

# The Common Good

**Taking a Preferential Option for the Poor**

A newspaper of the Christchurch Catholic Worker

No 82, Spring 2017

Price: free or donation

## Institutionalised Poverty – a national disgrace

Jim Consedine

Last Christmas Eve, I was thinking of the Tangiwai train disaster of 1953, indelibly etched in my childhood memory by the sadness and shock of the 151 lives lost. With me being from a railway family, Wellington to Auckland by train was a journey that our family often took to visit my grandmother and aunts in Auckland. We made the same trip by train a month after the disaster, crawling over a floodlit makeshift Tangiwai bridge and, looking down, saw carriages still lying abandoned in the river far below. Several heroic efforts had been made to warn the driver and save the train. All proved fruitless. The warnings came too late.

An avalanche of destruction far more widespread, though not as focussed, has been the effects of the neo-liberal economic policies which New Zealand (and the world) have adopted these past several decades. The negative imprint is everywhere, and has lowered New Zealand into almost a basket-case category in some areas of social development. The UN report (UNICEF Innocenti Report Card, 2016) released recently, places New Zealand 34th out of 42 OECD/EU countries for the welfare of its children and young people. This of the country where allegedly a great heart beats within our collective breast, a heart that makes us a great place to live, a 'great place to bring up kids.'

Not so it seems. These latest UN figures rip that illusion to shreds. Comparing young people's rates of mental health, neonatal mortality, suicide, drunkenness and teen pregnancy, we are failing even more drastically being rated 38th out of the 42 countries. Most alarmingly, we also have the highest rate of teen suicide among all these countries. That is sickening!

*At the heart of the issue lie three key elements: structured economic inequality, social injustice and spiritual deprivation. Until we name all three and tackle*



*them better, things won't improve.*

### Structured economic inequality and social injustice

Economic inequality and social injustice on a global scale is an accepted fact. It has been with us for generations. But it has sky-rocketed in NZ since 1984 with the introduction of neo-liberal laissez faire capitalism by Roger Douglas and the fourth Labour Government. This economic model has been promoted by every government since, most recently by the National Government through the (premature) signing of the TPPA. It is the doctrine of unrestricted freedom in commerce where the strong thrive and the weak fail. It is a rigged system that creates winners and losers. The losers make up most of the awful statistics. Their numbers are exploding exponentially as wealth falls into fewer hands.

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From 1984, New Zealand's economic goals and processes were restructured, the trade unions and Public Service deliberately undermined. The government re-tilted the economic model and took away many safety nets for the poor and vulnerable. They knocked away many solid piles upon which social equality had been built over generations and replaced them with a lopsided set of moveable structures which favoured the already



rich and powerful. These changes have led directly to the scandalous levels of institutionalised poverty we now have, especially among young people and families with children.

Economic inequality leads to social injustice. They are inseparable. This economic disease was already spreading world-wide from the 1970s. Its proponents set out to get their hands on the world economic levers of power. Largely they have succeeded. A 2017 Oxfam report, shows the richest 1 percent of the world's people, own more than the remaining 99 percent. How much more unequal can you get? Billions more people have been left in poverty.

In New Zealand, while many opposed the changes, those with the most power and wealth and those colonised by its glitter, generally welcomed the new economics with open arms. They proclaimed 'a brave new world' where everyone could stand on their own two feet and make a success of life. This left more and more people in greatly reduced circumstances and became the fertile ground for the inequality and poverty that has since developed. This institutionalised social injustice is the poisoned fruit of those changes.

## Spiritual Deprivation

In a secular culture which has lost its spiritual

### Who are we?

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

moorings, the third key is spiritual deprivation. Many ignore the spiritual dimension to life, a basic concept known to humanity since the beginning. A well-known metaphor states that, in life, we sit on a chair with four legs – physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual. Each needs its own recognition and development. The chair must be situated in supportive surroundings. Knock away one leg or despoil the surroundings, the whole chair collapses.

Pursuing the metaphor, to prevent collapse, each of the four sectors of life, including the spiritual, needs to be nourished. While most accept as common sense the need to keep physically fit, intellectually alert and emotionally stable, our western culture neglects our spiritual needs. So many today lack a wellspring of spirituality, a tradition, on which to draw. They have no place to return to rest, to drink from and be nourished. They are left spiritually bereft.

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***Neoliberal capitalism, built as it is on greed, competition, status and individualism, has no soul. It is the antithesis of the teachings of Jesus and all great religious traditions. Its tentacles pervade and warp nearly every aspect of life today – work, sport, leisure, home life, even religion. The tragedy is that many keep trying to find a soul within it. This is a dead-end street. I repeat. It has no soul.***

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Yet it is essential to nourish the inner being where values reside, feelings behind emotions are held, where in conjunction with our hearts and intellects we make sense of our world, and where 'the soul', the very core of our being, resides. This is a critical part of our insight into who we are as human beings and what makes each of us distinct from someone else. Unless this part is recognised and nourished constantly, we run the risk of our inner life-force drying up, our spirit dying.

Billions of people recognise this truth and acknowledge the great nurturing Creator Spirit many call God, Atua or Io, Jehovah, Alla'h, Yahweh and many other names. Spiritual nourishment also comes from good relationships, beauty, creativity, productive work, meaningful existence, a positive cultural life and belonging to good wholesome communities. Nourished, our inner self-reflective processes help us discern the meaning and direction of life itself. Without this nourishment, we are unable to function fully as human beings. This is a major reason why so many today don't function well.

Neoliberal capitalism, built as it is on greed, competition, status and individualism, has no soul. It is the antithesis of the teachings of Jesus and all great religious traditions. Its tentacles pervade and warp nearly every aspect of life today – work, sport, leisure, home life, even religion. The tragedy is that many keep trying to find a soul within it. This is a dead-end street. I repeat. It has no soul. It cannot fulfil the inner spirit, except at an illusionary temporary level. As it has moved to

dominate centre stage these past decades, Western culture's spiritual roots are withering, its fruit dying on the vine.

Nearly 3000 years ago, the psalmist wrote, *'they made a calf at Horeb and worshipped the golden image; they exchanged the image of God for a bull that eats grass.'* (Ps 105). Because the ideology of neo-liberal capitalism places material goals (a molten calf) as its central focus, Pope John Paul II called it 'the new idolatry'. It leaves a huge spiritual vacuum. For some, this is partly filled by political action, by social outreach, by devotion to family. For others, a drug/alcohol/porn/consumer-soaked culture of escapism has developed attempting to fill the gap. The negative social results are everywhere.

## Conclusion

Humans are continually evolving as a species. We cannot go back. While retaining the essential moral

pillars of the past, the challenge is to make sure our spiritual processes evolve too. Millions are doing that already, often outside traditional structures. Pope Francis has taught repeatedly, unfettered capitalism is a destructive economic system. Drawing on the Gospel in *Laudato Si'*, he begs us to find new ways of being human that recognise and develop a lifegiving spirituality and acknowledges the inter-dependence of all created things.

The Tangiwai rail disaster was due to an avalanche nobody saw coming. The warnings came too late. No one can say that they can't see the economic, social and spiritual avalanche which is dividing NZ society into two halves. Those with power and money and those without. The haves and the have-nots.

The warning bells are ringing everywhere. Are we listening?

## Editorial 1 Buying Purple Undies

I recently was wandering past a Postie Plus shop when I decided I needed to buy some underpants. Finding my way to the menswear department, I found I could buy a smart purple pair for just \$3. They were made in Vietnam, XXL size. I thought I was onto a bargain and brought 3 pairs.

Driving home, I had a sudden rush of conscience about the purchase. What sort of bargain was it and from whose point of view? I certainly had an economic bargain, but at what cost to the workers who made them, their families? The human family itself is degraded by the conditions under which these people work. Were these Vietnamese brothers and sisters being forced to make garments in oppressive sweatshop conditions?

Garment factory sweatshops are in so many countries now. They run on slave-labour wages. They are a poisoned fruit of neo-liberalism capitalism. The best known are in China (64 cents an hour), Vietnam, (25 cents), Bangladesh, (13 cents), India, (33 cents) and Mexico, (50 cents). Situations vary, but long hours, low pay, harsh working conditions, no union protection and family separations are the norm. They produce for all the big brands – Nike, Adidas, Walmart, the list goes on.

How could anyone make a pair of undies and ship them halfway around the world and sell them for just \$3? They can't, except through the use of oppressive labour conditions. The moral question is: what to do, when one realises that they are made in sweatshops by workers making a barely subsistent wage and working between 70 – 80 hours a week?

Available evidence suggests that the use of contract labour rather than employing workers on guaranteed contracts is widespread in a large number of countries including Bangladesh, India, China, Vietnam, Pakistan, Mexico, Honduras, the US, Turkey, South

Korea and Thailand. While some garment and textile workers are employed in factories or workshops, a substantial portion are sub-contracted homeworkers who carry out paid work for businesses or their intermediaries, typically on a piece-rate basis, within their own homes. In theory, this could seem to be okay. In practice, the few cents paid per item makes it another form of economic slavery. A shirt made this way that retails for \$80 in the US can be made for 20c - 60c labour cost in one of these places. The stock exchanges tell us who is making the money!

Studies suggest that as much as 60 percent of garment production, especially of women's and children's clothing, is done at home in both Latin America and Asia. This involves hundreds of millions of workers being paid a pittance for hours of painstaking work. Women represent a significant majority of the homeworkers who cut and stitch garments together for the global apparel trade.

I'd like to say I have a grand solution. Sadly, I haven't. Naturally I support social justice campaigns that highlight the issue. Having googled information, I am now more aware of what brands and shops to avoid. People like me still need underpants. Since the demise of our own garment industry in the 1980s–90s, these countries appear to be the only ones making them, except for a few tiny brands (eg Thunderpants) making for a niche market in NZ.

I've settled on saying a prayer for the workers who made them each time I put my purple undies on. It is a tiny act of solidarity and a reminder that I am benefiting from their labour and skills. It links me with those who made them and are exploited in the process. They are my brothers and sisters in Christ. I'm grateful for their work.

—Jim Consedine

## Editorial 2 A Nuclear Breakthrough

Twenty-one years on from the historic 1996 World Court decision making nuclear weapons illegal, it was a privilege and an absolute joy for Rob Green and me on July 7th to witness the standing ovation in the UN for the 122 non-nuclear states, supported by their partners in civil society, which greeted the adoption of the Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons. It was also a proud moment for the group of 10 New Zealand diplomats and NGOs representing various organisations as we gathered after the vote for a photo holding our Nuclear Free Aotearoa New Zealand rainbow banner. It was an emotional moment as we also celebrated together the 30th anniversary of our iconic nuclear free legislation in New Zealand.

We were delighted that Dr Lyndon Burford and Lucy Stewart from Auckland were there to witness this historic event and help with the negotiations. They used all their skills in social media to regularly tweet, blog, Facebook and write press releases during the 3 weeks of intense negotiations. They also interviewed the

indigenous participants from the Pacific about the effects of nuclear tests in our region. These were posted on their website [www.nuclearfreeNZ30.org.nz](http://www.nuclearfreeNZ30.org.nz) so that students from 125 schools around the country could join in this exciting process.

We were inspired by the presence of many of the experienced anti-nuclear activists from around the world, including two famous nuns, Sr Ardeth Plath OP and Sr Carol Gilbert OP, who between them, had spent 15 years in jail for trying to disarm US nuclear weapons! We attended the launch of the new film *The Nuns, the Priests and the Bomb* in the UN and heard Sr Megan Rice, aged 84, speak of her non-violent direct actions which had resulted in lengthy prison sentences. We hope to show the film in NZ next year. About half of the civil society representatives were young people and it gave us hope that there will be energy from this generation to ensure that as many states as possible sign and ratify the Treaty in the years to come.

—Kate Dewes

## Editorial 3 Mending the Cycle

My husband and I scrub our washing by hand, and often I have started singing, ‘with my own two hands, gonna make this a brighter place,’ by Ben Harper. This started me thinking as repetitive and mundane tasks allow us to do.

Everything that we do requires energy, and apart from sitting naked on the bare ground, everything we do relies on the world’s resources. Some of this energy and resource can be renewed and reused and some of it is lost forever, often turned into something that is destructive and toxic.

Our reasons for unconsciously destroying the planet, often at the expense of the poor, vary with each person and situation but for me it comes back to wanting to fit more things into daily life, which modern conveniences allow.

We have a fruit tree nursery and each year we rely on a phone and computer to sell our trees. When I am using these devices, it is easy to forget such things as the Coltan mines in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the lives and environment being destroyed don’t affect my decisions, probably because I can’t see them and I am only one person needing to free up my life.

Economist E. F. Schumacher opens his book, *Small is Beautiful*, by saying ‘one of the most fateful errors of our age is the belief that the problem of production has been solved.’ The book was published in 1974, but the problem still stands that those who consume the most and rely most heavily on mechanical production are the furthest removed from the source. The voices of those on the production lines are not heard. How do our modern-day slaves in our factory warehouses and mines view production? How is mother nature responding to the bleeding and burning of her oil?

The more we are involved in the complete creation of what we use, the more aware we become of our disruption of the natural environment. In contrast, the disruptive nature of mass production means that no one sees or feels responsible for the impact the process has on the planet. This latter is an intentional blinding, while sustainable living is an intentional awareness that makes wilful ignorance impossible or impractical.

The more energy we exert ourselves to produce our necessities, the less energy someone we can’t see has had to exert on our behalf. We are all dependent on each other as we are all dependent on this planet. But we need to start seeing the true weight and cost of what we use and consume, and begin to take greater responsibility and a far more personal approach.

*Author Marissa Dowling is a Catholic Worker living at St Francis farm in the Hokianga. This was originally published in the Winter edition of their CW paper, Bread and Roses.*



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# A fresh learning curve

Liam Gallagher

I've just spent the past two weeks living in South B, Nairobi, and working in Mukuru Slum – a slum with a higher population density than Kibera Slum, the largest in the world, also in Nairobi.

As we walked around several different families' homes on the first day, we walked down some streets that looked dry, but squelched underfoot as we walked on them. The smell, in some parts was unbearable. The dwellings we visited consisted of 3x3 corrugated iron sheds, windowless for greater security, and containing families of various sizes. Even on the cool day that we visited, it was hot inside – it must be the temperature of an oven on the warmest days. Yet, despite the heat, despite the discomfort, the smell, the obvious poverty, the people we visited proudly welcomed us into their homes.

The Ruben Centre, run by a legend named Brother Frank O'Shea sits on a small parcel of land – no larger than a generously proportioned rugby field – in Kwa Ruben, in Mukuru. On that small site sits a nursery, a maternity unit, a medical clinic, a radio station, a production unit with several weaves and a load of sewing machines, plus a primary school with around 2700 students. It's a phenomenal place and has done some brilliant things for the people in the area, essentially acting as the centre for services the government should provide but doesn't, giving children a chance and hope.

I was working in the primary school, taking music lessons and doing a variety of things, but mostly

taking in everything that was going on. The first thing that struck me was the humour – Kenyans are so funny! Some of the people I was working with had difficult lives away from the centre, but their sense of humour was fantastic! The other thing I noticed was the innovation that took place – we talk about the 'no. 8 wire' attitude in New Zealand, but you ain't seen nothing until you've been to Mukuru or Kibera! Many people had developed their skills in particular areas to a great level, and were largely constrained by lack of access to resources/capital to expand it, rather than any lack of expertise, or lack of work ethic.

The time I spent at Ruben was happy, I enjoyed it immensely, but it was also intensely disquieting – in a good way. I've got far more out of spending time teaching the song 'Fish'n'chips' ('Yeah! Makes me want to lick my lips') than the educational value the children got from the exercise, and I certainly urge anyone who has skills to share and is willing to open themselves up to being emotionally and spiritually challenged to go to Nairobi and spend time at the Ruben Centre – it's a time that I'll never forget.

*Liam Gallagher, aged 22, grew up in a Christchurch CW family and is currently volunteering in Kenya for a youth outreach programme.*

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## Brisbane Ploughshares activists found guilty

Four men, charged with wilful damage in relation to the removal of a sword from an historic war memorial cross at the Toowong Cemetery have been found guilty of wilful damage in the Brisbane Magistrates Court.

The four men – Catholic Workers Jim Dowling, 61, his son Franz Dowling, Andrew Paine and Tim Webb – were accused of tearing down a sword from the 'Cross of sacrifice', and hammering it into a hoe with a homemade anvil. The action took place on Ash Wednesday, 1 March 2017. The four men said, when they made the decision to pull the sword down, they 'were influenced by Pope Francis's peace message, in which he said religion can never be used to justify war, and peace alone is holy. The words of Pope Francis helped inspire us to remove a brass sword from the stone crucifix.'

In court, Jim Dowling said he was compelled to carry out the action by a call from God. 'We didn't set out to destroy or damage it (the cross). We wanted to transform it and improve it, which is what we did. He



said that it is blasphemy for a sword to be attached to a cross, and they felt compelled to remove it. 'Being Ash Wednesday, we thought that was an appropriate day to repent of Christian war-making ... so we went there with that thought in mind'.

Next, Tim Webb used the mallet and anvil to hammer the sword into the shape of a garden hoe/plough, thus following the biblical command to 'beat swords into ploughshares'. He took action over the Church's continued complicity in wars and its violent history. The Catholic Worker group then assembled near the memorial to celebrate Mass with a visiting priest and pray for the millions of victims of war and a cessation to all current wars.

Jim Dowling received a three-month wholly suspended jail sentence, 100 hours of community service and was ordered to repay half of the \$17,812 in restitution. Tim Webb was ordered to complete 100 hours of community service and pay the remainder of the restitution, and Franz Dowling and Andrew Paine each received fines of \$1000 and \$1500 respectively.

# Around the traps

# It was with a great sense of relief that we heard of the passage of the Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons on July 7th at the UN. Our good friends from Christchurch, Kate Dewes and Rob Green, were among the hundreds of delegates who spent 3 weeks hammering out the Agreement with 122 countries. Kate and Rob have worked so hard for so long to get to this point that tears of thanksgiving and joy would have been inevitable. In the end, the Treaty was passed 122-1 with only the Netherlands objecting. In what is the world's greatest flashpoint issue, this is a significant step towards a saner world. Getting the nine nuclear powers on board is the next major campaign.

# We congratulate co-producers Gaylene Barnes and Kathleen Gallagher on the world premier of their latest documentary, *Seven Rivers Walking – Haere Mairi*, a film exposing the perilous ecological state due to overuse and pollution of seven Canterbury rivers. Setting out on Ash Wednesday on a hikoi of repentance and discovery with walkers, rafters, iwi, anglers and farmers, the filmmakers joined local people at each river to talk about the health of the rivers. They travelled alongside *kaitiaki* – the river guardians – who stand as sentinels to the continued degradation of their beloved spring-fed streams and braided rivers. The result is a startling documentary which shines a light on the sad state of our rivers, of our rivers and the way through to full recovery of these life-giving veins that have been so productive, particularly in the South island over the centuries and which are now seriously under threat. The film will be launched at the NZ International Film Festival in Christchurch in late August. A full review will be carried in the next edition of *The Common Good*.

# We congratulate Robert Consedine, veteran social justice campaigner, on the acquisition of a third kidney to sit alongside his other two which have worn out. Because his donor was Maori, Robert is claiming *tangata whenua* status. Rumour has it that his next step will be to file for a land claim!

# Amnesty International says the Syrian government has executed up to 13,000 people in prison since 2011.

—Casa Cry, June 2017

# Fr. Jerry Zawada OFM – nuclear resister, peace and justice activist, Franciscan friar – died on the morning of July 25 at the age of 80. Jerry served his early years as a Franciscan priest in the Philippines, and later worked with the homeless, war refugees and survivors of torture in Chicago, Milwaukee, Mexico, Las Vegas, Tucson and elsewhere. Jerry was imprisoned for two years in the late 1980s for repeated trespass at nuclear missile silos in the mid-west; served three six-month prison sentences (2001, 2003, 2005) for trespass at the School of the Americas in Fort Benning Georgia, and two months in prison in 2007 after crossing the line to protest torture training at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. A few years ago, his advocacy for and celebration of mass with

women priests earned a disciplinary letter from the Vatican.

# This year 2017, marks 50 years of Israel's military occupation of Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. It also marks ten years of Israel's blockade of Gaza. There are thousands of Palestinian prisoners, including children, in Israel. The adult prisoners are now on a hunger strike demanding their freedom

—Maryknoll News

# Climate Change resolution - ExxonMobil shareholders overwhelmingly voted in late May in favor of a resolution aimed at shedding light on the impacts of addressing climate change on the oil company's long-term assets. Through investment groups like the Tri-State Coalition for Responsible Investment coalition, which comprises 40 Catholic institutions, and the larger Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, faith-based investors have been working for two decades to bring about change at Exxon in how it recognizes and responds to climate change. At the annual ExxonMobil meeting in Dallas May 31, the shareholder resolution, received 62.3 percent of the shareholders' vote — the highest ever at Exxon for a climate-related measure.

—NCR Eco-Catholic, Jun. 13, 2017

## The Prophetic Voice

feeling a blast from heaven  
propelled by an inner urge  
the prophetic voice  
screams into the night

on a mission to awaken  
those who would not see  
injustice, oppression, tyranny  
a dying exhausted planet

a stingray at water's edge  
barnacle on the body corporate  
it says what needs to be said  
does what needs to be done

rarely admired at home  
often marginalised, vilified  
this deeply grounded voice  
springs from within a rich tradition

rooted within the square  
but pointing outside  
where all things merge  
into the divine stream

—Jim Consedine

# Struggle transforms us

Joan Chittister OSB

When we find ourselves immersed in struggle, we find ourselves trafficking in more than the superficial, more than the mundane. That's why maturity has very little to do with age. That's why wisdom has more to do with experience than it does with education. We begin to feel in ways we could never feel before the struggle began. Before a death of someone I myself have loved, someone else's grief is a simple formality. We don't know what to say and we don't know why we're saying it because we never needed to have someone say it to us. Before feeling humiliated ourselves we can never know how painful the daily paper can be to those who find themselves in it with no way to defend themselves to the great faceless and anonymous population out there that is using it to judge them. Silently, harshly, even gleefully, perhaps. Until my own reputation is at stake, I can look at another person's shame and never have the grace to turn away.

After we ourselves know struggle, we begin to weigh one value against another, to choose between them and the future, rather than simply the present, as our measure. Some things, often quite common things, we come to realize—peace, security, love—are infinitely better than the great things—the money, the position, the fame—that we once wanted for ourselves. Then we begin to make different kinds of decisions.

We begin to see beyond the present moment to the whole scheme of things, to the very edges of the soul, to the core of what is desirable as well as what is doable. The bright young man who had worked the pit in the futures market, planned a big international career in trading, and worked hard to start his own business, changed jobs after the collapse of the World Trade Centre. He stood in shock a thousand miles away as television cameras watched the building go down with dozens of his friends in it. All of them young, like he was. All of them bright, like he was. All of them on their way up, like he was. But to where? He had lost too many of his hard-driving young friends to ignore the meaning of life any longer. He went back to Smalltown, USA, to hunt with his dogs and fish the streams and buy the average family home in a small cul-de-sac in a local suburb.

No one comes out of struggle, out of suffering, the same kind of person they were when they went in. It's possible, of course, to come out worse than we were when we went into the throes of pain. Struggle can turn to sour in us, of course. But it is equally possible, if we choose to reflect on it, to come out stronger and wiser than we were when it began. What is not possible, however, is to stay the same.

## Drones - Will I be next?

Do the drones hear the cries of the children dying on the ground?

Who hears the cries of the children then?

We hear you children, and we say to the murderers,  
'Take our blood instead.'

Mamana Bibi, births the children of her village,  
Planting in her garden when the bombs hit.  
No longer seeds that are spread but her body that is  
shared,  
Her blood, moistens the ground.

The grandchildren see,  
The villagers hear,  
Her family cry,  
and we say...

Do the drones hear the cries of the children  
dying on the ground?

Who hears the cries of the children then?

We hear you children, and we say to the murderers,  
'Take our blood instead.'

As she lay spread across the field,  
Her family gather her limbs, silently, shocked, broken.  
The drones drop their bombs again,  
Grandchildren cry, children die, or  
maimed for the rest of their lives.

The grandchildren see.  
The villagers hear.  
Her family cry.  
And we say.....

Do the drones hear the cries of the children  
dying on the ground?

Who hears the cries of the children then?

We hear you children, and we say to the murderers,  
'Take our blood instead.'

Those left behind bury the dead,  
unseen by the rest of the world.  
A grandson says he no longer loves blue skies.  
A granddaughter wakes asking,  
'Will I be next?'  
What do we tell her?

Do the drones hear the cries of the children  
dying on the ground?

Who hears the cries of the children then?

We hear you children, and we say to the murderers,  
'Take our blood instead.'

*Ann-Marie Stapp wrote from the anti-killer drones  
vigil outside the GCSB in Wellington, 27 March 2017.*



# Letter from America

The Nuclear Resister,  
P O Box 43383,  
Tucson, AZ 85733  
USA

Hi Jim,

We heard about the earthquakes and hope you are all OK. We are hanging on after the political earthquake here in the US!

We recently returned from Nevada and a wonderful Catholic Worker gathering hosted by the Las Vegas CW community, where we joined people from the US, Mexico, Australia, Germany and the Netherlands. The CW now comprises more than 200 communities committed to non-violence, voluntary poverty, prayer and hospitality for the homeless, exiled, hungry and forsaken, while also protesting injustice, war, racism and violence of all forms.

On the last day of the gathering, we were among 31 people arrested for trespass after crossing onto the Nevada National Security Site (NNSS), formerly the Nevada nuclear weapons test site. Here there were 1000 above-and-below-ground nuclear blasts between 1951 and 1992, and experiments related to the US nuclear stockpile continue to this day.

Later, we all went to the Creech Airforce Base, the epicentre of US drone warfare operations, to remember civilians who have been killed by US drone attacks. Thirteen people were arrested for blocking the main entrance to the base.

We first learned of our kinship with the Catholic Worker movement during two cross-country networking road trips promoting the Nuclear Resister in the 1980s. Ever since, we have always been grateful for the financial support received from many CW individuals and communities for our 'chronicle of hope' *the Nuclear Resistor*.

With CW support, we gather news from around the globe to tell clear, concise and comprehensive stories about arrest, court and imprisonment. Resistance continues at military bases, nuclear reactors and nuclear bomb plants in Korea, Scotland, France, England, the United States, Australia, Finland, New Zealand, Germany and other places. Activists tell us they find strength, inspiration and solidarity from reading *the Nuclear Resister*, and learning about, connecting with and supporting one another. Over the past 36 years, we have supported over 1000 imprisoned activists behind bars!

We need to keep telling their stories. We survive on the smell of an oily rag. Please donate now whatever you can to support the work of *the Nuclear Resister*. Cheques can be made payable to: *the Nuclear Resister*, P O Box 43383, Tucson, AZ 85733, USA. Or visit [nukeresister@ige.org](mailto:nukeresister@ige.org). Website: [www.nukeresister.org](http://www.nukeresister.org). Blessings and thanks to you. In peace,

*Felice and Jack Cohen-Jobba.*

## Prayer for Peace

Loving God, help us to be masters of the weapons that threaten to master us.

Help us to use science for peace and plenty, not for war and destruction.

Save us from the compulsion to follow our adversaries in all that we most hate, which now grow beyond belief and beyond bearing. They are at once a torment and a blessing; for if you had not left us the light of conscience, we would not have to endure them.

Teach us to be long-suffering in anguish and insecurity, teach us to wait and trust.

Grant light, grant strength, grant patience to all who work for peace.

Grant us prudence in proportion to our power,

Wisdom in proportion to our science.

Humaneness in proportion to our wealth and might.

And bless our earnest will to help all races and peoples to travel in friendship with us

Along the road to justice, liberty and peace.

—Thomas Merton, *Non-violent Alternatives*.





# Letter from Australia

6 August 2017

Dear CW,

For the third time this decade, Silver Wattle Quaker Education Centre in Bungendore, 45 minutes out of Canberra, played host to a five-day residential training for peace activists on 23-28 April, sponsored by the Victoria Quaker Fund. The programme included active participation in the Anzac Eve Peace Vigil and the Anzac Day ‘Lest We Forget the Frontier Wars’ March at the Australian War Memorial and was the brainchild of ‘Quaker Granny for Peace’ Helen Bayes from Melbourne, who is inspired by the 350+ year old Quaker tradition of peace witness.

As it was Anzac Day Eve, we were heading into the capital city, firstly to pay our respects to the custodians at the Aboriginal Tent Embassy on the grounds of the old Parliament House, which has been going since 1972. There is quite a contrast between where we are at in New Zealand at a time of Treaty of Waitangi settlements compared to the struggle in Australia to address human rights and sovereignty issues, though it is fair to say that we have a way to go also.

Then we headed up Mount Ainslie in the dusk for the Anzac Eve vigil. This is the seventh vigil and is the brainchild of lifelong social activist and cultural entrepreneur Graeme Dunstan, a Buddhist, now in his 70s, who travels in the style of a peace nomad around Australia’s East Coast in his ‘Peace Bus’, organising events and acts of witness and making beautiful colourful flags and occupying public places. He says this way he gets to meet ‘the appalled and the passionate, the movers and the shakers, the saints and the prophets of the times.’ Graeme has made a large number of two-metre high portable paper lanterns which contain candles and which we held up high above us, creating bright shafts of light in the darkness.

After being welcomed by elders, the Chorus of Women sang haunting laments and well-loved peace songs before the sure-footed meandered silently down

Mount Ainslie, carrying the lanterns to the forecourt of the Australian National War Memorial.

The next day we headed back to town on a cold, rainy morning to walk behind the official Anzac Day march, carrying a wide banner listing the known massacres (hundreds of them) and other banners for Aboriginal recognition. We attracted some modest applause, if not official recognition. The banner, a bright yellow 20 metre scroll listing all the recorded Frontier killings, was created by filmmaker Ellie Gilbert, widow of Kevin Gilbert, a tent embassy pioneer, poet and artist. It is simple, striking and incredibly sad.

The final action of the week was first discussed at length by the group, and difficult to decide on, but eventually turned into a series of individual and collective actions at the same place and time, outside the gates of the nearby HQ JOC, the Australian Army Joint Operational Command centre.

We decided to make do with using existing banners and props that Graeme had brought, and symbols of ‘dead babies’ made of shrouded pillows and red paint, to mourn over, in recognition of the innocent lives taken by drone bombings masterminded in Australia. My little group of women sang peace songs, spoke of our history and shared the ‘Peace Ambassadors’ creed.

While we gave witness on this frosty morning between 7.00am and 8.30am, hundreds of workers drove into the locked complex. We also gave out white peace poppies to each of the security guards and police that were attending us, who all took them. Two of us decided to walk the 10 km around the perimeter of the fence, while being scrutinised by the police, but allowed to finish.

*Liz Remmersvaal*

*Liz Remmersvaal, a Quaker from Hawkes Bay, participated in the recent National Catholic Worker hui in Wellington*



Funeral Choice  
A Catholic Worker project  
Cheaper alternatives to consumer  
funerals

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

CW website  
Leading articles from the first 20  
years of  
**The Common Good**  
Alternative funerals  
Restorative justice  
Other theological issues

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# Lifelong Call to Prophecy

Mary McGlone

Poor Jeremiah, born into a family of priests and called to be a prophet. When Jeremiah heard God say that he had been called for this from the womb, it was like being told that his birth certificate named him ‘Renegade-for-life.’ Nothing was ever going to be easy for this man.

What is a prophet? A prophet is someone called by God to read the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel. A prophet is someone deeply in touch with contemporary reality, one who is loving and courageous enough to expose what is contrary to the will of God as well as galvanize others to believe in and work to create a Gospel alternative. Now that’s a job description set up to antagonize just about everybody.

All those who benefit from the status quo — authorities, clergy, the dominant race, the highly educated, the wealthy, etc. — know that prophets question such people’s privilege, privilege that they generally believe they have earned. The privileged among us recognize prophetic words as a threat to our complacency.

Do we wonder why people rejected and plotted against Jeremiah? The prophetic message is just too demanding! Jeremiah’s case presents what could almost be a cartoon caricature. When a scroll of Jeremiah’s prophecy was presented to the king, the king listened to it section by section, and as each segment came to an end he borrowed a knife, cut off the part just read and threw it into the fire (Jeremiah 36). Of course, it didn’t take long for even Jeremiah’s friends to understand that their relationship with him might not be worth the price.

If you’re not sure about the cost of listening to prophecy, look up quotes from Pope Francis available on the U.S. bishops’ website, [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org). Listen to

Francis quoting St. John Chrysostom: ‘Not to share one’s goods with the poor is to rob them and to deprive them of life. It is not our goods that we possess, but theirs.’ That’s a prophetic statement that lets nobody with two coats off the hook. It says that when you encounter the poor, you either robe them or you rob them.

The second dimension of prophecy is the too-often-forgotten task of promoting real alternatives. How often do we hear a nearly inaudible voice prod us with some version of those most disturbing questions: ‘Isn’t there another possibility? Does it always have to be this way?’ These are quite often the questions of young people whose experience has not yet taught them to capitulate to ‘the way things really work’ and who have not yet accumulated so much that they feel they must protect it. The moment we find ourselves resisting such questions, we need to ask ourselves what we fear, what have we allowed to come into our lives and fetter our hopes?

In the Gospel, Jesus sends the apostles out to preach the coming of the kingdom of heaven in word and deed. He knows they will encounter resistance and even life-threatening opposition. Thus, he starts and finishes the core of his instructions by saying, ‘Do not be afraid.’ Halfway in between those two statements, he explains that those who kill the body have very limited power; the real danger comes from those who can suffocate the human spirit. The latter are the ones the prophets rail against, even at the cost of their lives.

Accepting the call to prophecy means that, like Jeremiah, we are accepting the role of speaking and acting as ‘renegades for life’.

## Pentecost Fire

If Jesus is risen and people are not finding him, then somebody is hiding him – he is not hiding himself. He came to cast fire on the earth, and he walked Palestine as a Flame so alive with God’s spirit of love that when he was ‘blown out’ on the Cross, the Spirit did not die. For that fire has been caught by his disciples who have passed it down to us through the centuries. It is the Fire of God’s love for us that we must uncover and give to others. That is the Presence, the meeting of Jesus that makes us more blessed than a doubting Thomas.

We are relieved of the temptation to think that the presence of God’s love was limited to a few years that Jesus walked the earth. We know he is risen and lives forever, for we are where he is risen, we are where he lives. We carry the flame of his life that must not be hidden under a bushel, that cannot be destroyed in a tomb. We know that we will live forever in the one who has lived for centuries through a love that cannot be extinguished.

—Miriam Elder OCD

## Obituary Judith Alice Land (1932-2017)

The recent death of Judith Land of the Hokianga heralded the entry into eternal life of one of New Zealand's most prophetic women. She was one half of a formidable marriage partnership with Peter. After discernment, in 1978 they left the comforts of an urban lifestyle in Whangarei to go with their seven youngest children and 'live simply' and carve out a sustainable lifestyle on 396 almost inarable acres at Whirinaki in Northland. For many years they lived in a large barn, somewhat adapted but always simple and close to nature. The bulk of the property later became St Francis Catholic Worker farm.

There they raised their family, as son Joseph says, 'to question and evaluate the practices and motives of the society around us. We were to hold fast to the values of the primacy of God, integrity of thoughts and actions, voluntary simplicity and the practice of Christian charity and justice.'

Peter and Judith also sowed the seeds of faith and action through home schooling. Several generations have now been home schooled, meaning that they have grown up in an environment where, as Richard Rohr says, 'the path itself is your teacher.' The acres of lush organic vegetables, the munching of Clydesdales in the yard, the ever-present patter of tiny bare feet, the psalms of praise prayed daily at morning prayer, the sound of hoof beats on the path or in the orchard, the pervading daily smell of

freshly baked bread, all continue to be signs of a meaningful and fulfilled prophetic lifestyle, begun by Judith and Peter.

That life for Judith ended 29<sup>th</sup> March 2017. She died peacefully and beautifully surrounded by family at about the time she used to rise and light her wood stove every day. A mother of nine,

grandmother of 64 and great-grandmother of 49, her *tangi* was packed for days as people came to honour this remarkable woman. We acknowledged her and Peter as prophets in *The Common Good*, issue 32, Lent 2005. Well done good and faithful servant. *Moe mai re e the whaea I nga manaakitanga o te runga rawa.*

—Jim Consedine



## Review

**Book Review – Jim Forrest, *The Root of War is Fear* - Thomas Merton's Advice to Peacemakers, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 10555, 224 pages, ISBN 978-62698-197-3, US\$20. Reviewer: Jim Consedine**

Reviewing this book is like entering a treasure trove of peace writings of the great 20th century Trappist monk, Thomas Merton, and finding many of them within one slim volume. Highlighted by Pope Francis in his recent visit as one of the four voices he most admired in US history, Merton's insights are in many ways as current now as ever. His early 1960s writings, at a time of great insecurity and fear of a nuclear first-strike attack either from the US or the USSR, reflect the tone prevalent today in the rhetoric between the US and North Korea.

Merton writes from a quiet space on the fringe of the war of words but physically close to Fort Campbell, home to the 101st Airborne Division. As he writes in his hermitage in the forest, bombers fly overhead en route to Vietnam loaded with bombs to drop on villages and cities, in addition to scorching the earth, hamlets, crops and rural farmers with napalm. No wonder he describes

the world as sick!

The book also interlaces some of Jim Forrest's own peace-making work, discusses the founding of the Catholic Peace Fellowship (of which Forrest is a co-founder), Merton's book *Peace in the Post-Christian Era* (banned by the Abbot-General) and the brilliant 1961 – 62 series of 121 banned Cold War letters, reflects on the rise of the anti-war movement in the at home which eventually helped defeat the US military abroad, peace lobbying at Vatican II leading to the Council outlawing nuclear weapons, and covers domestic social protest in America throughout the 1960s.

Jim Forrest, a personal friend of Merton and a former editor of *The Catholic Worker*, has spent the past 60 years writing about peace, disarmament and nonviolence. *The Root of War is Fear* is a stunning and comprehensive journal of two of the most important Catholic voices of the past century, presented in a most readable fashion. High praise for it is a gross understatement. It would be a fantastic resource book for school libraries where social justice is taught and students are serious about the Gospel.

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## **The Common Good**

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



## **Economic Justice**

An economic vision geared to profit and material well-being alone is – as experience is daily showing us – incapable of contributing in a positive way to a globalisation that favours the integral development of the world’s peoples, a just distribution of the earth’s resources, the guarantee of dignified labour and the encouragement of private initiative and local enterprise. An economy of exclusion and inequality has led to greater numbers of the disenfranchised and those discarded as unproductive and useless. The effects are felt even in our more developed societies, in which the growth of relative poverty and social decay represent a serious threat to families, the shrinking middle class and in a particular way our young people who are being robbed of hope, and their great resources of energy, creativity and vision are being squandered.

-- Pope Francis