

## Holy Cross Retreat



### Letter 308

9<sup>th</sup> January, 2025

#### Parking



As mentioned last week, we have one hundred and six 16-35 year olds Disciples of Jesus holding their 7 day Summer School, until Sunday night, so please be aware before coming to Mass on Sunday, that most spaces in the main carpark (closest to the chapel) have been taken. There will be spaces where the carpark is being extended, in the carpark past the building at the other end, and on the oval,

#### Jo Ridgeway



On New Year's eve we lost another former parishioner of St Kevin's who was part of the Holy Cross family and a Passionist Companion. Jo's funeral will be at Holy Cross next Tuesday, January 13<sup>th</sup> at 2.00pm.

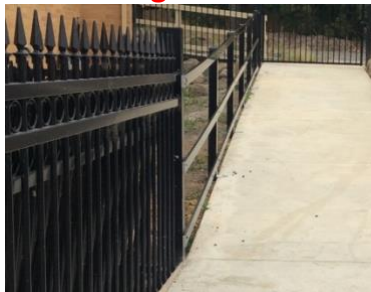
The funeral will be live streamed. The link is:  
<https://youtube.com/live/Qblx8PINkdk?feature=share>

#### Marathon



Erick put in a marathon performance not in athletics, but in lawn mowing last Saturday. Tri offered valuable assistance in covering the entire site. It was surprising how much the grass has grown in recent weeks, but Erick ploughed through it and it is now in really good shape!

#### Path railing



**Bruno, Pino and Vince** completed the fence from the carpark to the Shrine. This was a safety issue as well as an aid to older people walking down or up the path.

There is more work to be done to finish the carpark, complete the fence, install safety lights and insert the bollards to protect the fence from over-excited drivers.

### Great news – Mary and Dennis Cougle

After two surgeries and a lengthy stay in Austin hospital, Mary has made it to Bupa across the road from Holy Cross, so she and Dennis are together again, which they have both been deeply longing forward. Tri spent time with them on Tuesday.



Dennis has had some skin cancers removed from his scalp in case you were thinking he's lining up to be Leo 15<sup>th</sup>!

### Elizabeth Prout Day



Elizabeth Prout was born in 1840 and suffered inferior health only living for 43 years succumbing to TB, , but she made the very most of those years. She was raised an Anglican but became a Catholic in her mid-twenties under the influence of two Passionists. Elizabeth based herself in Manchester which at the time

suffered rapid growth which led to overcrowding, slums with dirty streets, unsanitary housing, and high mortality, especially among children. Elizabeth's response with the help of companions who gathered around her, helped establish numerous schools and hostels across poverty-stricken parts of northwest England. She taught women to be self-sufficient, teaching them skills to support themselves. She founded the Cross and Passion Sisters, of whom Srs Brigid and Karen are members and was declared Venerable by Pope Francis, in 2021.

Sunday 11th is Elizabeth Prout Day (the anniversary of the date of her death in 1864. Brigid and Karen have created a video to acknowledge the occasion. The link is: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTOgmU2EcmU>

## Pope Leo vs. Palantir

Two visions of education lie at a spiritual crossroads.

Antonio Spadaro SJ

December 27, 2025



In Silicon Valley, “meritocracy” is the gospel of efficiency, the creation myth of the self-made. But one of its own temples of worship, Palantir Technologies, has rewritten the liturgy. Its CEO, Alex Karp, and its president, Peter Thiel, have

unveiled the Meritocracy Fellowship—an experiment inviting twenty-two high-school seniors to skip college altogether. “Skip the debt. Skip the indoctrination. Get the Palantir degree,” the slogan declares. No student loans, no professors, no campus life—just four weeks of seminars on Western civilization, from Plato to Tocqueville, followed by an internship amid Palantir’s algorithms.

The fellowship, open only to exceptional students who pledge not to enrol in an accredited college the following semester pays roughly \$5,400 a month. The message could hardly be clearer—or colder: higher education is obsolete, learning is a waste of time, what matters is knowing how to perform.

It’s not only a provocation; it’s a political act. Palantir, whose empire runs on data and artificial intelligence, isn’t just recruiting talent; it’s shaping the future of education as a battlefield between freedom and economic power. Its model combines a fast-track humanistic crash course with immediate technical immersion, privileging functional training over the liberal arts that once defined the Western university. *The goal is to forge hyper-efficient operators—cogs polished to perfection—ready to serve the company’s clients.*



The stakes are enormous. Across the United States, the idea that education is—or should be—a private market commodity has taken hold. The blows dealt to

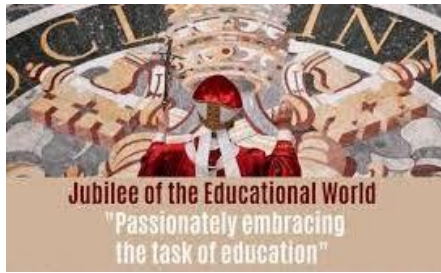


academia during the Trump years were symptoms, not causes, of a deeper shift. American universities face mounting tuition costs, a staggering \$1.7 trillion in student debt, and accusations of ideological bias and irrelevance to the labour market. Into that climate strides the Meritocracy Fellowship, promising a quick, low-cost escape from

what it calls the “debt trap.” In this new paradigm, the acquisition of skills replaces personal formation—competence displaces character.



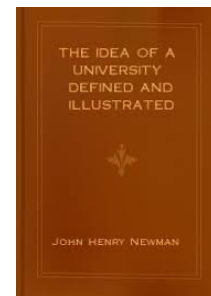
And yet, in Rome, another voice has begun to answer back. Pope Leo XIV—the first American to occupy the papal throne—recently released an apostolic letter



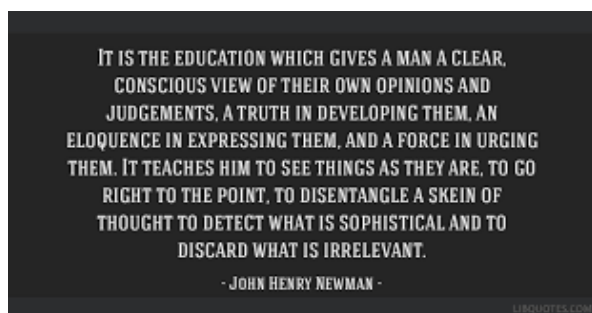
titled “Drawing New Maps of Hope,” inaugurating the Jubilee of Education. His words read like a counter-melody to Silicon Valley’s techno-pragmatism. Reviving the “Global Compact on Education” launched by his predecessor Francis, Leo XIV lays out three priorities: interior life, technology, and peace.

He writes, “**The educator is not a technician of learning but a witness of humanity.**” The student is not a cog; education, Leo insists, is a *constellation* that binds heart, mind, and hands. Education, for him, is another name for peace—because it teaches us to appreciate differences and to grow in dialogue. On one side, then, stands the dazzling shortcut of *learning by doing*, the promise of immediate success and measurable output. On the other, the slower faith in a process that ripens through error, encounter, and time.

Here enters **St. John Henry Newman**, whom Leo XIV has declared a Doctor of the Church and co-patron of educators alongside Thomas Aquinas. Newman had already diagnosed the modern confusion. In his masterpiece *The Idea of a University*, he warned that to reduce education to the mere acquisition of skills was to betray its soul.

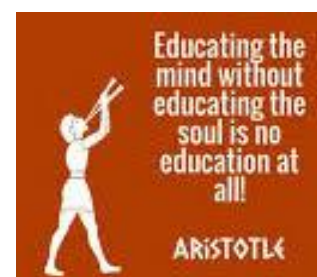


Knowledge, he wrote, is valuable not because it “produces” something, but because it trains the freedom of the human spirit. Liberal knowledge, in Newman’s sense, isn’t an end in itself—it clears the mind, untangles thought, teaches one to see things as they are. It prepares a person not for a trade, but for a life. Its purpose, as he said, is to form the *gentleman*, not the *businessman*.

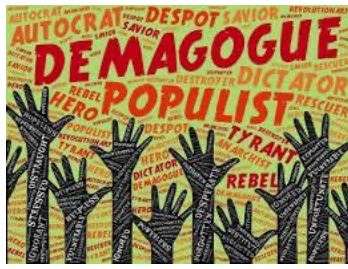


Between Palo Alto in Silicon Valley and Rome, then, two gospels of learning now face each other: one of speed and efficiency, the other of depth and discernment.

The question that lingers is which one will educate the soul of the century to come.



## Recognising and Calling Out Demagoguery (Dr John Kleinsman)



‘What is demagoguery?’ The Cambridge Dictionary defines it as “the action of winning support by exciting the emotions of ordinary people rather than by having good or morally right ideas.” Put simply, it is an approach adopted by those who use their powers of persuasion to appeal to people’s passions rather than their reason. It includes tactics such as scapegoating, exaggerating of

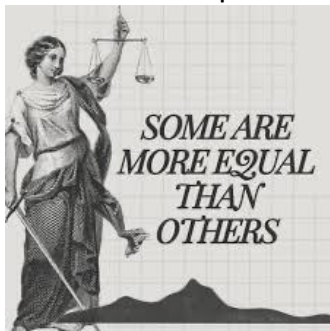
dangers and the use of rhetoric to arouse prejudices so as to drown out reasoned deliberation and exploit social divisions. Demagogues prioritise emotional appeal over honest, constructive and evidence-based rhetoric.

One of the recognisable characteristics of demagoguery is to create a distorted focus on identities; labelling people as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’ while simultaneously demanding un-thinking loyalty to the in-group. In some cases, this also involves scapegoating particular groups – playing upon people’s fears and/or resentments to create an ‘us versus them’ narrative. Another strategy of demagogues is to treat complex issues as if they result from one, simple cause that can be solved by one, simple cure. The political catch cry ‘Getting tough on crime’ is a classic example of this.

### How to identify it:

- Overly simple solutions to complex problems
- “Us vs. Them” language
- Distrust of experts, media, or institutions
- Emotional appeals over evidence

A further example of demagoguery at play in Aotearoa is the assertion that ‘we are all born equal and we should never be treated differently by the law’. This notion was to the fore recently in debates about the merits of special Māori wards for local body councils, with some describing them as reflecting a corrosive obsession with people’s race and others describing attempts to remove them as a racist targeted attack on Māori. How, as Catholics, do we respond to these radically different perspectives in a reasoned way while avoiding simplistic, emotive responses that exacerbate social divisions?



In 2023, the New Zealand bishops released a teaching document titled *Te Kahu o te Ora – a Consistent Ethic of Life* (i). In that document, the bishops reinforce the key Catholic belief that God has endowed every human life with an inestimable and innate dignity that is unconditional and inviolable, *regardless of a person’s background, abilities or circumstances*; “**te tapu i te tangata**”. This belief, one of the key principles of Catholic social teaching, is regarded by the bishops as “the most important principle because it is from our dignity as human persons that all other rights and responsibilities flow”.(2)



At the same time, however, *Te Kahu o te Ora* states that while the intrinsic dignity conferred by God is our moral stepping-off point, “human sacredness and dignity are endowed not only by what is intrinsic but also by what is extrinsic to us. That is, it is endowed in and through the lived experience of our physical relationships – **te tapu o**

**te tangata** ... the tapu we enjoy because we are embodied social beings.” What this highlights is that *respect for personal human dignity must infuse every aspect of our lives and world.*



In other words, intrinsic dignity and equality have a social dimension. This insight is so critical to Catholic social teaching that it is embodied in another key principle of Catholic social justice, the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable. For Catholics, therefore, there is no inherent contradiction between

maintaining belief in the ‘equality’ of all while, simultaneously, adopting policies and laws that give ‘preference’ to some in *the name of establishing equality* – that is, as a ‘means’ to furthering the equality that belongs to all.

Looked at like this, we can understand that the good of society as a whole – the common good, to identify a further key principle of the Catholic tradition of social justice – *requires* that we look at public policy and political structures in terms of how they impact those who are impoverished. Critically, as Pope Leo XIV wrote in his recent Apostolic Exhortation, *Dilexi te*, poverty takes many forms: ... the poverty of those who lack material means of subsistence, the poverty of those who are socially marginalized and lack the means to give voice to their dignity and abilities, moral and spiritual poverty, cultural poverty, the poverty of those who find themselves in a condition of personal or social weakness or fragility, the poverty of those who have no rights, no space, no freedom. (n.9)

That Māori, as an ethnic group, are overwhelmingly worse off according to a range of measures – in areas such as health, education, socio-economic well-being, addiction and incarceration – than other ethnic groupings in Aotearoa is beyond dispute. The statistics do not lie. A key to overcoming these disparities is to ensure that the voices of the marginalised are present at the tables where policy decisions are made. (See *Dilexi te*, n.81) As Pope Francis wrote so eloquently in *Fratelli Tutti*, equality is not achieved “by an abstract proclamation that ‘all men and women are equal’. Instead, it is the result of the conscious and careful cultivation of fraternity.”



As we reflect on the social and structural causes of societal inequality, we must both recognise and call out the over simplistic, emotive and divisive rhetoric of demagoguery. Equally, we must strive to implement structures that will meaningfully address poverty with its many different faces, including the introduction of 'preference', where necessary, as a means to bringing about equality in real life.

*Dr John Kleinsman is kaitohu/director of the Nathaniel Centre for Bioethics – Te Kupenga> He and his wife Kerry have long served in leadership roles for the Passionist Family Group Movement and John has been a member of the Province Formation Commission since 2001.*

## References

1. Available at: <https://www.catholic.org.nz/assets/Consistent-Ethic-of-Life-booklet-26-September-2023.pdf>
2. See <https://www.catholic.org.nz/social-action/principles/#:~:text=Every%20single%20person%20is%20created,and%20its%20stability%20never%20undermined.>

## Strange language English (Lord Cromer)

Why is break not rhymed with freak? Will you tell me why it's true  
We say sew but likewise few?  
And the maker of the verse, cannot rhyme his horse with worse?  
Beard is not the same as heard while cord is different from word.

Cow is cow but low is low, shoe is never rhymed with foe.  
Think of hose, dose, and lose, and think of goose and yet with choose.  
Think of comb, tomb and bomb, doll and roll or home and some.  
Since pay is rhymed with say, why not paid with said I pray?

Think of blood, food and good. Mould is not pronounced like could.  
Wherefore done, but gone and lone - Is there any reason known?  
To sum up all, it seems to me, sound and letters don't agree.

## One reason why I cannot spell

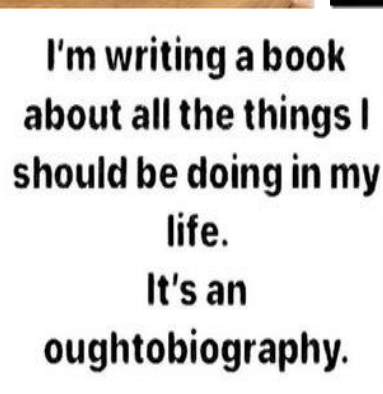
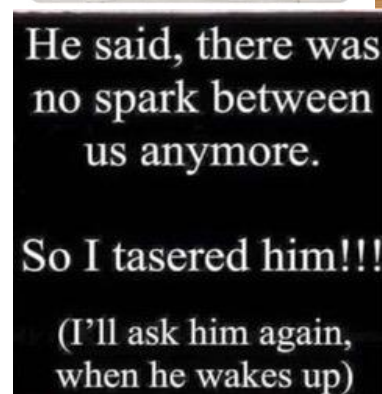
Although I learned the rules well, some words like coup and through, sound just like  
threw and flue and who but oo is never spelled the same. I ponder over though - Is it  
spelled like so, or throw, or beau? Bough is never bow, it's bow, I mean the bow that  
sounds like plow, And not the bow that sounds like row - the row that is pronounced  
like roe. I wonder, too, about rough and tough they sound the same as gruff and muff,  
but are spelled like bough and though, for they Are both pronounced a different way.  
And why can't I spell trough and cough and the same as I do scoff and golf?



Why isn't drought spelled just like route, or doubt or pout or sauerkraut? When words all sound so much the same, to change the spelling seems a shame. There is no sense – which sounds like cents - in making such a difference between the sight and sound of words. Each spelling rule that undergirds the way a word should look will fail and therefore prove to no avail. Exceptions negate the truth of what the rule states; So though I try, I still despair and I mutter "It's not fair That I'm held up to ridicule and made to look like such a fool When it's the spelling that's at fault.

We have polish the Polish furniture.  
He could lead if he were allowed to lead out.  
The farm was used to produce produce.  
The dump was so full that it had to refuse any more refuse. T  
The soldier decided to desert in the desert.  
This was a good time to present the present.  
I did not object to the object.  
The insurance was invalid for the invalid.  
The bandage was wound around the wound.  
There was a row among the oarsmen about how to row.

## Humour



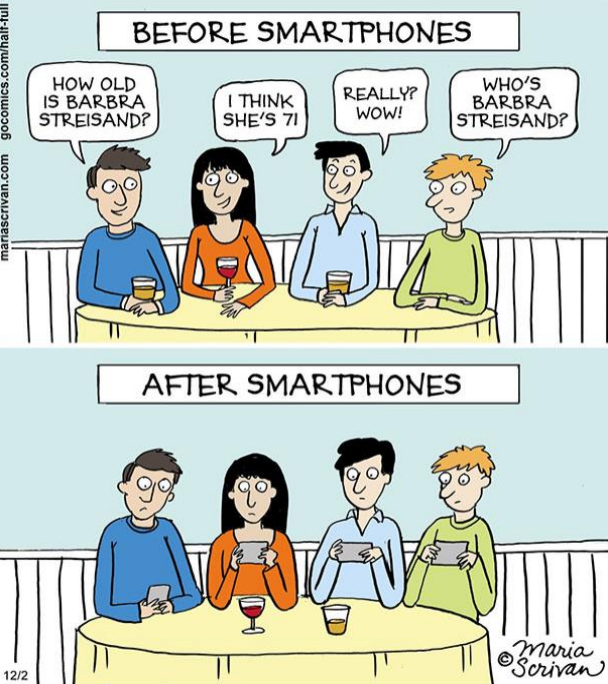


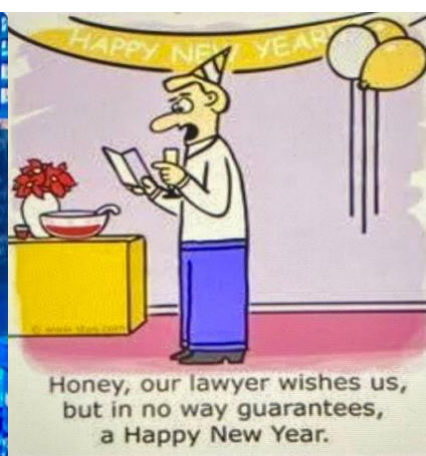
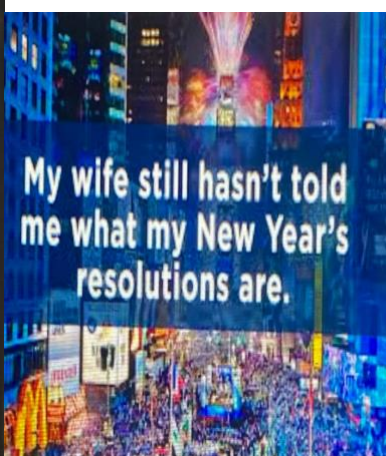
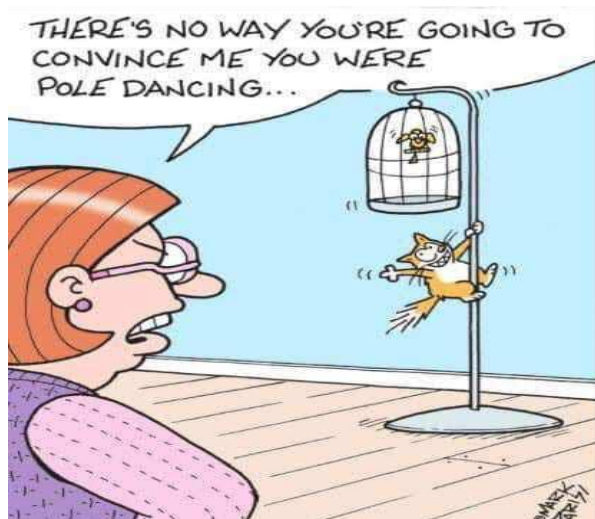
Apparently exercise helps you with decision making. It's true. I went for a run this morning and decided I'm never going again.

My wife asked if she could have a little peace and quiet while she cooked dinner... So I took the battery out of the smoke alarm!

We live in a time where intelligent people are being silenced so that stupid people won't be offended.

When I lost the fingers on my right hand in a freak accident, I asked the doctor if I would still be able to write with it. He said, "Probably, but I wouldn't count on it 😂"





## Reflection

On Wednesday, former Provincial Kevin Dance offered this beautiful reflection from Howard Thurman's, 'The Work of Christmas'



*When the song of the angels is stilled, When the star in the sky is gone, When the kings and princes are home, When the shepherds are back with their flock, The work of Christmas begins: To find the lost, To heal the broken, To feed the hungry, To release the prisoner, To rebuild the nations, To bring peace among brothers, To make music in the heart.*

## Prayers



We remember those who have died recently especially as well as those whose anniversaries occur at this time, especially

**Tom Butler (Geraldine's father), Norma Norris, Barry Hanrahan, John Goold, and Brian Kelly,** We pray that all who have died, have found joy in God's eternal presence.

We also pray for members of our Holy Cross family who are coping with illness and all who care for them: we especially remember

Mary Cogle, Dennis Cogle, Pam Storey, Lucia Isgro, Gladys Bardini, Marie Spowart, Max McMahon, Bob Hallam, Fergus Ryan, Anne Woon, Monica Sleeman, Nina Conti, Lisa Iverach, Maria Di Giantomasso, Caroline Hagedorn, Kate Lenic, Cate Sweeney, Anthona Henderson, Gerry Bond, Dr Peter Heffernan, Elizabeth Walsh, Denise Egan, Nancy Reynolds, Graham Burke, Maureen Barns, Bernadette Owen, Marilyn Cilmi, Alexander Lim. Carol Battistella, Anne Burke, Rex & Jan Cambry, Patricia Keeghan, Luke Norden, Rod Gorfine, Zoe & Sophia Chung, Pam Gartland, Peter Barry, Doris Castro, Julia Cantone, Helen McLean, Bro Jerome CP, Phil Drew, Greg Agosta, Lesley Yang, Anne Jenkins, and Errol Lovett,



Chris will send the link for next Sunday's Mass, on Saturday

Brian