist Order's Hawke's Bay Mission as a lay person. For the next twelve years she worked as district nurse for all who needed her. She drew no distinction between Māori and Pākehā, Catholic and anyone else. Her medical and nursing training stood her in good stead and she became very skilled at producing all sorts of remedies, many of them traditional Māori ones from native plants and herbs. She worked tirelessly. Records show that in 1873 she saw over a thousand patients. Māori loved her and called her Meri. Quite apart from her nursing skills she helped on the farm, gave religious instruction, led the local choir, played the organ and did embroidery.

Both in Hawke's Bay and later in the community at Hiruhārama Marie-Joseph wrote and translated material for the mission and the sisters. She revised and expanded the Māori Prayer book. This was published in 1879. She put together a Māori-English dictionary and a French-Māori phrase book. There was also a *New and complete Manual of Māori Conversation* in 1885, which included material on grammar and a large

vocabulary. For her own Order she produced a compilation called *The Directory*.

Archbishop Redwood of Wellington was very keen to re-open the Catholic mission up the Whanganui River at Hiruhārama (Jerusalem). The local Māori had been asking for a priest to help them after the wars of the 1860s virtually ended all work there. Bishop Redwood was to prove a stalwart supporter of Marie-Joseph's work. In July 1883, Marie-Joseph and Fr Soulas, both from Hawke's Bay, and three sisters of St Joseph of Nazareth settled in this impoverished community. Marie-Joseph promptly set about her work, encouraging the building of two schools and a dispensary for medicines. The community also offered a refuge for orphans and the chronically ill. All this was supported by work on the land and the sale of medicines downstream in Whanganui. The eventual move to Wellington in 1899 was in part brought about because Hiruhārama was just too far from medical assistance. Between 1891 and 1901, the community took in over 70 orphans from Wellington, many of them from unmarried mothers. In that period, to be an unmarried mother carried a huge social and financial burden. The fact that there were several infant deaths among the orphans may have hastened the move to Wellington.

Despite the success of the work, the Sisters of St Joseph withdrew in 1884, and it was decided that the best way forward was to establish a separate Order with Marie-Joseph at its head. It took a few years to achieve this but in 1892 the Daughters of our Lady of Compassion was formed. To have full independence and operate in its own way the Order would need papal approval. There were those within the Catholic hierarchy who found Marie-Joseph's independence and autonomy a bit too much. To pursue her goals, Marie-Joseph went to Europe in 1913 to seek papal approval. While in Europe, she continued nursing throughout the First World War and did not return to New Zealand until 1920. By then she had received the papal approval of her Order and its work. It was granted in 1917.

It will come as no surprise in the light of this account that steps are under way to have Mother Marie-Joseph declared a saint by the Roman Catholic Church.

The presence of God does not consist in thinking of God every now and then but in the consciousness of God's presence in all our actions.

Suzanne Aubert

IN THE QUIET OF THIS DAY

Colin Gibson

Hymns are normally sung by gathered congregations, full-throated and boosted by a piano or organ. In these Covid-darkened days it is important to remember that many of the texts will also serve as meditations or prayers. Indeed, we hear that early Methodists often carried their hymnbook (a suitably small and slim volume) with them for instant reference. One supposes that members of other denominations got to know hymn texts from memory (and constant repetition) and could resort to comforting texts by recalling them.

In the Quiet of this Day, by Shirley Murray (*Faith Forever Singing: New Zealand Hymns and Songs for a New Day*, 37) offers just such a message of reassurance. It can be sung to a beautifully crafted musical setting by Jillian Bray, but the plain words may be repeated as a mantra bringing soul-peace in many contexts of stress and anxiety.

In 1997, her friend Jillian Bray sent to Shirley Murray a new melody originally named *Lydia* after one of the biblical women whom Jillian admired. (She was a seller of the hugely expensive Tyrian purple cloth who was an early convert to Christianity and later supported the apostles Paul and Silas —see the Book of Acts: 16). Shirley came to love the tune, and later said of it, '*Lydia* has haunted me since I first heard it. More and more it has become a "first-person" rather than a community sort of hymn, and finally it has settled into a small meditation.'

The melody was given a new name when its composer realized that there already existed a much earlier and already well-known hymn-tune named *Lydia* by the nineteenth-century English composer Thomas Phillips. It was rebaptised *Te Piringa*, Māori for 'the refuge'. It has a melodic shape that sinks downwards and then turns upwards in a way that might easily suggest a pattern of physical or spiritual exhaustion followed by a gentle recovery.

Unusually for such a positive hymnwriter as Shirley Murray, this text starts in a self-reflective mood of weariness and tension, then takes its singers (or readers) from a confession of exhaustion and unresolved strain ('I am tired and out of tune....I am fearful and alone'), through to a grateful abandonment to the Holy Presence ('more than lover, more than friend') and a conclusion in a quiet act of worship, with a chanting of the Hebrew word *Alleluia*, meaning 'praise to God'. Try it for yourself

in your own lock-down place, and allow 'this small meditation' to evoke a mood of trustfulness and reconnection with your God.

*In the quiet of this day,
in the safety of this place,
Holy Presence, hear me pray,
soothe my spirit with your peace.*

*Take the tangle of my thought,
take the tension from my frame,
free within me what is fraught,
still the waves I cannot tame.*

*I am tired and out of tune,
it is you who gives new song,
I am fearful and alone:
bring me home where I belong.*

*What I am, you truly know,
more than lover, more than friend,
you the light to which I grow,
you my meaning and my end.*

*Alleluia, allelu, Alleluia, allelu,
Alleluia, allelu, Alleluia, allelu.*

The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is a friend who cares. Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into the places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion and anguish. - Henri Nouwen

God created routine and loves to watch it unfold over and over again. Creation gives praise to God by doing the same thing over and over – winter, spring, summer, autumn. The challenge is seeing the blessings that flow onto all of the things we dare to call ordinary and routine. Paul's words to the Philippians include telling them to 'keep on doing what you have learned and received ... and the God of peace will be with you'. Just keep doing what is right. Do it again and again and again. And God will be with you. - Craig Barnes

CHAPTER 3 VERSE 16

Peter Taylor

John 3:16 is one of the best known of all biblical references. During study leave Peter researched and prepared a series of short articles on chapter 3 verse 16 wherever this reference appears in each of the books of the New Testament. We begin with Matthew 3:16.

As soon as Jesus was baptised, he came up out of the water. Then heaven was open to him and he saw the Spirit of God coming down like a dove and alighting on him.

This verse in the Gospel of Matthew tells part of the story of Jesus' baptism in the River Jordan by the hands of John the Baptist. In the gospels Jesus' baptism marks the start of his ministry of preaching, healing and performing miracles in the region called Galilee before a final journey to Jerusalem where he was crucified.

Jesus' baptism is recorded in Matthew, Mark (1:9-11) and in Luke (3:21-22). Strangely it is not specifically mentioned in John, although John's description in John 1:32 tallies with the other gospels' baptismal stories. However it does throw light on a question which I want to raise: Who is the 'him' and 'he' at the start of the second sentence above: **Then heaven was open to *him*, and *he* saw the Spirit of God coming down like a dove and alighting on him.** (my italics)

Does Jesus see this happen to himself? Or is it John who witnesses this? It is not clear. But John 1:32 makes this the viewpoint of John: **And John gave this testimony: 'I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from heaven and stay on him'.**

It makes more sense for this to be John's vision, as it was John who needed confirmation of who it would be that would come after him baptising with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matthew 3:11). In any case the following verse (Matthew 3:17) is meant to have been heard by John: **Then a voice said from heaven, 'This is my own dear Son, with whom I am pleased.'**

These two verses (which are not strictly part of my remit) together mention God the Father, God's Son Jesus and the Spirit of God. Whilst this is not really a Trinitarian verse and so does not 'prove' the Bible talks about God in Three Persons, it is nevertheless a hint of this much later doctrine.

Why was this story included in the gospels? Its significance is partly to show that Jesus was the Son of God, an important message in the gospels, and partly as a prototype of baptism in the early church and the reason for the ceremony. The believer, like Jesus, in baptism receives the Holy Spirit and so becomes a daughter or son of God.

The Spirit of God as a dove alighting on Jesus at his baptism is attested in all four gospels. This is the only time the Spirit of God is so described and is reminiscent of the other dove story most people remember, involving Noah who sent a dove out to discover whether there was any dry land after the flood. In Genesis 8:6-12 we read of Noah sending out a raven which did not return and then the dove goes out three times: firstly with nothing to show, secondly returning with the iconic olive leaf and thirdly not returning. We have to presume the remaining raven and dove eventually managed to find their partners! The upshot of the story is that the dove and olive branch is a commonly used symbol of peace. Beyond the baptism of Jesus, this symbol of peace is one of those associated with the Spirit of God.

**BOOK REVIEW: Glynn Cardy: *A Book of Blessings*. (Bayswater, Victoria: Coventry Press 2021) 87 pages.
Reviewer: John Meredith**

It is a blessing to be aware of the presence of God in the context of everyday life. Awareness of blessing will often come as a surprise.

With imagination, Cardy includes blessings found in the midst of life under seventy different headings. These include the blessing of knitters who bring the threads together into a new creation and those who knit the dreams of today into a new garment of hope; baristas and those who practise the art of hospitality; those who move over so others can fit around a table and the blessing of those who shift to accommodate new ideas; a slice of newly-baked gingerbread, warm and ready for friendship; a welcoming doorway and doorways that lead to the broadening of mind and soul; restless discomfort about easy answers and half-truths; anger at injustice. Cardy quotes an insight from contemporary English poet Jack Underwood who said, *God is a cup in your home that you haven't yet recognised as God but drink from nearly every day*.

There is significant theological insight here. In inspiring readers to think about the sacred in the midst of life *A Book of Blessings* is a blessing indeed.

BOOK REVIEW: Jane Simpson: *The Farewelling of a Home. A liturgy.* (Christchurch: Poiema Liturgies. 2020) 21 pages.

Reviewer: John Meredith

As stated in the introduction, 'This is a liturgy written to meet an expressed need when leaving a home for the last time.' Originally written in response to the destructive Canterbury earthquakes of 2010-11 there are many reasons why people leave what has been their home: the house has been damaged or destroyed; illness resulting in the householder no longer being able to live independently; a decision to move to a property more suited to present needs; inability to meet the outgoings; the break-up of a relationship; a transfer in employment. In a rented property the decision of a landlord may affect tenancy.

Research suggests that moving one's home is one of life's most stressful experiences. Not only does moving mean that we leave behind a place of residence with its daily familiarity and memories, but it may also mean leaving our community of neighbours and friends and having to find new professional and service providers such as doctors, hairdressers, automotive technicians and even the supermarket where we can easily find our way around. Even if we have decided we want to move, when the day comes there will inevitably be a sense of loss. This is a form of grief and should be recognised as such. Jane Simpson does this admirably in the liturgy, *The Farewelling of a Home*.

The service begins with the householder(s), whanau and any invited friends and neighbours gathering either at the gate, front door or, if safe, inside the house. The service may be led by the householder or whomever the householder chooses. Beginning with a greeting of grace and peace the loss of a home is acknowledged in the biblical tradition of lament. This is adapted to the particular circumstances of leaving such as moving to a retirement village, the death of the householder, damage by natural disaster or loss of employment through the global pandemic which also brings the loss of a home. Lament is not self-pity but faces painful reality and looks to God for strength to go on.

If it is possible to enter the house the group progresses through the rooms and into the garden, pausing for reflection, sharing of memories, prayer and saying goodbye. Any mementoes placed in each room beforehand are gathered up and placed in a memory box for present and future generations.

The final part of the service is taking leave, emphasising that we journey on in hope. The door is closed and, if a candle has been lit, it is now extinguished. Floral sprigs may be taken from the garden for remembrance. The author suggests other optional symbolic actions.

The liturgy may be adapted when a home must be left for painful reasons such as domestic abuse or when a church is deconsecrated or otherwise vacated.

While not intending to restrict a family or householder(s) use of words the language of this liturgy is noble and expresses a range of emotion including sorrow, gratitude and hope. It is crafted with an awareness of tikangi Māori and it is hoped that a version in te reo Māori will become available.

The attractive cover image is *Golden Vapour Cloud* by New Zealand painter Gretchen Albrecht.

This liturgy is theologically sound and recognises that if we can let go with grace and begin again with hope this may do much for our sense of wellbeing. Copies are available for \$15 each or \$50 for 5 (+ \$4.50 p & p) from www.poiema.co.nz/shop

**BOOK REVIEW: Ian Harris, *Hand in hand. Blending secular and sacred to enlarge the human spirit.* (Wellington: Cuba Press, 2021) 230 pages.
Reviewer: John Meredith**

This review was first published in 'Touchstone' July 2021.

After the earthquake of 2011 the spire on the Anglican cathedral in Christchurch tumbled and lay sideways on the ground. Someone remarked that the spire was no longer pointing to God in some sacred realm above but to God in the world of every day.

'Secular' refers to the world of every day, of the here and now. The underlying premise of *Hand in Hand* is that the secular world is where religion must be practised and faith lived out. This is a profoundly biblical concept: life cannot be divided into holy or sacred and ordinary or secular spheres.

The world we live in is, however, vastly different from the world of the Bible. We live in a world of rapidly expanding knowledge that raises many challenges to the veracity of what was once widely accepted. The world has, quite frankly, moved on. In this new world Harris recognises

that, for many people, the existence of God as an independent being who maintains life on earth (a concept known as theism) no longer seems tenable. This does not mean a necessary rejection of religion but people are seeking ways of thinking about God that are consistent with their experience of life and do not require a sacrifice of their intellectual integrity.

If we can set aside the idea of God as a being with independent existence Harris states it may be possible to give the word *God* new meaning as a symbol that expresses the core of religious understanding. He suggests that 'in this symbolic view *God* is a word summing up what is central to a person's understanding of life and its purposes and what they sense as ultimate in the values they choose to live by. It points to what is best, highest and deepest in human experience.'

Harris emphasises the partnership between religion and science in seeking to understand life. He quotes Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks who said, 'Science is about explanation. Religion is about meaning.' Understood thus there is no conflict provided religious and scientific views are not held and promoted dogmatically. Mutual listening aids understanding. It may even open up a new appreciation of the sacred as we stand in awe of the wonder revealed by scientific discovery.

The material of the book is grouped under helpful headings. These relate to what is secular, spirituality, theism, science and the environment. The last section is a challenge: 'To the churches: adapt or die.' Harris states: 'It will be 'a grand day for Christianity when it ditches its obsession with belief and rediscovers the centrality of faith.' There is a need to move from ancient creeds and to find that when lived with reverence, respect and responsibility life yields the fulfilment of faith, hope and love.

The author dedicates *Hand in Hand* 'to all who embark on an exploratory journey of faith that continually changes shape and never quite ends.' Written in an incisive and highly readable style, it's a book that should be considered essential reading for anyone who is willing to think seriously about faith today and realistic possibilities for the future.

People ask me if I believe in God.

The verb is tedious to me.

I have faith in God.

Christian Wiman (Professor of Religion and Literature, Yale).

GOD OF THE GALAXIES

Beverley M. Smith

The book that I am reading *The Human Cosmos – a Secret History of the Stars* reminds us that the life we have led is not just an earthly existence but a cosmic one. Our innate relationship with the stars shaped who we are – our religious beliefs, power structures, scientific advances and even our biology. So goes the blurb of Jo Marchant's revelatory treatise.

Long before the birth of Christ, humans understood that the cosmos that created us, as we created it, in which internal experience and external reality were inextricably entwined.

After Northern Hemisphere discoveries of Neolithic sites, explorers established that people looked to the spirit world. And found a connection to the moon, sun and stars.

In February 1954 American biologist Frank Brown, discovered something so remarkable, so inexplicable, that his peers essentially wrote it out of history. He discovered that oysters removed from the ocean and kept in brine inside a dark room continued their feeding activity in time with the tides from their home beach.

The oysters gradually shifted their feeding times later and later. Brown realized the oysters had corrected their activity according to the local stage of the moon, instead of matching the East Coast swell. He had isolated these organisms from every environmental cue; and yet, somehow they were following the moon.

Closer to Aotearoa's history is how Englishman James Cook learned from Polynesian navigator Tupaia who retraced the voyages of his ancestors. They followed the stars.

The writers of the gospel story of the birth of Jesus focused on heavenly bodies; the star, leading shepherds to where the new born Jesus lay – immortalizing an event that brought forth one of the most momentous changes in Christian history.

The hymn 'God of the galaxies spinning in space' sets the scene for us.

**This comment by lay preacher Beverley Smith was published
in The Gisborne Herald 20 October 2020.**

NO DARKNESS AT ALL?

Steve Thorngate

A few years ago I was involved in editing and writing liturgical texts for the Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany cycle. I quickly realized that I needed to think hard about the issue of light/dark imagery.

I know people who think our worship should avoid such language altogether because it can be and has been used to bolster White supremacy. I know others who think we should use it freely because it's biblical. Neither approach seems adequate to me.

Yes, the light/dark binary pervades scripture. Christian views of scripture vary, but I have yet to visit a church that gives every jot and tittle equal weight. So the fact that this language is in the Bible hardly seems like the last word on its suitability for worship. Some biblical language is hurtful to some of us, and we have to take that seriously.

But I'm just as uncomfortable jettisoning the language of light and darkness entirely. After all, it's not just biblical—it's elemental. The days and seasons are defined by Earth's relationship with the sun. Humans since the beginning of time have been shaped by these cycles of light and darkness—and the depth of this shared reality makes it a rich source for liturgical language.

The church year, after all, is not organized first and foremost around the life of Jesus—that comes second. The church year is fundamentally a calendar, a way of marking time, and as such it is deeply invested in days and seasons. It is deeply invested in darkness and light as natural phenomena.

So how can those of us who work with liturgical language use these words and ideas well? How can we embrace their richness while also taking care to minimize their harm?

I'm convinced it's important to find ways to thread this needle. I'm not at all convinced that the particular guidelines I came up with, as I worked on my project, are the best available. But here are the ones I tried to follow:

- 1) Consider the different senses in which positive language about light is used. Light can mean illumination, sight, transparency, openness, the revealing of secrets. It can also connote colour, complexion, and even cleanness. Use the first sense of 'light' with care. Avoid the second.

2) Be very cautious about using negative language about darkness. Yes, it's logically implicit in positive language about light. But it also matters what we make *explicit*, what we say out loud and emphasise and repeat. It is possible to use (some) positive light language while also taking care not to actively disparage darkness.

3) Ask yourself, in a given situation, if you need to use light/dark language at all. Is there another good way to say this? Is it important enough to prioritize saying it at all?

4) Don't use black/white language to mean bad/good. The racist interpretation is too immediate, too hard to avoid. Find another way.

5) Perhaps most importantly: Say positive things about darkness. Fertile soil is dark. Secrets and mysteries aren't always bad things; their illumination isn't always good. Exodus 20 (contra 1 John 1) suggests that God dwells in darkness, while the psalmist praises the protection provided by God's shadow. These are rich areas for liturgical language.

6) It's OK if your liturgical images exist in tension. The goal is not a tidy, closed system of what light/dark language or anything else can mean. Our metaphors proliferate, overlap, and sometimes even conflict. This is fine. As with expansive language efforts around God and gender, Christian light/dark language might benefit from a longer list of available options rather than a shorter one.

I've found these guidelines useful, but they remain a work in progress. It's a difficult challenge. Can we eschew liturgical language that promotes racism while continuing to explore language to praise the God who makes sun and Earth and moon, days and seasons and years? I don't know, but I want to try.

Steve Thorngate is an associate editor at Christian Century

During the pandemic many churches have expanded their virtual outreach in innovative ways and enlarged their social media presence. This is exciting. But we shouldn't forget that the church stands or falls with the doctrine of the incarnation. 'Jesus drew near to them,' scripture reports. Intimacy, proximity and personal presence will carry more genuine authority in a post-pandemic church than touting a large platform. — Peter Marty

IN MEMORIAM: NORMAN GOREHAM

Ordained in 1958 Norman served in pastoral situations in Britain and USA and taught in a theological seminary in West Africa before coming to serve with the Methodist Church in New Zealand.

To keep up their spirits during World War II air raids, Norman's mother would sing hymns to her family. For Norman this created a love of hymns but he did not start writing hymns of his own until after he retired in 1988. His hymns and psalm settings have appeared in a number of publications. (See review of *With a Song in our Heart* in *Word & Worship* Autumn 2020). Earlier this year he wrote his last hymn, *Fed and nourished by the word* set to a tune by Madeline Maguire.

Norman corresponded frequently with the editor of *Word & Worship*, offered much appreciated feedback on content and contributed a number of articles of his own. His setting of Psalm 7 was printed in *Word & Worship* Winter 2021.

IN MEMORIAM: JOHN ROLSTON

John, who died on 24 January 2021, was accredited as a lay preacher on 28 March 1956 at Springston Methodist Church.

A farmer in Springston John was actively involved with Young Farmers and was a keen sportsman. Later moving to farm at Pleasant Point he was active in Federated Farmers and as a member of the Timaru-Temuka Methodist Parish John preached widely in South Canterbury.

With an acute mind John was constantly exploring matters of religious belief based on his own experience and reading. A person of intellectual honesty and critical insight he refused to accept that long-established tradition was sacrosanct. He was never afraid to ask questions when others might be willing simply to accept something as given. John listened carefully and had ability to express his point of view clearly and with respect for those who differed.

Mavis and John were the parents of five children. John was Chair of the Pleasant Point School committee and Chair of the Pleasant Point High School Board of Trustees.

Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.

Martin Luther King Jr

TRIBUTES TO LONG-SERVING LAY PREACHERS

DOROTHY AND ERNEST WILLIS

Dorothy and Ernest began as lay preachers in Riverton and have preached in over thirty churches around the south and beyond. They have often worked as a team supporting each other and, in earlier years, involved their children in services shaped by their creativity and imagination – see article by Dorothy in *Word & Worship* Autumn 2019.

Dorothy and Ernest have described their journey into lay preaching as a natural progression of their faith journeys. There was a period of five years training before accreditation. Parish vacancies were common sometimes for extended periods. Ordained ministers needed holidays and neighbouring parishes with multiple churches needed someone to fill the pulpit. The commitment of Dorothy and Ernest through times of change and challenge has been unwavering.

On Sunday 7 March 2021 Riverton Union Church was over-flowing with friends and family celebrating the contribution made by these two faithful preachers for over forty years. Rev. Nyalle Paris spoke for all in expressing the hope that their much-appreciated service would continue for many years to come.



Euan Templeton

KENNETH HYDE

In 1966 Ken and his wife Nola, with their three children moved from Marton to Rongotea where they joined the Presbyterian Church. Rev. Jack Scarlett encouraged Ken, who served as an elder, to sit the lay preacher exams. At the end of a three year correspondence course Ken was formally licensed on 1 August 1971.

In 1973 the family moved to Wainuiomata where they joined the Union Church. From there they moved to St Andrews in Featherston and then to the Baptist Church in Carterton. Ken continued preaching at both churches while living in Carterton. They are now valued members at St James Union Church in Masterton. Ken says, *With God's help over the last fifty years I have thoroughly enjoyed my time and met some great people.*

Merilyn Rigg-Weston

BETTY WATSON

Betty's journey in lay preaching began with presenting the sermon in a 1973 Methodist Women's Fellowship service, followed two years later by leading a full service on behalf of MWF. The next twelve years saw Betty leading worship in all Ashburton Methodist Parish preaching places, studying and completing papers before accreditation in 1987.

From that time unexpected opportunities arose full of enriching experiences for Betty. Over the years she has led worship in approximately thirty churches: Methodist and Union Parishes, Presbyterian, Church of Christ and Salvation Army as well as numerous celebratory services for service organisations and family reunions. She says she feels abundantly blessed.

Betty became Co-Superintendent of South Canterbury Methodist District in 1996 and served six years. In 2004 she was appointed a second time, during which she was fully involved in the formation of the Central South Island Synod. She served on the CSI executive beyond her term as Co-Superintendent.

Betty feels her worship leading has evolved over the years and she now sees her worship as inclusive. She is thankful to God for the privilege of leading worship and has expressed gratitude to the Parish for encouraging and equipping her for this role.

(See also Betty's story in *Word & Worship* Spring 2012). **Daphne Whiting**

LONG SERVICE CERTIFICATES

823 **William A. Simpkin**, Wesley Methodist, Dargaville, 30 Apr 2021 (60 yrs)

824 **Elizabeth (Betty) J. Watson**, Ashburton Methodist, 5 Apr 2021 (34 yrs)

825 **Digby S. Prosser**, Christchurch Central Methodist, 4 July 2021 (24 yrs)

ACCREDITATION CERTIFICATES

1107 **Amanda Lotter**, Ellesmere Cooperating Parish, 1 April 2021

1108 **Helen Boon**, St Andrew's United, Hokitika, 28 June 2021

1109 **Christine Bailey**, St Paul's Union Church, Taupo, 30 June 2021

The holy land is wherever you are. It is not a place but a presence.

– Henry David Thoreau

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