



# New Life for These Times

MARY THORNE describes three endings that will open us to the revelation of God now.

**T**he idea of ENDINGS sends my mind meandering along familiar paths; seasons and life spans, cycles and tides. Our lives are shaped by these recurring greetings and farewells. There is sadness associated with the loss of wise voices, beloved family members, things which are dear and familiar to us. These endings are part of our accepted reality, we are powerless to avoid them and we are resigned to our journeys through grief to hope.

BUT for many days recently I have been battling onion weed in my garden and a whole new perspective on ending has come to the forefront of my mind. This ending is my decision. It is an eradication of something that has become life limiting and problematic. I am committed to ending its domination and I'm working painstakingly and hard.

Now, it may be the tedium of the task or the heat of the day on my head but I'm pretty sure there's a parable to be found in the onion weed. It would go something like this . . .

## Parable of the Onion Weed

There was once a woman who had a garden. The garden was full of life; trees and flowers, birds and butterflies and sometimes there were things to eat. She loved her garden but life was busy and she didn't spend as much time taking care of her garden as was really required. Areas became overgrown and some virulent weeds began to grow. One particular weed was very well adapted to spread rapidly by multiplication of bulbs and by seeds. It then formed tough little capsules to keep the bulbs safe during summer heat and winter cold, ready to burst into vigorous life the following spring. The woman was not vigilant in noticing and dealing with this weed. Soon it had filled her garden with a dense covering and other plants were lost. Because of her lack of attention, the woman faced a long and arduous task to restore the diversity, balance and health of her garden.

The woman represents all of us who profess Christian faith. The garden is the context of shared belief

which at its best is life affirming for all. The onion weed represents outdated, unhealthy theological notions which we must intentionally and purposefully eradicate.

## Divine Revealed in Creation

My thinking is prompted by my impatience for more people throughout the Church to hear renewed understandings of God's relationship with all of created reality, encompassing the newest discoveries of science.

As long ago as 1991, physicist Fritjof Capra, in dialogue with Benedictine monk David Steindl-Rast, wrote of the parallels between new paradigm thinking in theology and science. Former fundamental laws of physics have given way to dynamic, evolving theories of time and space. Theologians are articulating belief that the divine is revealed in the depths of matter and the limitlessness, beauty and connectedness of all that is. Rather than the doctrinal certainty of God-



revealed truths, we are growing in understanding of God's self-revelation through creation.

The late, much loved Daniel O'Leary writes: "Trusted scholars and scientific experts within the believing community . . . are beginning to suggest an outline, a direction, a horizon for the exciting times ahead when both disciplines (theology and science) come closer together, painstakingly completing each other, shedding an ever-widening and ever-deepening light on the most alluring mystery of an evolving universe energised by the love of God."

### Taking On New Insights

What, then, must be eradicated to enable widespread renewal of our theological thinking? What must end? I think we could begin on three fronts. The first might be our language when we speak of God. The second might be a change from the belief in a foundational action of human sin. The third is to heal and dismantle human mindsets that keep us separate from God, from one another and from Earth. Like onion weed, these outdated, errant aspects of our belief have become problematic and damaging.

### Change Our Speaking of God

The usual mode of addressing God as Father and Son (Spirit still plays little part) inevitably limits the most widely held image of God to some kind of male super human. Let there be an end to this.

Given the inability of our language to speak of God adequately, please let us utilise more fully the language of Trinity. One God whose intrinsic being is relational, generative, communal and self-giving. Creator God, whose incomprehensibly abundant love pours out as time and space and matter in an evolving story of power and complexity and beauty and wonder, of which we are a tiny fragment with the extraordinary capacity to reflect and praise. God, within the very matter of this creation and, in time, present with us most explicitly in Jesus of Nazareth. A decisive revelation of who God is and how we can be in order to fulfil the God-potential within us. Jesus the

Christ who reveals the compassion and vulnerability of God. Spirit God who gives life, energizes, enlightens and enables all evolving.

### Change Our Belief about Sin

The heart of Christian belief came to be that God sent his only son, Jesus, to die on a cross to make peace with God for an offence committed by the first humans and to save us from our sins.

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I long for an end to prayer and liturgy which express an exclusively redemption Christology and virtually ignore the natural world. The image of God inherent in this belief is contradictory to the pure unconditional love we attribute to our Triune God. This theology allowed the institutional Church the power to dispense grace and forgiveness and contributed to incidences of abuse and injustice. It is the embodied life of Jesus we must contemplate. He lived with an aliveness that cannot be extinguished.

### Change Our Attitude in Creation

The third ending I seek is embedded more in the psyche of the developed world than in theological thought. But it is real and damaging to life and

ecological wellbeing and contrary to biblical teaching.

I want to amend the separateness that stops us connecting as kin with all of God's creation. We struggle to overcome the fear, suspicion or disdain we feel for all who are not part of our own group. We do not understand that we are made of the same elements as the cosmos, the Earth is our true home, our mother, our sister. There are depths of belonging to our environment we do not yet know. We struggle to understand the intimacy between God and the world.

### Live from New Theology

Expressing the tenets of faith in new ways, reflecting the signs of our times, will be disturbing to many. Those who want to communicate their beliefs in ways their young people can hear, will rejoice. In this creation-centred theology, our present massive ecological crisis is central. Motivated by passionate love, we will happily surrender the Earth-damaging parts of our lives.

The woman did pretty well at getting the onion weed under control. As her love and desire to care was rekindled she saw many other potential problem plants putting down deep roots. She saw Wandering Willie, Old Man's Beard and some that had once been prized garden plants like Agapanthus, Ivy and Jasmine. She had finally learned that gardening demanded an awareness of the signs of the times in her garden and a real determination to do the hard work of analysing, researching and uprooting! ☀️

Painting: *Tui Glide to Beach* by Paul Herbert  
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Paul's passion for NZ's native wilderness, wildlife, conservation and his love of the ocean have been used as themes and inspiration for his paintings using design minimalism and bright graduation of colours.



Mary Thorne and husband Russell live in Papakura and are coming to terms with retirement. They have many projects awaiting the time to begin.