

# The Common Good

*Taking a Preferential Option for the Poor*

A newspaper of the Christchurch Catholic Worker

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## Euthanasia - *Killing Me Softly*

Catholic Worker submission to Parliament

The debate over euthanasia is an emotive one but confronts a harsh reality – the choice of ending life prematurely. It is current in New Zealand with legislation permitting it possible. We already have older people with a lifetime of contribution to their families and our nation, who hold a wealth of experience and wisdom and have become our most valuable asset, considering the possibility they might end their lives prematurely because of their illness or age. Or, because ‘they have outlived their usefulness.’ Or, because ‘they don’t want to be a burden to others’.

In allowing itself to be swayed by such arguments, our society is at risk in denying one of the most fundamental truths underpinning human existence - that there is a natural cycle to life: we are born, we live, we die.

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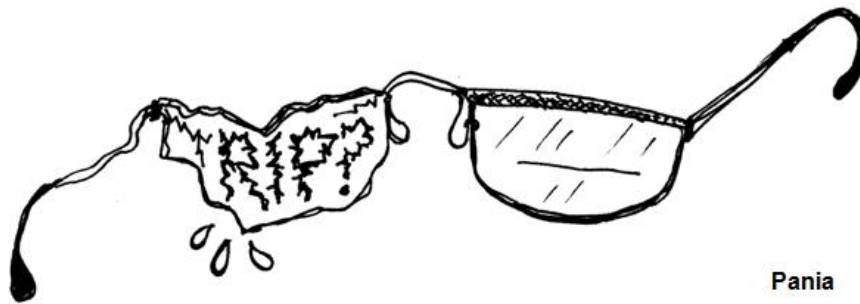
***In allowing itself to be swayed by such arguments, our society is at risk in denying one of the most fundamental truths underpinning human existence - that there is a natural cycle to life: we are born, we live, we die.***

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We don’t propose to deal with all the arguments against euthanasia or assisted suicide. Many are compelling. We wish to look at one in particular.

As members of the worldwide Catholic Worker community, we join Christians of every tradition and recognise God as Creator of all that exists, the guiding spirit behind the creation of the cosmos including human persons, and the pulse and guide of modern life. We believe this great Creator Spirit is everywhere around us and within us. We hold the life and the teachings of Jesus as revealed in the New Testament to be a manual to

follow. We accept the inviolability of life in all its forms.



Pania

### Shifting the Moral Compass

The most fundamental argument against euthanasia is that we are eroding yet another foundation block upon which

humanity has been built for millennia. Once we formally legislate a pathway to this end, we will never recover the value we have discarded. It will become totally acceptable to think in terms of ‘early termination of life’, as the concept moves into mainstream parlance.

This situation will create an absolute dilemma for many older people as they approach the end of their lives. ‘Am I using too many resources? Should I be getting out of the way?’ Having worked so hard to build up their retirement assets, they will see them being eaten up by rest home care and medical expenses, their remaining resources shrinking week by week. What will they leave to their families? Well may they reach a state of mind where ‘the right to life’ can become ‘the duty to die.’ Shakespeare’s seventh stage of life could become as vulnerable as the first stage!

We say that civil society should be built on a moral basis that protects and enhances each of its members without exception from conception until natural death. Euthanasia should be anathema to it. It is a concept that shouldn’t even enter our moral orbit. To erode such a foundation stone is simply dangerous. It places us on a very slippery slope. To argue that it is the compassionate option is emotive and misleading. We could argue the same about any other moral principle, including murder and infanticide for deformed children. Think of the savings in healthcare costs!

As Catholics Workers, we stand on an alternative biblical moral foundation stone. All life is sacred, from beginning to end. The origin and constant heartbeat of



life is a gift from God. To tamper with that leaves us morally rudderless.

## **Our Materialist Culture**

We all know that the modern consumer society is a 'throw away' culture. Our western culture is more materialist than ever atheistic communism was! Our generation has turned greed, status and acquisition into an art form. More and more our lives are dominated and controlled by trans-national corporations. Our embrace of the TPPA is simply the latest evidence of this. Their nihilistic philosophy states that outside financial worth, utility and profitability, everything else can ultimately be consigned to the scrapheap. This includes, where necessary, the sick, the 'unproductive' and the elderly.

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And this is where the rubber hits the road. Where is

### **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, Joseph Cardijn and Thomas Merton. We offer hospitality to people in need either on a temporary or more permanent basis. We have a continuing outreach to a number of families offering friendship and support. We promote non-violence and a 'small is beautiful' approach to life, practise co-operative work and peace making, focus on issues of justice, support prison ministry, help create intentional communities, and try to practise voluntary poverty and personalism.

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

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

the moral compass within corporate capitalism that constrains and guides it and seeks the common good? Where is the moral compass which says that all people are important, brothers and sisters within one human family? That all should be treated justly? That resources should be shared among all? Where is the compass that guides people 'to act justly, love tenderly, walk humbly with their Creator?' Corporate capitalism certainly does not find its moral compass in Catholic Social Teaching. Nor in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. Nor in any of the other great spiritual and religious traditions. 'Those who abandon Wisdom will die,' (Baruch 4) is a chilling message from the prophet for our time!

Is the Stock Exchange their only moral compass? The Consumer Price Index? Wall Street? If it is, we know there is no true collective morality found in these places. There we find a dog-eat-dog set of values at play, greed, self-interest, ruthlessness and bitter and sometimes violent competition, and theft on an unbelievable grand scale. Such values form the root cause of much modern day warfare as nations battle for remaining resources.

This reality reflects the antithesis of the Reign of God announced by Jesus. It reflects a moral compass in freefall, a tragic scenario playing out tragic consequences!

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### **Euthanasia – a viable option?**

Given the state of this all pervasive culture, it is not hard to see why a thrust for euthanasia or voluntary assisted suicide should have emerged as a viable option. Why would it not? It's an entirely logical development in a culture which defines people not as human beings but as consumers; a culture that conveniently takes God, the Creator Spirit, out of the equation. So when certain people cease to produce, and start to consume too many resources, take up too much 'valuable' time, become too 'expensive' to maintain, surely it is logical to make it easy to dispense with them?

With healthcare costs rising and palliative care (though generally brilliant in New Zealand) not everyone's choice, the push is on to deal more 'efficiently' with those who may be seen by some as a burden to others. We all know who held a similar position in World War II!

And being a burden to others is something most elderly people don't want to be. It's their greatest fear, their greatest worry.

Depression and feelings of uselessness are common among elderly folk. Add a splice of familial indifference or dysfunction, legacy questions, the financial costs, continued failing health and increased disability, and you have a cocktail of potentially lethal proportions. This vulnerability can be so subtly exploited.

In a civilised society that values its people, euthanasia shouldn't even be on the table for discussion.

## Editorial 1 TPPA -- worse than we thought

The Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) signed in Auckland, 4 February 2016, at that modern day cathedral Sky City, amid huge rolling protests from citizens across the country, is worse than we thought. There is a very good reason why the Government has kept it under wraps for so long. The casino was a highly appropriate place to sign this deal, given the huge gamble it entails. The fine print indicates that the Government has taken little note of what a wide ranging group of opponents have been saying for some years.

With good reason did the protests early February highlight the theme, 'death of democracy'. In Christchurch where 1500 rallied, protestors carried a coffin to make the point. In Auckland, where more than 9000 heard Professor Jane Kelsey and US campaigner Lori Wallach speak, the mood of anger was palpable. No wonder the Government operated under a code of strict secrecy, keeping the proposals away from any democratic input and giving the text in advance only to corporate lobbyists.

This Agreement is bad news for most New Zealanders who are not part of the corporate elite. It is obviously bad for democracy, since it gives greater power to corporate interests, thus undermining our parliament in a way never before attempted. It is insulting to Maori, our Treaty partners, who have not been consulted. It is bad for ordinary workers. It is bad for the poor, who will be further disenfranchised.

The Government will be handcuffed in its ability to regulate in the country's best interests. Claims against New Zealand at pro-business international tribunals (ISDS) could be conducted against decisions we wish to make, for example, about mining and overseas ownership of farm land. Rest assured the lawyers running such tribunals will all come from the same corporate pod!

Climate change, the most pressing moral issue of our time, has been removed from the text. Stronger domestic regulation against greenhouse gas emissions, mining, fracking, and pollution will face risks of Tribunal challenge. Farming will be unlikely to get anything like the boost in sales that the negotiators have been claiming.

The Prime Minister has already conceded that some medicines will cost more.

### The Good News

Despite the initial signing in Auckland and the huge spin put on it by the Key Government, the good news is that it is not a done deal yet. In effect, the Auckland signing was an important first step. Governments will only take on its commitments after the TPPA has been ratified by countries representing 85% of the TPPA GDP. That means after Japan, the US and Canada and the other signatories have all legislated for it.

This could take two years or more. The chances of foiling it are actually good. As in the 1980s with the nuclear-free movement, 'TPP Free Zones' are cropping up all over New Zealand. They send a simple message that ordinary people, once aware of the consequences of the TPPA, are resolutely against it. Homes, neighbourhoods, churches, schools, Councils, cities and regions can all declare themselves 'TPP Free'. Think globally, act locally, is more than just a slogan. It has worked before.

The deal has to pass a massive hurdle in the US Congress where Democrats are generally against it and Republicans are wary of supporting an Obama initiative. The Americans know it is in trouble in an election year. Canada is no shoe-in for final ratification, nor is Japan. There have been widespread protests in several signatory countries, who individually have to ratify it in their parliaments.

It is fair to say that Pope Francis, who has been such a vehement critic of neo-liberal economic policies, would hate this. It clashes with all the gospel values he espouses where he speaks. It will help the rich get even richer and disempower the poor even further. On environmental issues, it totally ignores his latest encyclical, *Laudato Si'*.

How can anyone with a heart for social justice support it?

*Jim Consedine*

## Editorial 2 A political sideshow

Why do we need a new flag? We don't. Basically the exercise on a new flag is an exercise in re-branding. And like all good marketing campaign, the 'darker' side of the of the 'product' is glossed over. Twenty- seven million dollars (\$27m) is being spent on a great show of 'democracy' on the flag.

Yet are New Zealanders given a choice on much bigger issues that will really affect the lives and well-being of us all? Where was the 'democracy' when it came to signing the TPPA? The sale of SOEs? Welfare reforms? Industrial animal cruelty? Climate change/oil drilling? The flag debate is a political sideshow.

Who needs a flag? Flags bring to mind historical conquerors and colonisers. Flags representing the colonised people of the world have even been created in very recent years to subvert the colonising empires. Flags are used to show or invoke patriotism or loyalty to one's particular nation – hardly a paving stone towards building world peace!

By giving us a choice on what brand stamp our country will use, the National Government has white-washed and plastered over much more serious issues, and patronised the people they are supposed to represent.

*- Lu Murray Land, CW Hokianga*

# The Cry of the Poor

Jim Consedine

The Christmas week email message from my Filipino nurse friend Suzy was to the point. 'I have been struggling to help my family financially back home. I cannot neglect my very ill mum Rose who has kidney disease. I have talked to my brother and I told them not to go on with the dialysis because it will be a lifetime treatment and we should also take into consideration her present situation and age (75). Her kidneys have collapsed and she has been in hospital for almost a month now. She is still on an NGT feeding and receiving medications intravenously. Still weak and can't be released yet.'

'I have been sending \$200 weekly to support all her rental and medical needs. She is now conscious and keeps on crying. She wants me to come home but I told them to tell her that I can't because I don't have the money. Once again, I am asking for your help even if it will cost a lot of embarrassment on my part.'

Suzy is one of thousands of Filipino workers resident or on working visas helping to keep the New Zealand economy afloat and earn enough money, not just to live here, but also to support her extended family back home, who live in genuine Third World poverty. She and her husband also have five children to support and educate here.

In the Philippines, there is little or no free public hospital care or medical treatment for the poor. Suzy indicated that for her mother to survive much longer, she would need to go on thrice-weekly dialysis and pay for all the medical tests, blood samples and doctor's visits. She simply had no money for any of that. This is what it means to be desperately poor. No proper and sustained medical treatment. Few resources. No money.

As a recipient of a kidney myself in this country, my circumstances and Suzy's mum's could not have been more different. I was well cared for by a world class team of nephrologists, specialists and nurses at Christchurch Hospital. I had many blood tests, scans and hospital visits prior to my operation. Subsequently, I have had innumerable visits and constant on-call care which has seen me through the first 20 months of recovery. Blood tests and follow-up continues to this day, and will be available for the rest of my life.

It comes all absolutely free. This is First World publically funded medicine at its best. I know I am lucky to be living in a country where public healthcare,

although under constant threat from private providers, is usually still available when necessary. I feel much blessed by it.

Not so poor Rose. Only 30 hours after she had emailed me, a sobbing Suzy rang to say that her mother had died. She was heartbroken. As the eldest in her family, she felt she should have been there. Who wouldn't? She didn't know what to do. Who to turn to? Most of her friends are in a similar financial situation to her.

At the Catholic Worker, we decided to try and raise some money and fly her home for the funeral. It was all rushed and pre-Christmas. The cost was going to be in the range of \$2000

– \$3000, as it had to be an urgent flight. The appeal went out and many responded with generosity.

Suzy then came to another very difficult decision. Upon some reflection with some friends, she said she would prefer to stay here in NZ because funerals are expensive in the Philippines and the money raised here was more urgently needed for the funeral costs there. Could she just send the money home to her family so they could bury her mother in dignity without the family having to worry about the funeral account? Of course we agreed.

Suzy's situation was one that thousands of Filipino migrant workers working in New Zealand live with every day. The issue of sickness and death within their families in the Philippines is a constant. Most of them are sending a good portion of their NZ earnings back home monthly. The high house rentals many pay here aggravates their financial situation and leaves them with little to spend on anything other than the bare necessities. In one home I visit, there are 12 Filipino men living in a five-bedroom house with the owner drawing \$1680 per week from his old 1930s dwelling. Each worker is paying \$140 per bed. Not per room. Per bed! Is it any wonder that Pope Francis so consistently attacks the market led neo-liberal economic system which blesses such extortion, labeling it 'grossly sinful.'

I have been deeply moved by Suzy's plight. Whenever I see her, I will be reminded that behind many smiling Filipino faces one currently sees in our workforce is a struggle to survive and provide for families at home living on limited income.

I do wonder sometimes whether we take their gracious presence, their work ethic, their religious fervour and their skills for granted?



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# Ash Wednesday Reflection

Art Laffin

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. Lent is a time for personal and societal repentance, radical conversion and transformation. Living under the brutal occupation of the Roman empire, Jesus declared: ‘The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel.’ Living in the U.S. empire, which is responsible for so much needless death and suffering in our world, we need to heed Jesus’ proclamation now more than ever.

As people from different faith-based communities committed to nonviolence, justice and peace, we summon the cloud of witnesses as we come to pray and witness outside the White House today, calling for repentance and conversion of ourselves, our society and our churches to the Gospel way of love, justice, and a reverence for all life and creation.

During this Lent, and in this Jubilee Year of Mercy, we are especially mindful of the imperative to be people of mercy. Jesus proclaimed: ‘Blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy...Be merciful just as God is merciful.’ We, therefore, call on all people everywhere to become practitioners of mercy, compassion and nonviolence as we seek to end all social injustice, violence, torture and killing.

Living in a nation whose origin is rooted in slavery and genocide, practicing mercy means repenting for those sins that has caused so much needless death and suffering in our society and world—past and present. It means committing ourselves to eradicating what Martin Luther King, Jr. called the ‘triple evils of poverty, racism and militarism.’ It means doing away with a corporate, political and military order that is based on greed and

violence and which translates into systemic domination and exploitation. It means repenting for and making reparations to those countries that the U.S. has inflicted massive violence against.

Practicing mercy also means protecting our sacred earth, our common home. As the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientist* has now moved the doomsday clock to three minutes to midnight because climate change and the danger of nuclear war pose an ever-growing threat to civilization, we must end the climate crisis, safeguard the environment, abolish war and eliminate all nuclear weapons.

We must also abolish killer drones and all weapons, halt all arms sales and close all U.S. military bases worldwide. We implore those in power to unequivocally renounce the use of force and pursue nonviolent-diplomatic actions to bring about just resolutions to conflicts worldwide, including ending the U.S.-backed Israeli occupation of Palestine. And we call on the U.S. government to make peace with the Islamic State instead of bombing them.

On this Ash Wednesday, we commit ourselves to working with sister’s and brother’s everywhere to create the Beloved Community as we seek to make God’s reign of love, justice and peace a reality in our society and world, right here, right now!

*Art Laffin has been a member of the Catholic Worker for more than 30 years and lives at the Dorothy Day CW in Washington DC*

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# God’s Justice is Restorative

Richard Rohr OFM

Almost all religion and cultures that I know of have believed in one way or another that sin and evil are to be punished, and retribution is to be demanded of the sinner in this world - and usually the next world too. It is a dualistic system of reward and punishment, good guys and bad guys, and makes perfect sense to the ego. I call it the normal economy of merit, or ‘meritocracy’, and it is the best that prisons, courtrooms, wars, lawyers, and even most of the Church, which should know better, can do.

The Revelation from the Cross and the Twelve Steps (of AA), however, believe that sin and failure are in fact the setting and opportunity for the transformation and enlightenment of the offender – and then the future will take care of itself. It is a mystery that makes sense to the soul and is entirely on an ‘economy of grace’, which makes sense only to those who have experienced it.

The first is a system of retributive justice and has controlled the story-line of 99% of history. The second is called restorative justice and has always been a small

minority position, even though it is clear and the revolutionary pattern of Jesus before, during, and after the Crucifixion. It seems history could not see what it was not ready to see. But in our time, more and more are ready to understand. One cannot help but believe that there is an evolution of human and spiritual consciousness. ‘Spiral Dynamics’ is one of the many fine attempts today to describe this evolution of consciousness. As any good therapist will tell you, you cannot heal what you do not acknowledge, and what you do not consciously acknowledge will remain in control of you from within, festering and destroying you and those around you.

The ‘economy of grace’ was exemplified in Desmond Tutu’s *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* in South Africa after the fall of apartheid, where all had to take proper and public responsibility for their mistakes, not for the sake of any punishment but for the sake of truth and healing.

This is revolutionary and unheard of in human history but is actually totally biblical, starting with the prophet Ezechiel during and after the Exile, and dramatically lived out by Jesus. Ezechiel laid the biblical groundwork for truth-speaking, total accountability and restorative justice. This method of restorative justice is now being used in some negotiations, conflicts and prisons around the world and could well change our very notion of justice and bring it much closer to divine justice.

Only mutual apology, healing and forgiveness offer a sustainable future for humanity. Otherwise, we are controlled by the past, individually and corporately. We all need to apologise and we all need to forgive, or this

human project will surely self-destruct. Almost two-thirds of Jesus' teaching is either directly or indirectly about forgiveness. Forgiveness is to let go of our hope for a different or better past. Such acceptance leads to great freedom as long as there is also accountability and healing.

One would hope that the Church would be leading the way here, and indeed it was the Catholic Bishops' Conference of New Zealand who wrote a groundbreaking document in 1989 on this subject called 'Revenge of Reconciliation.'

*Richard Rhor, Breathing Under Water – Spirituality and the Twelve Steps, 2011.*

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## Honouring the Prophets - Professor Jane Kelsey

As the Trans-Pacific Partnership battle rages, one person is a constant 'turn to' hub of up-to-date information and informed comment. Jane Kelsey, professor of law at Auckland University, has become the trusted face of opposition to the TPPA for the tens of thousands opposed.

Jane has lectured in law at Auckland University since 1979. Besides her local teaching, she is active internationally as a researcher, analyst and advisor on globalisation, trade in services and investment agreements. And the TPPA. Her latest book, *The FIRE Economy*, published in 2015, was just the latest of a string of publications delving into the impact of economic liberalism (Rogernomics) here in NZ. She edited the book *No Ordinary Deal – Unmasking the Trans-Pacific Partnership Free Trade Agreement* in 2010. As recent as January 2016, she toured NZ with American Lori Wallach, speaking at rallies opposing the TPPA which drew thousands in the main centres.

Her voice is a prophetic one for our time. From the heart of the academic establishment, she campaigns tirelessly to shine a light on the secretive TPPA and put the fine print (which could impact negatively on us all) into simple understandable language for everyday use.

Jane was the first to knowledgeably warn us years ago of the dangers of the TPPA. Of how it was part of a worldwide corporate grab for control of trade and investment, which would adversely affect the poor, and would badly weaken our democratic processes. For this,

she has been vilified.

Being a prophet is not a title. It is not a special honour. Like other true vocations, prophecy is simply an inner call. It is a call each must follow in conscience. No true prophet seeks to be one. Nor do all necessarily have religious beliefs. Jane is not a specifically religious person, though undoubtedly her passion for truth and driving sense of social justice tell us she is deeply spiritual.



Prophets like Jane know they will never win the popularity stakes. They can be guaranteed misunderstanding, even persecution. They will be hammered by the righteous. By the corporate media. They get tagged with 'rent-a-crowd' slurs from the Prime Minister down because they confront the established order, seeking to promote fairer justice in a grossly unjust world.

That has been Jane's role for a long time. But she is as active now as she ever was. She is still shining a light to help all to see a pathway through the murky secretive waters of the TPPA, helping to expose the hidden traps built into the fine print.

We honour Jane Kelsey. A prophet for our time.

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## Otaki CW news

Forrest, Krista and their four girls have moved to Otaki, and have been enjoying being part of life at the Otaki CW farm. The children always have a friend next door, and there is always a chat and a cuppa tea happening somewhere not far away. We put out *A Calendar of Saints for Pope Francis' Year of Mercy*. They've been well received. Anyone who missed out, and would like one for the remaining 11 months of the year can let us know, and we'll send them one.

Jo took her vows to become an Oblate in the Third Order of Benedictines (I hope that's the correct terminology) at a lovely mass at the Home of Compassion, Wellington. Fr Peter Healy presided. We

recently discovered that in her later years, Dorothy Day was a Benedictine Oblate also.

Late last year Adi, Jack and Finn, and several others from Otaki put their bodies on the line, picketing the Wellington Arms Expo. Quite a lot of argie-bargie and Adi arrested. As I write, Jack and Finn are in Auckland, protesting the TPPA. God be with them, and with all (protesters and police alike).

Despite the enormity of the powers that enslave, we know that the 'little way' of love will ultimately prevail.

*Forrest Chambers, forrest\_c@clear.net.nz*



## peace palace

on a day that started in stillness  
and ended in storm  
the temperature dropped like a stone

gulls flapped like loosed  
bunting  
over the canal

time and half spheres  
old wounds  
stitched themselves more neatly down

you go  
but leave a corner of a foreign field  
forever peaceful

*Tracey Sullivan, Anzac Day, 2015*

## lenten lament

a biting wind  
sweeps this desolate beach  
signaling the start of Lent  
that time of repentance

where great sins cry out  
for sorrow and tears  
sins of greed, self-indulgence  
war mongering and violence

oppression against women, children  
against this very climate  
its winds, its waters, its air  
sins against hope

this cold blast  
watering windswept eyes  
carries a challenge  
to receptive souls

*Jim Consedine*

# Around the Traps

# **Christmas Day was celebrated** with a fine dinner at Suzanne Aubert CW. More than 40 guests shared a wonderful meal prepared by Judith, Sharmaine, Leony, Sharon, Francis, Raewyn, Natalie and Carmen, aided by a team of elves led by Joseph, Alex, Jacob and Tui, who did the dishes and other less glamorous jobs. As usual Jim swanned in at noon to say grace and join in the feasting. Later he, Francis and Peter Jones entertained with the guitars. Eventually, the guests departed carrying ice-cream containers of left-overs to guide them through Boxing Day.

# **Canterbury Maori Health Statistics.** Data from the Ministry of Health indicates that there are 430,800 Maori living in the Canterbury District Health Board area. Many face severe health issues. Children in Maori households are living in dire financial hardship at a rate 70% higher than non-Maori, with one quarter of children living in homes that have less than \$15,172 household income.

The flow-on from that is that they suffer poverty related health issues and mental health problems at a higher rate. For example, Maori children under 15 years old are four times as likely as non-Maori to be hospitalised for acute rheumatic fever, which goes hand-in-hand with low incomes and poverty. 'This is a preventable disease which goes with poor housing and damp conditions,' said Child Poverty Action spokesperson, Susan St John. In terms of mental health, Maori were nearly 40% more likely to be admitted to hospital for a mental disorder. Life expectancy is also shorter, 2.8 years for Maori men at 77 years, 2.6 years for women at 81 years.

# **Donations from our annual Advent appeal** totalled \$9,587 from 102 individual contributors which is very gratifying. Our annual expenditure is about \$22,500 which covers major items like hospitality, *The Common Good* and our outreach work. We very much appreciate your generosity and thank you.

# **Meditation/Contemplation Group** - Perhaps the best-kept secret in the Catholic Worker is our Meditation/Contemplation group where we meet to pray in silence using the mantra or prayer word to still our chattering minds so as to be present to the inner Christ. This is the contemplation that's necessary to underpin our action in the world. Our group is linked with the NZ and World Communities for Christian Meditation (see [wccm.org](http://wccm.org) and [nzccm.org](http://nzccm.org)). We meet on Tuesdays at 5-6 pm to meditate in the beautiful chapel of Sacred Heart Church, Spencer St, Addington. Readers of *The Common Good* - come and join us (enter by the door nearest the presbytery). Phone Sally 3665479 / 0273383820

# **Child Poverty in NZ** - In a report released in December 2015, it was claimed that 305,000 New Zealand children now live in poverty - 45,000 more than a year ago. That was the finding of a new report from the

Children's Commissioner Russel Wills. Of those children, half live in a cold house, lack decent clothing and go without fruit and vegetables. That means 150,000 New Zealand children without adequate housing, food or clothing. And most children who are in poverty now will remain so for the rest of their childhood.

# **There are currently 20 000 innocent children in NZ with a parent in prison.** Maori leader Sir Pita Sharples recently challenged New Zealanders to make a difference by supporting one of these kids through support for PILLARS, a community organization specifically set up to support families of prisoners. Sir Pita is its patron. Contact - [www.pillars.org.nz](http://www.pillars.org.nz), or [enquiries@pillars.org.nz](mailto:enquiries@pillars.org.nz).

# **The wealthiest 62 people in the world** now own as much among themselves as owned by one half (3.5 billion) of the world's population. The wealth of the richest 62 people has risen by 44 percent since 2010, while the wealth of the poorest 3.5 billion people fell 41 percent. About NZ\$11.74 trillion of individuals' wealth sits in off-shore tax havens. If tax were paid on that income, an extra NZ\$292.9 billion would be available for the public purse to pay for health, education, public transport and housing needs of poorer people. Multi-national companies and wealthy elites are playing by different rules to everyone else, refusing to pay the taxes that society needs to function.

- *Oxfam, World Economic Report, January 2016*

# **Last year brought further revelations from Edward Snowden** that, not only have the GCSB and Waihopai spy-base been conducting mass surveillance on New Zealanders for years, they have also been spying on behalf of the US National Security Agency (NSA) on a number of other countries, from our Pacific Island neighbours to Bangladesh and China. They also spied on NZ Cabinet minister Tim Groser's rivals from other countries during his unsuccessful attempt to become head of the World Trade Organisation. The Government either completely ignored or tried to minimise these damning revelations. The so called 'independent' Intelligence Review can be guaranteed to recommend even more repressive spying agency laws to 'protect us from the terrorists'. The Government has embroiled NZ in America's new war in Iraq. Will Syria be next?

- *Anti-bases Campaign, Jan 2016*

# **A recently released report from Physicians for Social Responsibility** calculated that in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001, U.S. wars there have killed between 1.3 - 2 million civilians. The wars have cost trillions of dollars, made huge profits for arms corporations and left the countries more unstable than ever.

*Body Count: Casualty Figures after Ten Years of War*



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# Francis' priorities

Thomas Reece SJ

Pope Francis has been very clear in laying out his priorities in his talks and writings. His priorities include:

- A poor church for the poor
- The church as a field hospital, a church of mercy and compassion
- The practice of synodality at all levels of the church
- The end of clericalism and the empowerment of the laity
- The promotion of justice and peace and the protection of the environment

## A poor church for the poor

From the moment of his election, Francis has made the poor a priority in his concerns. He constantly talks about the poor and the marginalized, the immigrants and refugees. He has called on Christians to serve, accompany, and protect the poor.

Serving the poor is the traditional work of charity — feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, etc.

Protecting the poor is done through working for justice so that the poor are not exploited or marginalized but have access to jobs and dignity. It means changing economic and social structures that handicap the poor.

Accompanying the poor means welcoming them into our churches and communities, sitting down with them, listening to their concerns, and becoming their friends.

## The church as a field hospital

For Francis, the church is not a country club for the blessed. It is a field hospital that cares for the wounded.

The first words of evangelization, he says, must be about the mercy and compassion of God, not a list of rules and regulations, let alone words of condemnation. This is why he speaks of the Eucharist as food for the weary not a reward for the perfect.

Francis wants a pastoral church, preaching a gospel-based message of love, compassion and justice — not a nagging church wagging its finger at people.

In other words, the church needs to preach the gospel not the catechism.

## Synodality

At the 2015 Synod on the Family, Francis did something extraordinary. He urged the attending bishops to speak boldly, to even disagree with him. He invited the church to return to the open discussions and even arguments that marked the Second Vatican Council. He reopened the window that had been opened by Pope John XXIII and closed by Pope John Paul II.

‘Open and fraternal debate makes theological and pastoral thought grow,’ he said. ‘That doesn’t frighten me. What’s more, I look for it.’

For Francis, synodality, open discussion in the church, is essential to its life. It is not something only for synods

of bishops, it is necessary at every level of the church. ‘The path ahead is dialogue among yourselves, dialogue in your presbyterates, dialogue with lay persons, dialogue with families, dialogue with society.’

The big question is: can synodality be brought to local dioceses and parishes?

## End of clericalism

Francis’ harshest words are against clericalism and careerism in the church. He sounds like Jesus denouncing the scribes and Pharisees. He insists that leadership is for service. That shepherds must smell like their sheep. And that priests and bishops are at the bottom of the pyramid, not the top.

As he said to the American bishops in Washington last October, ‘Be pastors close to people, pastors who are neighbours and servants.’ But just as the scribes and Pharisees hated Jesus, many clerics do not like Francis, who they see as undermining their authority.

Francis also wants to empower the laity to take up their role in evangelization and in reshaping the world according to Gospel values. As he challenged the 600 Latin and Central American bishops at their 2013 meeting in Brazil,

- ‘Do we make the lay faithful sharers in the mission?’
- Do diocesan and parish councils, ‘whether pastoral or financial, provide real opportunities for laypeople to participate in pastoral consultation, organization and planning?’
- Do we give the laity ‘the freedom to continue discerning, in a way befitting their growth as disciples, the mission which the Lord has entrusted to them? Do we support them and accompany them, overcoming the temptation to manipulate them or infantilize them?’

## Justice, peace and the environment

Francis, like the popes before him, believes that Christians should be active in the world, working for justice and peace and protecting the environment.

No one can read his 2013 apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, without becoming aware of his radical critique of the current economic and political system that worships the golden calf of money and power. He freely criticizes capitalism and globalization for not helping the poor.

His 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si’*, has also inspired Christians and non-Christians to be concerned about our common home, Mother Earth. Protecting the environment is not an optional aspect of Christian experience. According to Francis, it is essential to the Christian life of virtue in the 21st century.

*Thomas Reese SJ, a former editor of the monthly America magazine, is senior analyst for NCR, from which this article is re-published.*

# Letters

Sarpy County Jail,  
1208 Golden gate Drive,  
Papillion, NE 68046  
20 January 2016

Hello Thomas Merton CW,

Wow! International mail! These small town guards don't know what to think. Ha! Ha!

Thank you so much for your card. It is by far the prettiest thing in my cell to look at.

This is a very blessed time for me and your support is appreciated deeply.

Peace, love,

*Jessica Reznicek*

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Peter Maurin CW,  
Queensland

20 October 2015

Dear CWs,

Early in October, I was moved to hear on radio that Brisbane's Archbishop Mark Coleridge had offered to take 100 Syrian refugee families into Catholic communities in Brisbane. I have written to thank him and offer support. A few days later I had a sick feeling in my stomach as I heard Australian pilots had dropped our first bombs inside Syria, adding to the demonic madness which is the war there – the war that has created all these refugees. How ironic!

We seemed to learned absolutely nothing from the evil we have inflicted in the Middle East, especially from our invasion of Iraq in 2003 that has created a living hell there. Our invasion left a million or more people dead, millions of refugees, and decimated the Christian community. Instead of hanging our heads in shame, we are now doing some more killing. And creating more refugees!

The ISIS monster has largely emerged from the terrible war-making of the United States and its allies, including Australia. The US and Saudi Arabia funded and armed the war against the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad. Now, suddenly one of its monsters, ISIS, has got out of control. Now we are supposed to be destroying the ISIS monster. What if, by some unlikely miracle, we destroy ISIS by our bombs? What then? Do we resume the war against Assad? When will we learn that killing people is not the solution to the problem of killing?

Blessings for the New Year,

*Jim Dowling*

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Peter Maurin Farm,  
2705 Mt Mee Rd,  
Dayboro,  
Queensland 4521

Dear Jim,

Nice to hear from you and get your letter and articles. The TPPA has been passed here in Australia. Wow! How can we be so stupid? I think they just want to get into Aboriginal land, exploit it, get rid of the vulnerable. We've had it so good. How could we sign our land and our rights away like this? I guess we'll learn the hard way.

Otherwise, we are all good here. The Brisbane CW down the road is thriving. So heart-warming to see young ones take up the challenge! Our four eldest are in CW communities now. When people said, 'we must be breeding CWs,' I used to laugh and say, 'no guarantee of that'. But at the moment it's true! After all, the main task we have is proclaiming and living the gospel.

My husband Jim was in court in Rockhampton in October to face minor charges over interrupting US/Aust/Asia/South Pacific war-games earlier in the year. He spoke of non-violence and Jesus' teachings. It made no difference. He was found guilty of course, and fined. We await the next step, as he never pays fines to swell government coffers.

Hope all is well with you and yours. May God's abundance grace be with you,

*Anne Rampa.*

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Movement for the Abolition of War,  
London N4.  
30 November 2015

Dear CW friends,

They say that 'fair exchange is no robbery'. So our newsletter Abolish War is a small return for your ever interesting *The Common Good*. Hardly fair though! CG is 12 pages, ours only four! Keep at it. You are a nice bright light in a rather gloomy world. Note our slogan: War causes climate change. Climate change causes war!

Warm greetings,

*Bruce Kent*  
Vice-President

12 February 2016

Dear Jim,

What a long time it seems since I opened your envelope while sitting on a prison bunk in Lexington, KY. I've carried your letter to many spots since then.

You had written to me about the TPPA. Thank you from 'the deep heart's core,' for all who are valiantly working to defeat this pernicious plan. Please forgive my long, very long, delay in responding. It seems that the ball is in the court of U.S. activists to persuade U.S. legislators not to approve the TPPA. As you can imagine, the motives for defeating the TPPA proposal on the part of U.S. legislators, seldom or never reflects concern to alleviate poverty and reduce the terrible income inequities that plague our planet now.

After being released from prison, I visited young friends in Kabul several times and did quite a lot of roaming in the U.S., generally as a guest of communities earnestly working to end wars and stop U.S. economic violence.

Your CW witness on behalf of prisoners, restorative justice, hospitality, human rights and ending wars encourages me. Howard Zinn believed in the basic desire of human beings to live at peace with other human beings 'once they have divested themselves of the deceptions, the nationalism, and the racism that is provoked by war.' Cheers for such divestment.

Sincerely,

*Kathy Kelly*

*PS On 23 February, Kathy Kelly along with CW Brian Terrell were arrested on trespass charges after trying to deliver a loaf of bread and a letter to drone operators at Volk Field, an Air National Guard base in Wisconsin. Drone killings don't distinguish between military and civilian targets. Kathy believes that sharing bread is a sacred action; drone killings are acts of terrorism.*



Brian Terrell and Kathy Kelly

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

A Catholic Worker project  
Cheaper alternatives to consumer funerals

Wellington  
8 December 2015

Dear friends,

We valued the list of NZ prophets (CG75) past and present. There were good friends and mentors among them. Our Quarterly Meeting may be joining the local Catholic parish to study the encyclical of Pope Francis.

Your friend,

*Barbara Mountier*

40 Perth Street,  
Invercargill 9810

Greetings Jim,

Christmas day went well again down here. We had a bumper Christmas dinner for the poor – 31 someone counted. The dinner was prepared by Sister Marie Goretti. We still have dinner for the poor each Sunday throughout the year. Before we start, I explain a gospel passage briefly and then all join in a hymn and I invite any who wish to wait after dinner for our prayer group. Last Sunday there was a good number, so I am grateful to God.

Blessings to all CW members,

*Fr Tom Keyes.*

#### **Call to Action**

The future of humanity does not lie solely in the hands of great leaders, the great powers and the elites. It is fundamentally in the hands of peoples and in their ability to organize. It is in their hands, which can guide with humility and conviction this process of change. I am with you. Each of us, let repeat from the heart: no family without lodging, no rural worker without land, no laborer without rights, no people without sovereignty, no individual without dignity, no child without childhood, no young person without a future, no elderly person without a venerable old age. Keep up your struggle and, please, take great care of Mother Earth. Believe me; I am sincere when I say from the heart that I pray for you and with you.

Pope Francis, Bolivia, July 2015

#### **CW website**

Leading articles from the first 20 years of  
***The Common Good***  
Alternative funerals  
Restorative justice  
Other theological issues  
[www.catholicworker.org.nz](http://www.catholicworker.org.nz)

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**The Common Good**

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



But the final word is love... We cannot love God unless we love each other, and to love we must know each other. We know God in the breaking of bread, and we know each other in the breaking of bread, and we are not alone any more. Heaven is a banquet and life is a banquet too, even with a crust, where there is companionship.

Dorothy Day