

The

# Common Good

*Taking a Preferential Option for the Poor*

A newspaper of the Christchurch Catholic Worker

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## Rio – summit fishy going on...

Tony Watkins

Conversations you have in the hot pools at Ngawha Springs, in the north of New Zealand, have an air of unreality about them. Precisely because they are real. People say what they think without any attempt at manipulating or massaging the message. These conversations can be as informative as they are startling. You look at life right in the eye, and then are left to ponder what to do about it.

I asked one individual what he had been up to during the day. 'Shooting ducks.' 'You like eating ducks then?' 'No, it's the killing I enjoy.' I must have looked startled, even through the steam. He wanted to set my mind at ease. 'I'm into conservation too.' he went on. 'One of my mates has set aside 500 acres where the pheasants are protected so they can breed.' He thought, then added wistfully, 'When they open it up the shooting will be fantastic.'

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***Rio+20 seemed to be only pretending to be concerned about the environment. Rather like those academic conferences where participants are focused on advancing their careers rather than changing the world.***

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Rio+20 was a world in denial, confused by all the smoke and mirrors of green economics, and completely lacking the honesty you find at Ngawha Springs. At UNCED in 1992 we were eyeballing life and getting on with it. Those of us involved in ending the Cold War believed that anything was possible, and sorting out the environmental mess was just a process of getting on with the job. Tough, but possible. We knew you had to be focused and to see clearly.

Rio+20 seemed to be only pretending to be concerned about the environment. Rather like those academic conferences where participants are focused on advancing their careers rather than changing the world. Before UNCED 1992 we had done our homework, and afterwards we followed through on what had been achieved. In Rio we convinced Susan Maxman to bring the issues forward to the UIA/AIA Congress the following year, and New Zealand played a leading role in that Congress. Back home the 1993 Papatuanuku Conference polarised the architectural profession. The seeds for Enviroschools were planted. All over the world Agenda 21 offices were opened up as local governments everywhere tackled the issues we had raised.

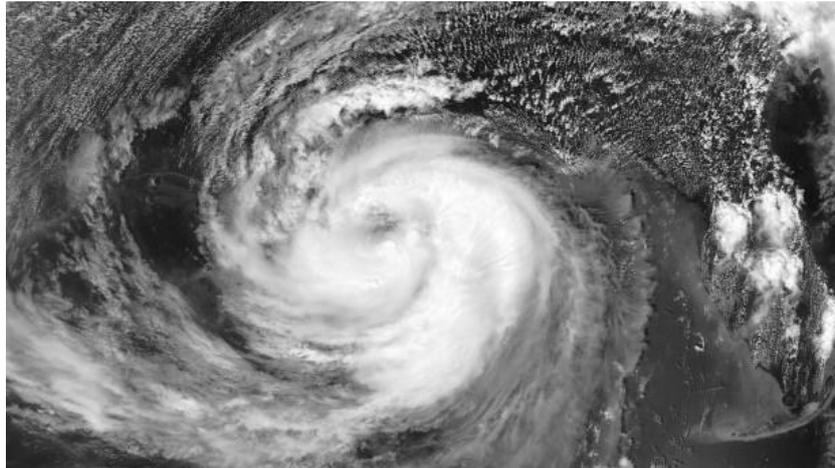
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***The decision makers at Rio+20 seemed in contrast to have lost touch with the realities of both the natural and the built environment.***

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The decision makers at Rio+20 seemed in contrast to have lost touch with the realities of both the natural and the built environment. Our Environment Minister Amy Adams, for example, went all the way to Rio to say that there were important domestic imperatives for protecting oceans, such as fishing.

Not 'from fishing' apparently. It seemed that it was the killing she enjoyed. Meanwhile 'The World Bank was seeking an initial \$250 million of funding which it would use to leverage \$1.2 billion from businesses, NGOs and other organisations.' Did they really mean that volunteer NGOs were now to take time out from protecting the environment to provide money for the fat



cats in the World Bank? What the money would be used for was not clear. Indeed nothing at Rio+20 was very clear. It was just a gigantic public relations junket. A significant negative cost to the environment.

The World Bank had launched their Global Partnership for Oceans last February, but only eight countries signed up, so that was a fizzer. New Zealand was one of those countries, but it would seem we did so just to get some political mileage. In a speech to the summit Amy Adams proudly spoke of the 8% of New Zealand's territorial waters protected by reserves. Green MP Kennedy Graham, who also travelled to Rio de Janeiro, pointed out that just 0.41% of the country's Exclusive Economic Zone was protected. Debating statistics became just a cover for opening up Antarctica waters for oil exploration or destroying what was left of the Kermadec Trench.

Gwynne Dyer noted that 'the final document contained the verb *reaffirm* 59 times. In effect, some 50,000 people from 192 countries travelled to Rio de Janeiro to *reaffirm* what had been agreed there 20 years ago.' The text said fundamental changes were needed but gave no idea as to what they might be. He noted that people 'are already dying from the effects of environmental destruction in poor countries, but that makes no difference because they are powerless.'

What Rio+20 really did was to reaffirm the power-

### Who are we?

Members of Te Wairua Maranga Trust, which publishes this paper, have since 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, Thomas Merton, and Joseph Cardijn. 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 usually receive back more than we ever give. 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 also engage in regular prayer and generally struggle along like everybody else.

We 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.**

base which was supporting both the architecture of power and the way in which it was destroying the natural environment. Gwynne Dyer rued that 'few leaders of the main powers even bothered to attend.' They did not need to. Hundreds of large corporations were represented at Rio+20 and they came away happier than anyone else. Business as usual had been confirmed. Rio+20 confirmed the right of multinationals to set the agendas, rather than governments.

Even those we might have looked to for leadership seemed to have sold out. Janez Potocnik, the EU Environment Commissioner talked about how a green economy would lead to salvation. It felt as though John Key might have written it. 'Rio+20 has turned into an epic failure. It has failed on equity, failed on ecology, and failed on economy,' said Kumi Naidou, executive director of Greenpeace.

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At UNCED in 1992 'there was plenty of energy and hope around'. At UNCED we knew what we wanted to achieve and we got on with the job. Our arguments were convincing and the nations of the world signed up. By Rio+20 no one was interested any more. In the period between the two conferences we had lost three million square kilometres of forest, along with any sense of urgency. Greenhouse gas emissions had risen by 48%, and the wealthy were now more comfortable than they had ever been. Gwynne Dwyer noted that 'Politicians are always reluctant to be linked to lost causes, and the struggle against poverty and environmental destruction now seemed to fall into that category.'

As Rio+20 came to a close George, the last remaining Pinta Island tortoise, died on Santa Cruz Island. Another species came to an end. Rio+20 moved the world a little closer to the day when the human species too would quietly become extinct.

It would be good news if we had at least agreed at Rio+20 to leave intact the wonderful planet we have been privileged to live on, and only set about destroying ourselves. The New Zealand government celebrated the end of Rio+20 by allowing mining exploration in the marine mammal sanctuaries that protect rare dolphins, whales and seals. The New Zealand Conservation Minister, Kate Wilkinson, pointed out that steps would be taken to minimise harm.

We could do with some of the honesty you find at Ngawha Springs. It's the killing we enjoy.

*Tony Watkins is an Auckland emeritus professor of architecture and town planning. This article is reprinted from Tui Motu, August 2012, with permission.*

## Editorial 1

# Good News, Bad News

It's not easy to start a Catholic Worker paper with a 'bad news' story, when the entry of God into human history in the person of Jesus has brought such 'good news' for the human family. Yet we are starting with three such stories.

Firstly, the world environmental conference, Rio+20, clearly showed that the world's leaders are not taking the 'signs of the times' about climate change and its threat to the planet seriously. The sober assessments in this edition by Tony Watkins and Cecily McNeill on the lavish Rio + 20 environmental extravaganza give all grave cause for concern.

The fact that some of the most important leaders were not even present is an indictment of their thinking and political priorities. John Key take note. The weak final statement using wishy-washy wording was pathetic. It could have been drafted by a bureaucrat in Brussels a year ago and saved the costs and carbon print of the 17 000 who travelled to Rio. It was a critical opportunity wasted. Tragically our children will pay the price for such inaction.

A second 'bad news' story relates to the latest report released in August shows that one quarter of New Zealand children are growing up in poverty. This means among other things that they live in sub-standard housing, with daily food deprivation and inadequate access to health care. The report makes for chilling reading. How can this be in a country which prides itself on first world status? A country which produces so much food? A country small and manageable with a rich history of egalitarian development?

Finally, the third 'bad news' story concerns scapegoating. It is a concept dating back to biblical times. Its

tradition is to take a victim (often a goat), load the sins of the people onto its back ritually and set it off to wander and die in the wilderness. Modern society carries on similar rituals but applies a more sophisticated bent to the practice. While the really big criminals are divvying up the planet and carving out economic empires for themselves, some are busy scapegoating targets closer to home and dumping the sins of the community on them.

The latest scapegoat is Stewart Murray Wilson, released with heavy restrictions into the community in late August. That he has done himself no favours in prison is obvious. That he is someone to be wary of is also true. That we don't want him in our street may be a valid opinion. But the hysteria generated in Whanganui in particular needs to be reflected upon. Are we really a society like this? The fear generated by the media, who have consistently nicknamed him 'the beast of Blenheim', is dangerous. It's a media gimmick and should be acknowledged and rejected as cheap.

Christians hold that Murray Wilson shares the divine spark in his being in the same way that we do. We teach that no sin is beyond redemption. He is due respect for this reason if for no other. Having served his time, he needs to be given a chance like any other human being. The parole board has leant over backwards to make sure that his conditions of release mean the community risk is minimised. He is entitled to the protection of the law, as Justice Young wisely pointed out in the High Court in Wellington.

Maybe some need to look to their own inner fears and face them instead of scapegoating others?

—Jim Consedine

## Editorial 2

# Afghanistan – a reckless adventure

The August deaths of five young military personnel in Afghanistan has brought that war back before the public in a tragic way. It seems that NZ soldiers are now being targeted by the Taliban and more casualties can be expected before our troops finally come home early next year.

Afghanistan has been a reckless adventure we should never have undertaken. It does not reflect well on the politicians from either Labour or National who committed troops ten years ago and have maintained them ever since. 'Reconstruction' was always presented as the primary aim of our involvement. From what one can gauge some good things happened over the years by way of constructive development. In reality our involvement was always much more. The involvement of the SAS was always undercover as has been our involvement with military intelligence. Our front line soldiers were always going to be targeted, sooner or later. That has now come to pass.

In the end, while most westerners dislike the Taliban and all it stands for, this US led war has always been about power and access to resources. We warned in an

editorial five years ago that our involvement was immoral and sooner rather than later would inevitably lead to further casualties. Such has sadly proved the case. We said then, 'Our level of involvement is not in the best interests of the Afghani people nor of New Zealand. It places us much closer to the epicentre of anger from aggrieved Muslims throughout the world and therefore under greater threat from retaliation. It runs counter to the moral teachings of the Church on war and conflict, and flies in the face of repeated appeals from Pope Benedict XVI. It is an affront to every Christian who believes that Jesus taught us to resolve our differences using the tools of non-violence.' (*The Common Good*, Lent 2010)

The American people are among the most decent people on God's earth. But the 'principalities and powers' which drive US major institutions including their political, economic and banking systems, judicial apparatus and war machine, are geared to rewarding a powerful corporate elite at the expense of the many. That is why there is such a disparity of wealth and why the same disparity is growing here. The American dream is a

materialist dream, not a justice dream. There are some winners and many losers. For millions of poor Americans, it's not a dream but a nightmare.

There is no such thing as a painless war and the ongoing effects of combat remain a lifetime. For example, we know from official statistics that 40% of Iraq/Afghan US veterans experience difficulty in adjusting to civilian life, 12.7% remain unemployed, 45% have filed disability claims, 47% report post-traumatic distress and one attempts suicide every 80 minutes. . According to the US Veterans Administration, more than 1600 have lost one or more limbs, 156 are blind, and 177 000 have hearing loss. (*Associated Press*, 28 May 2012) Now it is Kiwi parents bringing home the wounded and burying their offspring.

The US economy is essentially a war economy to which we have become inextricably linked. The almost sycophantic desire of successive New Zealand Governments to snuggle closer up to the US, militarily as

well as economically, has led us to make high handed and immoral decisions in relation to trade negotiations and military involvement. The current round of secretive meetings involving our government and the US and others seeking a Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) is symptomatic of a country which has swung off its hinges morally and is ready to trade/sell most things to the highest bidder in a bid to emulate the American dream and stay friends with 'big brother'.

It may well already be too late. We are so intertwined now with global and US capitalism that we are in danger of losing our sovereignty in all but name. We are no longer masters of our own economic destiny. The current government couldn't care less. In effect, we are betraying every bit of freedom won by an earlier generation of soldiers. We are selling our souls to a corporate elite largely based elsewhere. The price we are paying includes the blood of our soldiers.

The betrayal of our independence is almost complete!

—Jim Considine

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## In the Spirit of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

'The dawn of the 21st century has witnessed two remarkable developments in our history: the appearance of systemic problems that are genuinely global in scope, and the growth of a worldwide movement that is determined to heal the wounds of the earth with the force of passion, dedication, and collective intelligence and wisdom. Across the planet groups ranging from ad-hoc neighbourhood associations to well-funded international organisations are confronting issues like the destruction of the environment, the abuses of free-market fundamentalism, social justice, and the loss of indigenous cultures. They share no orthodoxy or unifying ideology; they follow no single charismatic leader; they remain supple enough to coalesce easily into larger networks to achieve their goals. While they are mostly unrecognised by politicians and the media, they are bringing about what may one day be judged the single most profound transformation of human society.

There are at least two million organisations worldwide – people with good hearts – working toward ecological sustainability and issues relating to social

justice. These separate organisations form a global, leaderless conglomerate that reaches every corner of the world. This movement is dispersed, inchoate, and fiercely independent. It has no shared manifesto or common doctrine, no over-riding authority to check with. It is taking place in schoolrooms, farms, jungles, villages, companies, deserts, fisheries, slums, and even in hotel rooms.

From an evolutionary perspective, this movement is, without a doubt, the most complex associations of human beings ever assembled. Most people know only the organisations they happened to be linked with. But its global database is mammoth. It is also facing issues that governments often fail to tackle: energy, jobs, conservation, poverty, and global warming. How it appears to function as a coherent system is even more mysterious.'

—Paul Hawken,

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### ***Funeral Choice***

**[www.funeralchoice.co.nz](http://www.funeralchoice.co.nz)**

*A Catholic Worker project*

Cheaper alternatives to  
consumer funerals

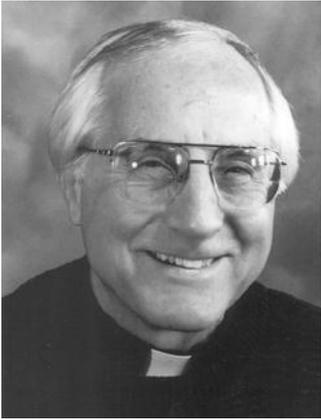
### **CW website**

- Leading articles from the first 14 years of *The Common Good*
- Alternative funerals
- Restorative justice
- Other theological issues

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

# Everyday prophets are in our midst

Thomas Gumbleton



Jesus comes into the midst of God's people, into the human family, as the Prophet who speaks on behalf of God, and whose very presence, whose very life, whose very being is a message about God, a message enabling us to know God deeply by knowing Jesus. He is the Prophet that is God. Now

all of us are also called to be prophets, and we must understand that people may not listen. They may reject the prophet.

The people were happy to see Jesus do some healing, and they thought of Him as a wonder worker, but to speak on behalf of God, who is He? He's a carpenter. They spoke in a derogatory way about Jesus. 'We know His family. They're nobody. Why is He putting Himself up?' So they reject Him. Jesus, Mark says, is astounded at the hardness of their hearts, and because they are not open to Him, open to God, God's love can't touch them. So Jesus decides to leave there, but a Prophet has been in their midst as God promised.

We know there have been many prophets whom God has sent. I suggest a couple that we're probably very familiar with. I think everyone knows Mother Teresa. She was a prophet, not so much by what she said. She didn't go around preaching, but her very life exemplified God's love that includes everybody, especially the poor, the rejected, those that are thrust aside almost as worthless. She went among them. She brought healing -- not so much physical healing.

She brought the sisters into their midst with the healing love of God, but her very life spoke God's love for God's people, that our God is a God of love who reaches out to all of us, but especially to the poor, the most rejected. That's a powerful message that Mother Teresa preached by her very life. I also bring to your attention another woman prophet: Dorothy Day, who has had a significant impact on the Church, especially in the USA.

Some would claim that Dorothy Day has been, in the Church in the United States, the most outstanding of prophets. She started the Catholic Worker, a community of people who live the radical teachings of the Gospel, going among the poor and live among them, welcoming the poor into their homes through houses of hospitality, and who try to transform our world into the Reign of God by bringing the message of Jesus into our world.

One of the things that Dorothy Day did that was not well known, during the Second Vatican Council, when the Bishops at the Council were discussing the part of the document on the Church in the modern world about war

and peace, she together with some others, met with a number of bishops and helped to influence their thinking about the need to issue a declaration condemning weapons of mass destruction. It's the only place in all of the Vatican Council, in the document of the Church in the modern world, where there is a condemnation of weapons of mass destruction as being something totally evil that never could be justified.

That was prophecy, a God message proclaimed through the help of Dorothy Day and others, but now through the Bishops of the world teaching, prophesying, speaking on behalf of God, giving us this message that we must turn away from war. We must turn away from that. It's a powerful message. I think that here, too, we discover for the most part we haven't really been listening: not enough to Mother Teresa and not enough to Dorothy Day and the bishops of Vatican II.

We still find ourselves in a world where there are a vast majority of poor people who are neglected and pushed aside and ignored. In our own country, it's getting to be a larger and larger number, while a few are getting richer and richer. We find ourselves embroiled in acts of violence and war, and the use of weapons that kill so many innocent people. So prophecy is still something that God is using. God is speaking to us through prophets, but like the people in Nazareth, like the people in exile in Babylonia, we do not listen well enough.

That is one thing we must reflect on today as we are instructed on prophets and prophecy, and our role as baptized Christians. We must listen and reflect. Are we really trying to hear God's Word proclaimed by the prophets who are in our midst today, those who in some special way are proclaiming God's word and the radical teachings of Jesus? Are we listening? Then, also, are we being the prophets we're called to be?

Most of us would not think of ourselves going out and preaching, but we can do it the way Mother Teresa did, through our lives. We can be everyday prophets.

Through our baptism, all of us are called to be prophets. We hear the Word of God. We hear Jesus proclaiming, 'Love one another as I have loved you. There is no greater love than this: to lay down your life for your friend,' and even to love your enemies -- we've all heard that message. We see it lived out by others around us who have been prophets in our midst.

So today, we must ask ourselves, are we going to leave this Church and understand more clearly that we are called to be a prophet, to follow Jesus the Prophet? We must pray that God will give us the ability to proclaim God's Word wherever we are, not necessarily and most often not in words, but just to proclaim God's way of love by the way we live out the Word of God.

*Bishop Thomas Gumbleton is a retired auxiliary US bishop and a founder of Pax Christi. This abridged sermon was first published in NCR, 20 July 2012.*

# A Tale of Two Cities

Jim Consedine

It is hard to know where to start when writing of the earthquakes in Christchurch. Already millions of words have been printed, almost to the point of nausea. Many are already sick and tired of hearing about it. Yet for thousands it remains an everyday reality to be faced and lived.

The problem is that Christchurch is a city of two halves. Often people from the western suburbs have little idea what it is like living every day in a quake-damaged area in the south and east. I sometimes say to people that it is a bit like the difference between living in Harlem and Queens. Both are parts of New York City yet few in one sector have ever seen how the other half is living. They know about each other mainly from movies or television. Ne'er the twain do meet!

There is a similar problem in Christchurch. In large parts of the city the struggle is still there every day for people, especially those thousands living in damaged homes or in the 'red zone'. Every day the stress of making sense of what has been a horrendous disaster is sheeted home. Often it is done inadvertently by one of the giant corporations one has to deal with – the Earthquake Commission (EQC), the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA) or one's insurance company.

Letters to the editor in the morning paper every day witness to the pain of the dispossessed and the desperate. They provide a non-stop commentary, a weather gauge, on how many ordinary citizens are coping – or not. It is not a pretty read!

Communication has been a major issue, with EQC the main but not the only culprit. Normally one would deal with a government agency or an insurance company once or twice in a lifetime. But thousands of Cantabrians have to deal with one on a weekly basis as they are fudged off or totally ignored. It is ironic that in an age of instant communication technology, getting answers from corporations like EQC is so difficult. Responses from automatons in Manila and Delhi are demeaning. The stress levels for many are through the roof – and show few signs of diminishing.

My own rented home has sunk 20 centimetres but thankfully remains intact. I might get a rebuild in 3-5 years. My brother and sister-in-law's home is off its foundations and is stuck in the infamous TC3 category – able to be repaired even though it is obviously not suitable. The decisions for such things are taken by insurers who want to spend the least amount on properties, even though the insurance taken by householders is often for 'full replacement'. Insurers are too often saying 'no – we will repair not replace because it is cheaper for us.' This is regardless of what common sense might say about the state of the home.

The issue of land repatriation is also a major concern. Often the land has sunk or continues to sink with each

consequent quake. The land at the end of my street in South Brighton has sunk several metres. This has resulted in the estuary seeping up into back gardens, undermining houses, sinking foundations. It has salted and killed the roots of thousands of trees which have had to be culled.

Liquefaction is another massive problem. Land has been spoilt. Hundreds of homes have been declared unstable and have to be evacuated prior to being demolished.

The much-heralded \$2.2 billion recovery plan has many fine features and no doubt will bring a huge amount of fresh energy and finance to the city. It will also provide work for hundreds. But the plan ignores the plight of those who have been most affected on the eastern side of the city. These include thousands of low-paid workers or beneficiaries with limited incomes who simply see their options being shrivelled up every day by the planners. Many landlords have taken advantage of the housing squeeze to increase the cost of rents. There appears to be no plan by Government to address the desperate need of people for low-cost housing. Social housing should have been a priority for the planners. It hasn't been.

The crisis in the city has evoked some wonderful responses from a wide range of people. Many have rightly been lauded by government and even awarded Queen's medals. In particular, two stand out for us. The prophetic voice of Rev. Mike Coleman has rung out time and again calling on EQC, CERA, the Christchurch City Council and the government to respond in ways that speak to the needs of the poorest. Mike, an Anglican priest, has become the voice of the Earthquake Communities Action Network. He is a courageous fighter for social justice in the best tradition of Christian advocates of the past.

Another is Lianne Dalziel, MP for Eastern Christchurch, who has been unflagging in her efforts to speak to the needs of the disadvantaged and those who are being marginalized by the bureaucratic processes. She herself has had to shift from her home in Bexley, so knows firsthand what the issues are. Her unfailing good sense and moderation has not always won favour in government circles but she continues to try her best for the people of the eastern suburbs.

No one suggests that decisions being made are easy to arrive at. The expectations of many may be unrealistic given what has happened. But it is the priorities of the planners which need to be questioned. When so many have no affordable homes to go to, the high priority given to a new rugby stadium and convention centre need to be seriously questioned. These are assets which wealthy and established cities can well afford. But Christchurch is no longer one and there are more basic needs that should be met first.

In addition, the hullabaloo about the rebuilding of the Anglican cathedral is a debate that has got well out of hand. Bishop Victoria Mathews is to be commended for sticking to her guns in stating that the priorities for the Anglican Church are gospel related, understood in the light of the teachings of Jesus. There are strong arguments to be made on both sides of the cathedral debate but ultimately it is for the Church, not civilian authorities, to decide its priorities and how it uses its resources. These matters are not always understood by heritage advocates.

It needs re-stating. The mission of the Church is the mission of Jesus. He came to announce the arrival of God's reign in our midst. This was his stated primary task. The mission takes form in a series of priorities

announced in Luke Ch 4 – 'to bring good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, set the down trodden free and proclaim a jubilee year.' This has nothing to do with assets and buildings and everything to do with a message of hope for our troubled times.

The tragedies of Christchurch have created a unique opportunity for followers of Jesus to rethink how well or otherwise their particular tradition is living out that message. Now is a time of great opportunity. Given the loss of impetus and membership of the mainstream churches in recent decades, it is a God-given one. For the Churches, imagination, courage, deep faith in the guidance of the Holy Spirit and ecumenical dialogue should be the guiding principles of a future rebuild.

## **after the 10,000 quakes**

the spring rain falling  
two full years twenty four months of serious  
upheaval and destruction  
maybe it was like this post wwII in europe  
just sort of waking up to how things are now  
unutterably changed  
post trauma stuff lurking under every bush  
people ill dead sick tired not functioning as we once  
were  
extreme exhaustion premature death  
land homes workplaces rendered uninhabitable  
shifted changed broken open  
communities born  
stronger resilient unbelievably stretched  
worn through to the bone  
everywhere the blossom coming  
kowhai yellow daffodils jonquils  
plum blossom brilliant pink white  
dancing us through

—Kathleen Gallagher

## **walk in a damp forest**

on a still spring day  
glassy waters lie motionless  
reflecting grey clouds  
on nature's estuary  
  
devastated by quakes  
savaged by chain saws  
the forest stands adjacent  
resilient still  
daring to come again  
confounding the elements  
  
under its canopy  
moist from the rain  
a carpet of needles  
squelches softly underfoot  
scenting the air  
with divine fragrance

—Jim Consedine

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# United Nations Earth Summit

Cecily McNeill

Some 600 multinational companies dominate 99 percent of the global economy. At the same time, just half of the world's population has access to electricity.

Wellington archdiocesan justice coordinator Mary-Ann Greaney attended the Rio+20 Earth Summit in Brazil from June 11 to 23, 2012, as part of a delegation of Presentation Sisters and Associates.

A stark contrast for Mary-Ann was the buzz of high-energy activity at the myriad events, activities and discussions within civil society and the People's Summit compared to the low energy in the room where representatives of the heads of state were negotiating an agreement for the conference paper.

The conference heard that some \$US17 trillion went into rescuing some banks during the 2008 banking crisis. This is enough to feed the world for 600 years. Most of the bankers involved in the crisis retain their jobs, their high salaries and regularly collect substantial bonuses. Put this alongside the fact that 800 million people are hungry at any given moment and notice how world leaders' priorities are skewed.

Many speakers at the parallel events talked about solidarity. Liberation theology guru Leonardo Boff told a meeting that sustainability is based on solidarity and sharing. 'There is no lack of food in the world. The problem is in the lack of access for the poor to obtain the food they need.'

Nations need to move away from a globalised culture based on markets, the bottom line, business and the economy to nature, energy and spirituality, all in balance. These add up to solidarity. Developing societies will develop themselves according to their needs and the needs of their people as they renew their aspirations, said Boff.

A *Caritas* delegate said that a solidarity-based economy puts men and women at the centre and that protects distribution. Mary-Ann was impressed with the tons of energy in the people who attended and the life and passion they contributed. People were excited. They were talking about movements in which they were involved. For example a young woman in a *favela* (Brazilian slum) was concerned about the lack of health services there. So she mobilised other young people and collected support for a petition and the government was forced to provide health services to the slum-dwellers.'

The president of Ecuador, Rafael Correa, called on the richest countries to compensate poor nations for damage caused by climate change.

Referring to the 2008 global banking crisis, he said, 'Money is found to rescue banks; why don't we put money in to rescue the environment.' Ecuador has oil. The country would like to leave it underground, but how will the poor of Ecuador be compensated for not using

this valuable commodity to trade? The 476 million barrels of oil are worth \$US14 billion. 'This isn't charity,' he said. 'The money could be put in a UN trust fund to pay for research on a renewable, non-polluting energy source.'

Mary-Ann said she heard about a school where there are 3,000 college kids who decided they should be recycling the water. They put pressure on the school board about what they could do to be more sustainable. The school now uses recycled water in the toilets.

## The 'no-shows'

Notable by their absence were leaders from some of the developed countries – Barack Obama of the USA, David Cameron of the UK, German Chancellor Angela Merkle, Stephen Harper of Canada and New Zealand's John Key.

Their absence was interpreted as an indicator of the low priority being given to the conference. Heads of France and China were there as was Australia's Julia Gillard.

Since 1972 conferences have been convened at a variety of venues and conventions, treaties, agreements and protocols have been signed in an effort to address unsustainable practices and their impact on Planet Earth.

At Rio in 1992 optimistic world leaders made strong commitments to ensure a sustainable future for all. Despite this, the decline of ecosystems has accelerated, climate change has escalated, natural disasters have intensified, desertification has extended, oceans continue to be used as huge waste dumps, the air is increasingly polluted, rivers, mountains and forests are exploited and more than a billion people live in extreme poverty.

## What New Zealand said

Greens environment spokesperson Kennedy Graham said the world had a governance problem. Most governments would deny there was an ecological crisis and rate Rio as a success.

But if you acknowledge that we are in an ecological crisis – which means resource depletion, biodiversity loss and climate change – you would rate Rio as a failure.

Spokesperson for the NZ nongovernment organisations platform at Rio, Diana Shand, said the Rio document was 'generally lacking in ambition, urgency and political will. The document is full of 'we know', 'we consider', 'we applaud', 'we uphold' but we don't see 'we commit'.' Consumption and production are a major problem, she said. It is important that we recognise that inequality affects us all.

*Cecily McNeill is the editor of Welcom, where this edited report was first published in August 2012*

Peter Murnane OP

One of our workers, Peter, was sick. He lives a few hundred metres through the bush along from our jetty, so I walked over to see how he was getting on. Life here is busy, so I don't often enough take a leisurely walk around our own island. I was delighting in my morning expedition along the winding foot-track through the teak plantation, with coconut palms and a few mahogany trees adding their graceful beauty.

Peter's house came in sight when I was still some distance away. It stands on stilts in a cleared, sandy area among coconut and pandanus palms and is built mainly of local materials and roofed with sago-palm leaf. His little boy was playing with a toy truck in the sand; the blue lagoon lapped on the beach almost at the front door; a battered dug-out canoe was parked at the high-tide mark. It looked like the tropical ideal that books and films have put before us for more than a century, and which has so attracted the populations of 'developed' countries that men will slave for half a lifetime to try to reproduce it when they retire by the sea around the coasts of Australia or New Zealand.

Peter is a happy man, but with due respect to Plato, who most of us remember as teaching about the ideas or ideals of things, beyond and better than the world we are familiar with, this idyll has to be analysed. I found Peter lying on a hammock beneath his house – completing the ideal! - but he was sick. (Here I will disguise his personal details; what follows might apply to any island people in his position). His sickness might have been only flu, which is serious enough, but might be malaria or something worse. At once it threatens his power to earn a living by labouring or canoe driving for a modest wage, and by regularly night-diving for fish to supplement his meagre income and diet. He has a wife and children to support, but no medical insurance. The superannuation scheme in this country is small, and naturally depends on how many years one has contributed. If Peter had moved from his home in one of the poorer islands of the Solomons chain, he would be far removed from his wider

## Around the Traps

**We congratulate Fr Tom Keyes** of Invercargill on the 60th Anniversary of ordination on 20th July. A former borstal chaplain, Fr Tom is a legend in the south for his work among ex-prisoners and the poor, for his deep prayer life and commitment to the Gospel. He has also been a long term supporter of the Catholic Worker and *The Common Good*, distributing several dozen copies of each edition. A consistent letter writer to newspapers over decades, he has his latest letter to us in the current edition. *Ad multos annos*, Tom!

**Great to have three CW visitors** from the Far North among us for a week in early August. Marissa Dowling, Danielle Webb and Teresa Land brought some fresh energy to our Wednesday night gatherings as they

family who might have supported him in old age.

My thoughts about the tropical idyll were reinforced a short while later, when we were invited to a celebration in the village of Nusabaruka, across the lagoon. This is a village of immigrants from Kiribati (Gilbert Islands) who came in the 1970s because of population pressure and lack of land. It is built on mangrove flats about a kilometre west Gizo town, but the swamp prevents any road being built. To reach it by steep bush track takes up to an hour of walking, so the main access is by canoe, but few can afford to own one. After the 2007 tsunami destroyed most buildings and killed nine children, the people moved their simple homes inland to slightly higher ground in the bush.

Families are large, and live mostly in poverty. Most of the flocks of children and teenagers do not go to school. There is a high rate of young pregnancies.

We were honoured guests at the celebration of a first birthday, which for a first-born son is important in Kiribati tradition. But as we enjoyed the food and company, my mind wandered to possibilities of providing a school, or even teachers, for the many children here who are growing up illiterate, with little English, few prospects of a job and already losing their own ancient and beautiful Kiribati culture.

While this is surely the government's responsibility – a canoe service to take kids to school in Gizo would be a big help – I think of Mary McKillop, Catherine McAuley, Edmund Rice, John Baptist de La Salle and others who took direct action to teach needy children, and even ponder calling on Dominican Volunteers International. Perhaps these too are ideals that do not fit today's world, but then tropical dreams have inspired a lot of people before this.

*Peter Murnane OP, Dominican friar and a member of the Catholic Worker in NZ, is working in the Solomon Islands. His address is – Gizo, Box 22, Solomon Islands*

came to pay a sister-house visit. They headed north from us to the Otaki CW and more of the same with the Leason clan, before heading home for Spring planting.

**Trade Minister Tim Groser** gave the clearest statement yet that the TPPA is about conceding sovereignty in a *NZ Herald* article on 7 July. 'Of course trade agreements involve concessions over the sovereign rights of countries to do things ... New Zealand's problem had been the 'excess sovereignty' other countries had exerted over it. ... We needed to control their sovereign right to do whatever suited their fancy. The whole point of international law is to put limits around countries' sovereignty on the basis of negotiated understandings.' So it is now official that the TPPA

means 'controlling' the sovereignty of other countries, and conceding our own, in a deal that is brokered behind closed doors without any evidence of tangible gains and potentially significant costs.

**The annual mid-winter CW dinner** was held at Kathleen and Mike's place in early July. About 15 gathered to feast and celebrate each other. We took the opportunity to farewell one of our guests Nuwan da Silva from Sri Lanka who was returning home. For some months, Nuwan has been a very positive influence at Suzanne Aubert house and we will miss his presence. We wish him well.

**Jim's friend Susan Crane**, part of the *Disarm Now Ploughshares* action from 2009, who served 15 months in a federal prison in Dublin, CA, was recalled to prison for two further months in mid-August for refusing to comply with stringent probation conditions. Susan believes that the harsh sentencing of peaceful non-violent witnesses confirms her belief that the US courts are merely an extension of other violent social structures

which are routinely used to further disenfranchise and punish the poor – and she will not have a bar of compliance with them. We wrote wishing her well and have to pray for her and other imprisoned activists at our CW Wednesday gatherings.

**In the US, where 18 military veterans die as a result of suicide** every day, the budget for 2013 includes 60% for the U.S. military for war, veterans affairs and nuclear weapons programs; 6% for health and human services, 6% for education, 5% for the states, 4.5% for miscellaneous programs, 4% for Department of Homeland Security, 3% for Housing and Urban Development, 2% for Agriculture, 1.5% for Department of Justice, 1.5% for NASA, 1.5% for Energy, 1% for Labour, 1% for Treasury, 1% for Interior, 1% for Environmental Protection Agency and 1% for Transportation. Less than 1%, less than 25 cents a day, goes for foreign aid; much of which is military aid. *American Friends Service Committee.*

## Obituary

### Sister Anne Montgomery SSH

Sister Anne Montgomery SSH, one of the original Ploughshares peacemakers, died of cancer Aug. 27 at Oakwood, the Society of the Sacred Heart's elder care centre in Atherton, California. She was 85.

From participating in the first of the Ploughshares actions Sept. 9, 1980, until her sixth and last protest Nov. 1, 2009 -- for which she served two months in federal prison -- Montgomery epitomized the 'heart and soul' of a movement that has spanned the globe, several friends and fellow activists for peace said.

Catholic Worker Art Laffin, who was arrested with Montgomery in Plowshares actions twice, said she knew about the cross and what the cross meant. She lived in the hope of the resurrection. Hers was a living faith in the gospel of Jesus. She will be remembered for her peace witness, for serving the poor and for going fearlessly into war zones to be with people under occupation. 'She was a doer of the Word.'

Montgomery's last Ploughshares action -- the *Disarm Now Plowshares* -- took place on All Saints' Day in 2009 at the U.S. Navy's Strategic Weapons Facility, Pacific in Bangor, Wash., where more than 2,300 nuclear warheads are believed to be stored. After being indicted at age 83 in September 2010 for the All Saints' Day protest, Montgomery said she felt called to continue protesting



**Peacemakers – Sr Anne Montgomery with Sr Megan Rice**

nuclear weapons and would do so in one way or another until her last days.

'Nuclear weapons posed such a grave danger to all life on earth that I have devoted more than 30 years of my life to protest their stockpiling by the world's governments. I have been involved since 1980 in Ploughshares movements, which are really saying we as human beings, as Christians, as citizens of a country which is supposed to be governed by its citizens, we are responsible to eliminate these weapons'.

## Review

***The Bone Keeper's Story*, a play by Kathleen Gallagher and Helen Moran, Elmwood Theatre, Christchurch. Running time: 55 min. Reviewer: Jim Consedine.**

This was a remarkable and for me surprising night out. This one woman play, originally devised by Kathleen Gallagher and actor Helen Moran, was a moving and stunning presentation of a spiritual quest for

life's meaning set within a New Zealand context but prompted by an original Inuit story by Clarissa Pinkola Estes. The writers were challenged by Estes to look into their own heritage and their own life experiences and find the stories there of their search for meaning. Drawing especially on the Celtic heritage of both, Moran presents a wonderful dramatic and imaginative tale. Here nature's elements of sea, sky, earth, fire and water are

found in every movement as they impact on her journey. Her main prop is a human skeleton made of sticks of driftwood. It is imposing in its effect, and reflects the creativity of Mike Coughlan. Helen Moran's ability as an actor has never been better showcased. She gave a powerful performance on a night to remember – and ponder on.

## Letters

7/33 Seaside Ave  
Waterview  
Auckland 1026

Hi Jim,

I just finished reading *The Common Good* and want to congratulate you and your associates on your genuine radicalism. As also in the article you attached to your email to me. I have been horrified at how the unions are being treated. But the declarations around Jesus and peace and the church and the poor are right on the 'money'!! I appreciated the article on 'the New Land Wars.' Right on.

Also thinking of you in Chch. Thanks and love,

*Andrew Duncan*

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40 Perth Street,  
Invercargill  
7 June 2012

Dear Jim,

Greetings from the south. At our Sunday community lunch, I was sitting at a table with a young Maori lad and for something to say, I asked him where he lived. He said he had spent Saturday night in Queen's Park. I was told later that when it rained he moved into the toilet. I took him to a friend of mine, a Rastafarian, who recently had taken in two other chaps I found with nowhere to stay. Unfortunately, my friend wasn't home but I left the young man there. Later that day, after dark, he turned up at the door of our presbytery and said that he could stay with my friend. There were five there already and only one bedroom. So I rang another Maori friend whom I used to write to in prison. He has a flat and said this young chap would be most welcome. There are a number of chaps who wander from one place to another, but I was surprised to find one out in the cold in winter time.

I love this quote from Psalm 34, 'They lack nothing who revere the Lord. Strong lions suffer want and go hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no blessing.'

Blessings to you all and God bless,

*Tom Keyes*

*Fr Tom Keyes, who helps run a communal meal for the homeless every Sunday, celebrated his 60th anniversary of ordination on 20th July.*

Christchurch

Kia ora katoa,

It is time for New Zealand to get out of the UKUSA spy system. Millions of dollars are being squandered by New Zealand on intelligence agencies that produce no discernible benefits for this country.

The latest Western spy revelation that a Canadian Navy intelligence officer has been spilling top secret material to Russia illustrates yet again the futility of New Zealand's spy operations.

Concerns expressed that this country's interests could be compromised are predicated on the ridiculous assumption that this country has something to hide from Moscow.

The only reason for any interest in NZ operations is our entanglement with Washington through the Waihopai spy base.

At least \$60 million a year is wasted on the NZ Government Communications Security Bureau and its games with the big boys.

Not only have a series of spies (of whom Sub-Lieutenant Delisle is only the latest) totally discredited the Western system, the major agencies continually fail in their basic responsibilities. Take for example, the complete failure to predict the 9/11 attacks or, more recently, the Arab Spring.

Additionally, the Western agencies are increasingly into illegal spying, domestic surveillance and murderous covert action.

In this country, security problems have been much better handled by the Police.

Our expensive commitment to Western spy operations needs to be properly investigated, and not glossed over by 'no comment' from the Prime Minister and the failed system of the Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security.

Best wishes,

*Murray Horton*

Anti-bases Campaign

the more roads we build  
the more they fill with traffic

the more cycleways we build  
the more they fill with cycles

—Mike Coughlan

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**The Common Good**

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



*The vantage point of marginal people is a privileged place of encounter with God, whose preference is always for the outcast. There is important wisdom to be gleaned from those on the margins. Vulnerable human beings put us more in touch with the truth of our limited and messy human condition, marked as it is by fragility, incompleteness and inevitable struggle. The experience of God from that place is one of absolute gratuitous mercy and empowering love.*

*- Sr Pat Farrell, OSF, President, US Leadership Conference of Women Religious*

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