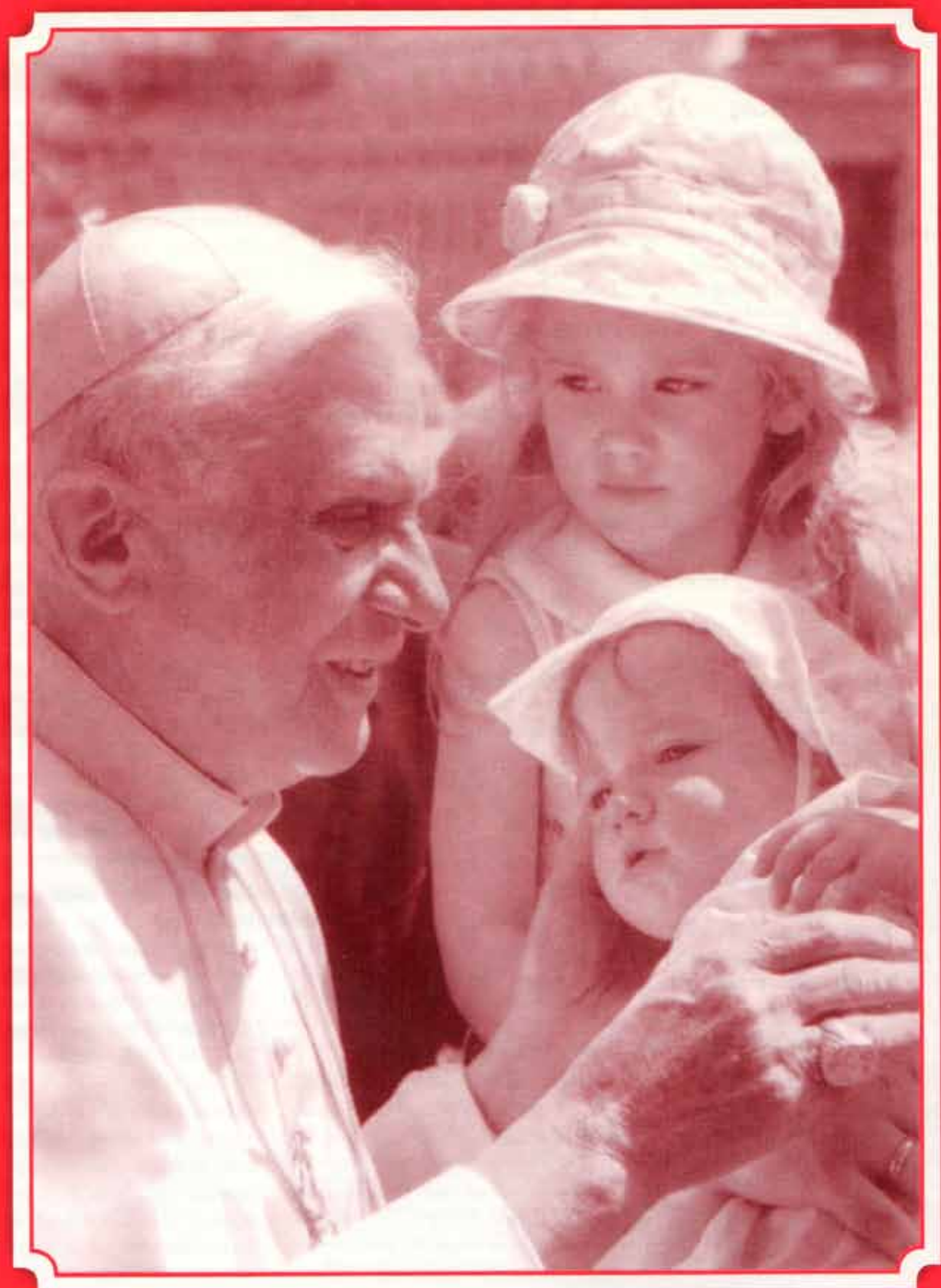


# Tui Motu

InterIslands

December 2006 Price \$5



*to such belongs the Kingdom of God*



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## The Christmas Cover:

Pope Benedict blesses small children at the Convention on the Family, in Seville, Spain.

## The new postal codes

Thank you, subscribers, for telling us your new codes. For now, the Post Office have advised us to continue using the old ones.

# The coming of the Christ-child

The editorial team wishes all *Tui Motu* readers a peaceful, safe and much blessed Christmas and a most enjoyable holiday season. We wish to take the opportunity to thank you all for your generous support – especially the overwhelming response to our Jubilee celebration in all its aspects: the 100th issue itself, the launch of the *Tui Motu Foundation*, the push for more subscriptions and a veritable flood of donations. We have a future!

Christmas is the story of the birth of the God-Child. It is in essence a children's feast. Our primary emphasis in this Christmas issue is on the young. This age is very cruel to the youth of the world. They are the main victims of war, civil strife, the AIDS pandemic, of the drug culture and the widespread breakdown in family life.

Among many articles and stories which particularly touch on the lives of the young are two deliberately chosen as 'good news'. Paul Andrews (p 8) underlines all that is sound in a healthy schooling. We also interview a Canterbury couple who devote their lives to bringing change into the lives of children who for one reason or another are casualties (pp 9-11). Christmas itself, as John Bruerton says opposite (p3), can be an occasion for purely secular indulgence. We may well ask ourselves: is it the Christ-Child or Santa Claus who will be the centre of our feasting?

## Transformation

There are two major articles which I hope you will read many times. The interview with Jean Vanier (pp 5-7) is a unique opportunity to look into the soul of one of the world's special human beings. His life, like that of Christ himself, has been an outreach to the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters who have major learning disabilities. His work

has been to create for them places to belong, to grow as human beings and discover their personal worth. The *l'Arche* movement is surely one of the great stories of our time. Jean's lifelong labour is empowered by a vibrant spirituality, which equally is his gift to our generation.

Many of us were also fortunate during November to sit at the feet of the American Franciscan Richard Rohr. The theme he offered (pp 18-20) is a fitting complement to the Vanier interview. Richard puts his finger right on what the church exists for: to bring people to holiness, to help believers to meet their God personally. He calls it 'transformation'. It is adult conversion. It is the moment when a believer sees it is not sufficient merely to conform externally to God's law.

There is a vocation which is personal to each one of us – the unique invitation to "come, follow me". God comes into my life and yours and changes it for good. It happened to Jean Vanier at Trosly, in France, during the 1960s. It changed him, and it has been immensely fruitful for many human beings. The dynamic which Richard Rohr spells out is the need to combine contemplation with the call to action.

Richard Rohr's visit prompted a hostile response from some Catholics who deliberately tried to scupper the Christchurch weekend. What is truly astonishing is that there are those in positions of influence who not only listen to calumny against a man like Richard Rohr but also attempt to use their authority to stop the faithful being nourished. I hope our bishops take due note of this and act appropriately. The attitude and action of these people is a scandal. The *Adult Education Trust* is to be commended for taking no notice of them. In the event it was a full house. Thanks be to God!

M.H.

# Journey towards Christmas

**A**t Christmas when we read the Gospel Infancy narratives, certain questions spring to mind: “Why did *Matthew* and *Luke* take the trouble to write down these stories? And since *Matthew* and *Luke* were not ear or eyewitnesses, are the stories historically reliable?”

## What were the writers trying to say?

Christianity, like Judaism, is a storytelling culture and tradition, a storytelling theology and a storytelling way of living. *Matthew* and *Luke* were not writing an allegory; they intended readers to believe that the narratives were grounded in actual events. The Bethlehem nativity, they say, was real just as the eventual ministry and death of Jesus was real.

*Matthew* and *Luke* are making a retrospective statement, a coded confession as to the real identity and adult mission of the baby called Jesus. They know how the story ended. They are interpreting the Bethlehem story from the standpoint of Easter, because the Cross, say *Matthew* and *Luke* – and *Paul*, was **the** great reality, the radical event, the defining moment of all history.

The infancy stories, then, are not intended as the New Testament equivalent of *Genesis*. They are a bold public statement as to who Jesus is. Written in 70 AD or so, *Matthew* and *Luke* are urging their church congregations to hang in there, to have faith in the Crucified and Risen Christ; it wasn't a safe time to openly confess to being a follower of Jesus.

About 60 AD the Emperor Nero had slaughtered Christians in Rome. In 70 AD the Romans had destroyed the Temple and left Jerusalem in ruins. And the infant Christian sect had been kicked out of the synagogues by the Pharisees. It was crucial that the evangelists reassure the infant Christian community that, in the babe of Bethlehem despite all appearances to the contrary, God had visited and redeemed his people and that Jesus Christ was the Son of David and the Son of God.

The name Jesus comes from *Joshua*, which means *salvation* or *Yahweh saves*. The nameless ones (the shepherds) are more important than the great ones (Herod and Augustus and the high priests). The Roman peace is an illusion. In singing the *Magnificat* Mary contradicts the enforced taxation, armaments and brutal suppression of protest. Notice how salvation, justice and happiness come not from powerful Roman emperors but from a helpless baby and his mother!

## What do the infancy stories say to us in 2006?

Over the last 1600 years or so, the Bethlehem scene has become completely integrated into church culture through carols, hymns, art, stained glass windows, Christmas cards, Christmas pageants, presents, food and holy-days.

At the risk of introducing the spirit of Ebenezer Scrooge I suggest that Christians need to seriously review the popular Christmas ‘story’ of our time, which concentrates excessively on parcels under Christmas trees, mountains of food and drink, a reindeer sleigh dashing through the snow and Santa Claus in every shopping mall with children on his knee. Such a Christmas story is a travesty, a caricature, a secularisation of the Christian tradition and of Scripture.

Here in New Zealand we need to be vigilant to the increasing abandonment of the Biblical Christmas story. An alternative ‘Christmas’ is being foisted on us every year by the multimillion dollar retail industry and the advertising media. Let us keep the subversive hope and trust of the first Christmas alive.

For the infancy stories make the outrageous claim that Emperors, ancient or modern, political, economic or religious, are not divine, that crippling taxes and low wages are not the legitimate claim of rulers or employers (or trading blocs), that true peace and prosperity is not for the privileged on the basis of the domination, exclusion and marginalisation of other people and other cultures.

The infancy stories, with the *Magnificat* and the *Benedictus*, show us the origins of the Jesus Movement. **God has visited and redeemed his people and all humankind**, they say. **Jesus is the Son of David and the Son of God**. The infancy stories assure us that, in Jesus Christ, God's salvation, God's liberation, is freely available to all people; that God is with us in all our living and in all our struggles.

So, may the church and all people this Christmas hear again the Good News, claiming that salvation, recovering that sacred dimension, and embracing the challenge of living positively, co-operatively, with justice and hope and compassion in the world and in the pattern of Jesus Christ.

Let us liberate Christmas from Santa Claus; let us truly celebrate the Christmas of Bethlehem.

**John Bruerton**



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**Tui Motu-InterIslands** is an independent, Catholic, monthly magazine. It invites its readers to question, challenge and contribute to its discussion of spiritual and social issues in the light of gospel values, and in the interests of a more just and peaceful society. Inter-church and inter-faith dialogue is welcomed. The name Tui Motu was given by Pa Henare Tate. It literally means “stitching the islands together...”, bringing the different races and peoples and faiths together to create one Pacific people of God. Divergence of opinion is expected and will normally be published, although that does not necessarily imply editorial commitment to the viewpoint expressed.

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Women’s ministry

Bridget Taumoepeau’s ‘thoughts on women’s ministry’ (*TM Aug*) triggers this thought.

According to the Scriptures there were several women at the foot of the Cross and one man. The ratio of four to one (including congregations of most Protestant denominations) is roughly the support found for churches in the Western world. Pull out the women and services would virtually cease apart from priestly functions, which would be rendered rather pointless with the emptying of the pews.

Christ’s ministry was made possible by the material (and, for all we know, spiritual) support of that band of wives and mothers who followed him everywhere. As Bridget suggests the future of the church may be dubious indeed if progress is not made towards honouring the active role that women could play and are increasingly demanding.

By acknowledging this valid and vital contribution they can make in areas which go beyond the present comfort zone, who knows – people might even

letters 

We welcome comment, discussion, argument, debate. But please keep letters under 200 words. The editor reserves the right to abridge, while not altering meaning.

Response articles (up to a page) are also welcome, but need to be by negotiation

be attracted back into churches which are fast emptying.

*Norman Maclean, Gisborne*

Smither’s picture

This riveting Smither picture (*Nov. p 32*) is countercultural, disturbing the preferred image of two playmates enjoying each other’s company. The sheer intensity of their encounter is shocking, reminding us how vulnerable even children are to a kind of innate violence in the human psyche.

Above all though there is the irony of the gun as a plaything. Is the supply of ‘weapons’ to children a form of conditioning?

*Tom Cloher, Auckland*

Judas at the Last Supper

Desmond Smith’s letter (*Nov. TM*) asks whether Christ gave the Eucharist to Judas at the Last Supper.

In *John 13:18*, Christ quotes *Psalms 41:10*: “Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.” In the context of the Last Supper, “ate my bread” is a clear reference to Judas eating the Eucharist. What else would we expect the God who is Love to do?

*Chris Sullivan, Pakuranga*

Jubilee issue

The 100th edition of *Tui Motu* challenged me to identify its particular character. Its primary impulse is inclusiveness. Look in vain in this issue for anyone left out. In this respect it represents the redemptive attitude of the gospel.

Love, not fear, is a recurring theme of contributors, so much in harmony that it is hard to credit that they come from various faith communities and from cultures and countries other than our own. It is difficult to read *Tui Motu* without becoming more hopeful and more compassionate.

That’s a decent legacy to leave those responsible for the next 100 issues.

*Ignatius Harrigan, Auckland*

Season Greetings, Tui Motu readers

We have had an amazing response to our *Tui Motu Foundation* project. The 100th issue with its peace theme has been really well received. A thousand extra copies were printed and 900 of them have already been sold around the country.

We have also been overwhelmed by the generous response from our readers. As I write this in mid-November \$6,600

has been given in small donations during the month. We have also had an excellent response to our appeal for people to sell down a generation and to encourage others to read *Tui Motu*. Over 100 new subscriptions have come in.

**Thank you to all** for your help and generosity. Especially those people who have promoted and sold for us around the country. We couldn’t do it without you.

May you all have a restful, safe and greatly blessed holiday over Christmas and enjoy the love of family and friends.

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The Jubilee Gift subscription was so successful we are continuing it for December.

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*On a recent trip to France  
Mike Noonan spent time with Jean Vanier,  
founder of L'Arche, the worldwide  
movement for disabled people*

## *... talking with* **Jean Vanier**

**Mike:** I remember the first time that I saw you. You were preaching a retreat to a group which was unlike any retreat group that I had seen before. There were old people and young people, priests, religious and lay people, people who couldn't walk, people who couldn't talk. There were people with PhDs and people with intellectual disabilities, people from different Christian traditions and people of different nations.

They were united in wanting to listen and to share about the Gospels. It seemed to me that this was a foretaste of heaven. You, a layperson who joined the navy at 13 and who went on to study and teach philosophy: how did you get to that point of preaching to such a diverse group?

**Jean:** Like many things in L'Arche, it just happened. In 1968, because I had given talks and many people were coming, a priest of the diocese of Toronto asked me to give a retreat for the priests. It was a time when it was difficult to find people to give retreats in the Catholic Church. I asked for a week to reflect and pray about it, and then I said I would; but that I wanted it not only for priests but also for lay people, religious, people with disabilities – open to all the people of God.

It was an important time for me as well as for others. I discovered I was able to talk about Jesus and the Gospels in a way that attracted people and helped them to pray. People say that each time I give a retreat I say new things. It is because I am also someone who is seeking, searching to be truthful. I don't give retreats just to get people to come to L'Arche, but a retreat is to help people discover how beautiful they are and that they are called towards freedom and to help others become free.

**Mike:** Jean, you are a Roman Catholic and you began your community in France, in the Catholic tradition. L'Arche very quickly found itself welcoming people not only from sister churches but also from other faiths. That started a journey which has a great deal to say to our world today, when divisions between the churches and faiths can be a matter of life and death. Can you tell us about that part of the story of L'Arche?

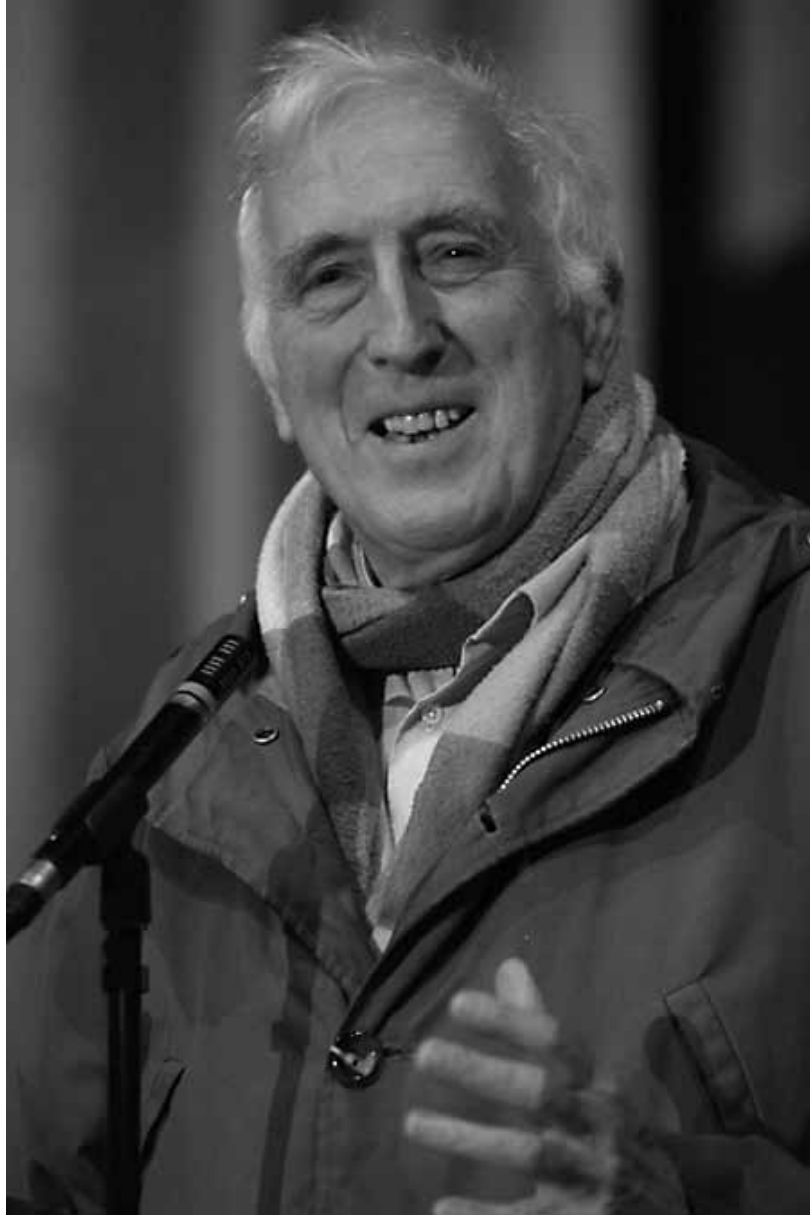


Photo: Olivier Peix – Ombres et Lumière

**Jean:** Yes, it has been a long journey. L'Arche was born in France, on Catholic soil, but when we welcome someone to our community what is important is not that he is or she is a Catholic but that he or she is in pain, lonely and rejected because of their disability. Here in Trosly our community is Catholic, with a priest who celebrates Mass and the sacraments – but when a person of a different tradition or faith comes to this community, we explain that we are Catholic and ask them what their needs are.

When we started moving into other cultures, communities worked with that same principle – welcoming people because they were in need, not because of their faith. In the United Kingdom, L'Arche is ecumenical, welcoming people from different Christian traditions. We can only rarely celebrate the Eucharist in those communities. People go to their local churches.

It is another reality in countries such as India where people within our communities are Hindu, Muslim and Christian. We would pray together and hopefully we'd find a unity in praying together. But then the Muslim members are encouraged to go to the mosque on Friday or to the Temple, if they are Hindu, or to their church if Christian. In our community in





Jean Vanier, with Jean-Christophe Pascal (l), international co-ordinator of L'Arche, and Christine McGrievy (r), vice international co-ordinator

Human beings, like all living beings, want to give life. One can give life through conceiving children, but all parents know that while they can give life biologically that is only the beginning. Once the baby is born you have to be with them, revealing to them every day that they are worth listening to. Obviously you have to try to educate the child, but true education occurs through communion and mutual trust.

A relationship of mutual trust reveals that you are precious, that you have something to say and that you have your freedom. A child needs to know that he or she is loved. If a child senses that they are not loved, often their self-image is broken, they lack self-esteem, and they develop a fear of creativity, of doing what they feel is right.

So the whole structure of L'Arche, the whole pedagogy of L'Arche is to reveal to people that they have value, helping them to express desires then helping them to fulfil those desires. It's in a hundred different questions within L'Arche – what is it that you like to eat? What sort of things would you like, how do you want your hair to be done, do you want to keep your beard or not? What type of work interests you?

It is about helping people to have projects and then to make choices, even if these choices take them outside L'Arche to independent living, getting married or whatever it might be. It's about helping people discover that they are a subject, that they are an important person – and then it goes even deeper as they begin to realise that they are loved by God and have a place in the plan of God.

**Mike:** L'Arche has taken you on an interdisciplinary journey – theology, anthropology, psychiatry, sociology to name but a few. Do you have a sense that there is a synthesis emerging, saying new things that perhaps we haven't had words for in our cultures until now?

**Jean:** Everything here is based on experience, on welcome, listening, understanding and then watching how people grow and what they need.

This has been very strong for us, to bring experience and the word of God together: the word of God, the Gospel message, or the *Gita* if we are in Hindu culture. This is very much in line with Vatican II – listen to people; see the signs of God in people.

You can see this throughout the whole *First Letter of St John* – it is about bringing together that we are loved by God and called to love people, listening to people, being open to them understanding them and entering into committed covenant relationships with them.

Frequently, faith-based communities tend to be quite closed in themselves. Communities of L'Arche want to be rooted in faith but open... open to visitors, open to help people leave if that is what is good for them. There is belonging, but it is a belonging to help each one to become free to make choices and to go ahead. So the whole vision which is emerging

▷▷ Calcutta there is a wise Hindu man and a Catholic priest who accompany people and help them to be closer to God and more loving towards others. All this can be a challenge, particularly for people who are so ingrained in their own faith that they are scared of living with people of other faiths.

Here, in Trosly, we have some Muslim people with disabilities and a Muslim assistant, from Morocco. She lives her Muslim faith totally – goes to the mosque, or to the Ramadan prayer, and she tells us “I love the way you are living your faith here.” She has been here seven years and has just asked to stay another three years. I think that she dreams one day of starting a L'Arche community in Morocco.

So while there can be tension, it is resolved because we believe that what is most important is each person and their growth to greater openness, greater maturity and greater love. We want to help each person to live their faith, whether it is a Catholic faith, a Protestant faith or an Islamic faith.

**Mike:** In L'Arche you've discovered something very valuable about the spirituality of committed friendship with people with intellectual disabilities. Can you tell us about that?

**Jean:** We do everything we can to help each person find self-esteem and grow in self-confidence. One way is through work, letting people know that they are able to do beautiful things, but work is not the whole of the human being. A human being is about relationship, spirituality, having fun – much deeper than just being able to do things. What is important is for each person to discover that they are wonderful, precious and unique. It is through relationship that the other person discovers, from the way you listen to them or the way that you are with them, that you appreciate them as a person.

This is why I say that one of the fundamental ways of working in L'Arche is to communicate: “I am happy to be with you”. When you tell someone that you are happy to be with them, you reveal to them not only that it is good to be together but also that they are a good person and that they are precious. We do all we can here to help people to discover who they are and what the meaning of their life is.



– I call it a sociological vision – is that community is for each person and not for the group. The community is for people, and it is there to help each one become free.

We are also discovering that young people who come to us as assistants today are not like the young people of yesterday. There is a whole sociology of young people today who come to us often from broken families with not much sense of family; young people who are anguished, or who have been introduced to sexuality at a young age.

So there is the whole question around the meaning of sexuality and the question of sexuality and the people with intellectual disabilities. What is the relationship between sexual urge and commitment in friendship? If someone has been introduced to very free sexuality, then they might have difficulty much later on in remaining committed and faithful in family.

So it is the whole sociology of family. What happens to children when they don't just have just two parents or grandparents, but maybe six pairs of grandparents? What happens when they go through the trauma of the conflict between their mother and father and they don't know which side to take? We find that many young people are in need of security but also there is a great anguish and a desire to be free.

We are entering into a new world where we in l'Arche need the help of other people – philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, good psychiatrists; a world where we need wise religious leaders and theologians who help us in dialogue on

the ecumenical and inter-religious level. We in l'Arche are called to live on all these levels.

All this means having a good theology, a good vision and growing more and more towards wisdom. And wisdom is harmonising the various sciences and then building from the visions of theology and psychology towards a real understanding of what the human person is. What is the sense of belonging that they need? We have to be looking together for these wise people, so that we in l'Arche can become a bit wiser.

One of the most beautiful things in l'Arche is that we see people grow, change, being transformed from persons who were angry and aggressive with themselves, with their parents or others, sometimes violent and depressed, to becoming more peaceful, more open to others, more kind and capable of making choices. This maturation may take a number of years. But over the years we have seen many gentle resurrections.

The opposite approach to the one we take in l'Arche would be to use ideologies or to apply theories; what we find is essential is to look at what really helps the person to grow. I'm not saying that what is good is what works – but to look for what helps people become mature human beings and open to others. Resurrection is both a very human reality and a very spiritual reality. It is about accepting oneself and then letting desires grow. ■

*Mike Noonan is Zone Co-ordinator for L'Arche, Asia-West Pacific*



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# What children give us

*At time of jubilee Paul Andrews recalls  
not only when as a teacher he 'got it wrong' but also the good  
things he learned from dealing with children*

## *It is jubilee time.*

I have lived long enough to find myself invited to reunions of people I taught in the mid-'50s. The occasions lend themselves to sentimental utterances, remembering the nice things (having a young body, an uncluttered mind and good friends) and gliding over the dark patches: bullying, corporal punishment, the uncertainties of the hungry 1950s, when career guidance was unnecessary because there were no jobs.

The Gospel shows Jesus with children (*Mt 19,13*): they were noisy, energetic, enjoying life, running instinctively towards someone who also enjoyed it. The apostles spoke sternly to those who brought them: *These kids are not serious. We are here to listen to the Sermon on the Mount, and we can't hear him properly with all this noise and commotion.* Jesus intervened, invited the children closer and laid his hands on them. He gave them two precious things that cost no money: time and affection.

I remember 1956. A trade union official was considered revolutionary when he looked for a minimum wage of £10 a week. Some architects were surviving on £4. Our highest hopes were for a modest sufficiency. I was in my first teaching job. Schools tended to follow the line of the apostles rather than of Jesus.

Pupils were expected to be passive, at the receiving end, moving in lockstep, so that it was frowned upon to move ahead of the posse in your reader. They sat in rows, hands visible, not speaking unless spoken to, like the children Maria Montessori described as butterflies transfixed on pins. A

teaching colleague recounted the stern advice she received in training college: *Don't lean down to a pupil when you are with her; keep your distance.*

This year I am celebrating the retirement of Madeleine, a wonderful teacher from that time but not of it. She saw that love could flow in a classroom without inducing chaos; that children could learn in an active way, even moving around, following their interests; that even at a young age they could exercise self-discipline in learning. That needed space and a particular sort of teacher, who was unsurprising, could challenge her pupils, trust their good desires and command their respect. I had a chance to know many of her pupils, and came to recognise the unspoiled joy in learning and living that marked children from her classes.

Later I used to bring girls and boys from another small school, St Declan's, to play football against Madeleine's school. It was a special sort of football, with passionate parents on the sidelines. Numbers on the pitch were fluid, as players were distracted from the round ball by the delights of climbing trees or exploring sand pits or bird boxes. The referee was expected not merely to record the score but to control it. An even result was much prized.

Towards the end of one match a breathless boy asked me: *What's the score?* "Two all", I said. Donal responded with a metaphysical question which has puzzled me ever since: *Who is two and who is all?* It was always fun to be there. The school was green before its time, delighting in growing things

and the green spaces not far away, the Sugarloaf, Killiney Hill; Madeleine was always cooking up something exciting with the help of parents.

## *What is a jubilee?*

Not a time of complacency or self-congratulation, but drawing strength from roots. It is certainly a time for gratitude: to God for preserving us over half a century; and gratitude to the management boards that sustained such schools through many quietly negotiated crises; and gratitude to Madeleine and other teachers, for the magic they worked in keeping love flowing; and gratitude to the parents who trusted them; and above all gratitude to the children who made such schools into places of sunshine.

We have learned since 1956 that children are deprived not because we do not give them things, but because we do not sufficiently value what they give us. Madeleine realised and taught us to welcome what children have to offer. You remember how Kahlil Gibran wrote about children:

*You may give them your love but not your thoughts, for they have their own thoughts. You may house their bodies but not their souls, for their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams. You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you. For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday. You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.*

Despite our exalted role as teachers or parents, we were conscious that we were not as good as we looked. Those



# Eleazar

## – a place of healing



*Margaret and John Merrylees  
live on an eight hectare farmlet  
near Rangiora, north Canterbury.  
They call it 'Eleazar'.*

*Much of it is given over to market  
gardening and raising livestock.  
It is also an oasis for needy young  
people – and their families.*

*Twenty five years ago the  
Merrylees had a vision – now the  
vision is bearing fruit.*

### The vision

Margaret and John raised four children of their own and in their earlier life they often took in foster children. Margaret has also always had a passion for growing things, especially herbs, and for a time ran a health shop in Christchurch. An early hero of theirs was Mother Aubert, a great herbalist herself who was driven by a vision to assist the impoverished in the society of her own time. One of the Merrylees children was hyperactive, and Margaret helped set up the Christchurch Hyperactive Society to assist parents in managing these children.

Early in her life as a carer she observed the amazingly therapeutic effect animals often had on disturbed children. Working around animals the children learned to concentrate, to be less aggressive and to show empathy towards other living things, firstly animal and then human.

John and Margaret had come from religious backgrounds with an emphasis for both on strong social conscience: John a North Island Catholic, Margaret an Anglican from England. As a couple they learnt the importance of daily prayer and reading and reflecting on Scripture. For a time they belonged to a Christian community in the Maniototo. All these circumstances combined to give them both a vision, that God was calling them to do some special work.

In the early '80s, together they underwent a form of spiritual awakening. "The kingdom of God is within us", says Margaret. "God is not interested in what you do or who you are: God is in each one of us". Jesus, they knew, had a particular love of children. So, together, they conceived this desire to do something to help children in need.

The name 'Eleazar' came to both of them independently: the meaning in Hebrew is *God has done this*. Eleazar was the priest companion of Aaron at the time of the children of Israel entering the Promised Land. One of his tasks was to make and use the oil of anointing, the oil of healing. Reflecting on this, they came to see that their work with children was a sort of healing ministry.

Unfortunately they had financial problems at that time and John suffered a bout of ill health. So the vision remained 'on hold'. Eventually they applied to be residential house parents at the Mount Grey Downs Youth Centre for boys who had been in trouble with the law. Once again Margaret observed how quite disturbed children were positively affected by working with animals. Even collecting eggs for hens was an adventure for them.

Mount Grey was closed in 1999. The closure offered them an opportunity to realise their own vision. Because of a spate of youth suicides round Christchurch the government



of us who were no longer children took on the gigantic responsibility of working for them. We know we were less than perfect: that we were sometimes short-tempered, indulged our particular delight in one child, or irritation with another, failed to stand for the weak against the strong, for ensuring fairness and justice. What children do afterwards is of their own

shaping; but we touched their lives, and insofar as we failed to help them, or even did harm, a jubilee reminds us to say to God, to our charges, and to our fellow workers: Please pardon me, I am sorry for my inadequacies.

Our children are flying forward into areas we have not charted ourselves. What is asked of us is in Kahlil's last

phrase: *Even as the Archer loves the arrow that flies, so He loves also the bow that is stable*. We are expected to be stable, reliable, showing a steady love in our own lives. 2006 is unimaginably different from 1956, but we can draw a difficult lesson from those beginnings: to offer our children what Jesus offered: love and stability, plenty of time and a readiness to bless. ■



- ▷▷ decided to set aside funds to give respite care for children who were seen to be at risk. The Merrylees were approached and given a contract to provide this care.

### Founding Eleazar

At the same time one of their sons helped them to rent the present property, near Rangiora. The *Eleazar Trust* was set up to support the enterprise. John and Margaret have now been there for seven years, and when the lease is up they hope to be able to purchase the property and put Eleazar on a sound, long term basis.

Many children who are sent to them have not received a ‘well-rounded’ upbringing. They may lack adequate nurture and discipline at home. Australian psychologist Dr Michael Carr-Gregg describes such children as “growing up in a psychological wasteland without nurturing and support... Every day of the week 13-year-olds have to make decisions adults need to make for them”. Under the influence of modern marketing pressures they become like “greedy little adults”. Such children, when left largely to their own devices, grow up into unhappy adolescents who are difficult to manage.

For instance, a child fails to receive consistent guidance from parents: one moment they are told off for doing something, next minute they are not. They don’t know where they are. They have no clear boundaries. They are at the receiving end of constant criticism. They are never praised. When you have a solo mother who is suffering mental illness, you usually get very dysfunctional children, who don’t how to deal with their emotions. The children have a lot of bottled up anger. Their behaviour inevitably reflects the sort of home they have been brought up in.

Some of the children who come to them exhibit obsessive behaviour, especially with things like cellphones and PlayStations. The parents have spoilt them with the latest gadgetry and the children become hooked. They constantly expect instant satisfaction.

Another cause is within society itself, which is becoming so fragmented that there are no longer extended families

to help bring a child up. Many teenagers become socially isolated. They find it hard to socialise because they spend their leisure time in their own bedrooms watching TV. They have become slaves to a screen. They have even ceased to function socially within the family unit.

Of course not all families are like that. Some youngsters come to the farm from excellent homes, but the child has ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) or suffers from Asperger’s Syndrome, which is a form of autism. Eleazar takes eight children at a time, one weekend per month and for school holidays, to give the parents a break. At first they also took long term residents, but it didn’t work as well as having one regime for all the children. Some of the children have been coming regularly for three years and more.

What these children need more than anything else are good role models. Recently the Merrylees had a youth group visit the farm from a Christchurch parish to do painting jobs. The children soon became attached to some of the visitors, and the change in them was amazing. The youth coming from outside acted as ‘mentors’ for the children and helped introduce them to a world they were ignorant of.

Part of the aim of the Trust is to provide a break for overstressed parents. Now they have rented an adjoining house with a beautiful garden to be used for mothers. There is also a plan to put a second house on the property for long-term residents.



### Activities.

Quite aggressive children can change dramatically when they get to handle lambs or when they are given a very simple task like collecting hen’s eggs. The activities of the farm give opportunities to the children at various levels of development. They discover, for instance, how to organise themselves and how to handle equipment. They learn to work together. They start to acquire the sort of skills which would be second nature to boys and girls brought up on a farm, who from an early age are well used to being ‘part of the team’.



The children also learn to solve problems, to achieve and become competent. This is vital for their self-esteem. Moreover, when children have everything given to them, they never learn to relate properly to other human beings and they lack empathy. But as the Eleazar children start handling young animals, holding day-old chicks and keeping them warm, they learn to care for another living being. They cease to be utterly selfish.

John teaches the boys to use a quad bike, how to manipulate a trailer, how to manoeuvre a vehicle safely. They become competent at these simple tasks. They learn how to look after equipment. They acquire the social skills which are usual among country children.

Perhaps a child will ask, when it's raining, "Do I have to go out in the rain and feed the animals today?" Margaret says: "Do I have to give you breakfast today?" They soon get the message.

### **'Hort' therapy**

Everyone knows that gardening is good for the human spirit. So this also has become an integral part of life at Eleazar. The first thing the children have to decide is what they want to grow. At first they are limited to four species of plants. The garden has raised beds. The children are given a square each. They have to count out the seeds, write out the labels, (learn how to spell 'carrot'!), water their plants and eventually harvest them.

One thing they each must learn is patience. They plant seed one month. They come back, and there are the seedlings ready to be potted out or put in the soil. Eventually they will want to take home their produce. One boy had an obsessive hatred of eating vegetables. He was given pumpkins to grow. They grew so dramatically that he was beside himself with delight. Eventually he was able to take home 15 pumpkins he had grown himself – and he started to eat them!

'Tommy' has been with the Merrylees for two and a half years. When he first came, he was addicted to PlayStation and used very violent language learnt from TV. His mother had not been providing him with adequate boundaries. There was no father in the home. The Merrylees persevered with him even though at the start he was so awful that Margaret wondered how she was ever going to cope.



"I had a sense, however, that God loved Tommy just as much as God loved me!", explains Margaret. "One day he started to imitate another boy on the trampoline. He learned to do back flips. Then he said to us: 'I'm going to stop using the PlayStation and stay out here on the trampoline'. It took about two years to work the transformation. The children have access to a PlayStation in the afternoon. But we wean them off it gradually. The more they nag, the later in the day they are allowed on!"

"Then we had a visit from boys from a local church youth and this

influenced Tommy so much that he started going to the church where they came from when he was at home. And he brought another person with him to the same church.

"It is often not easy to define success with these children by external parameters. What is happening is an inner healing. It may take months, even years. At the same time we are enabling families to stay together who might otherwise break up."

*enabling families  
to stay together who might  
otherwise break up*

### ***So how long will they continue in this work?***

"John and I are no longer young," says Margaret, "and the work is very demanding. We believe that every person has a God-given purpose in life. The Bible continues to nourish us daily. Recently I read *Jeremiah 2,13*, and it spoke to me that only God can change these children inside. We simply do our bit from the outside."

***And what is the future?*** The Eleazar Family Support Trust is now sufficiently well established that in the near future the three separate activities will exist side by side in adjacent buildings: a house for continuous care, the respite care centre and a house for mothers. John and Margaret can see that a time is coming when they will be moving into a 'wisdom' role. Recently they have engaged someone to run the mothers' house.

The work is supported by very energetic Trustees and helpers who raise funds. If any readers would like to give a Christmas present to help the growth of this very worthy cause, the address is Eleazar Family Support Trust, 43 Browns Road, Okuku. RD4 Rangiora. There is a website: [www.eleazar.org.nz](http://www.eleazar.org.nz). ■



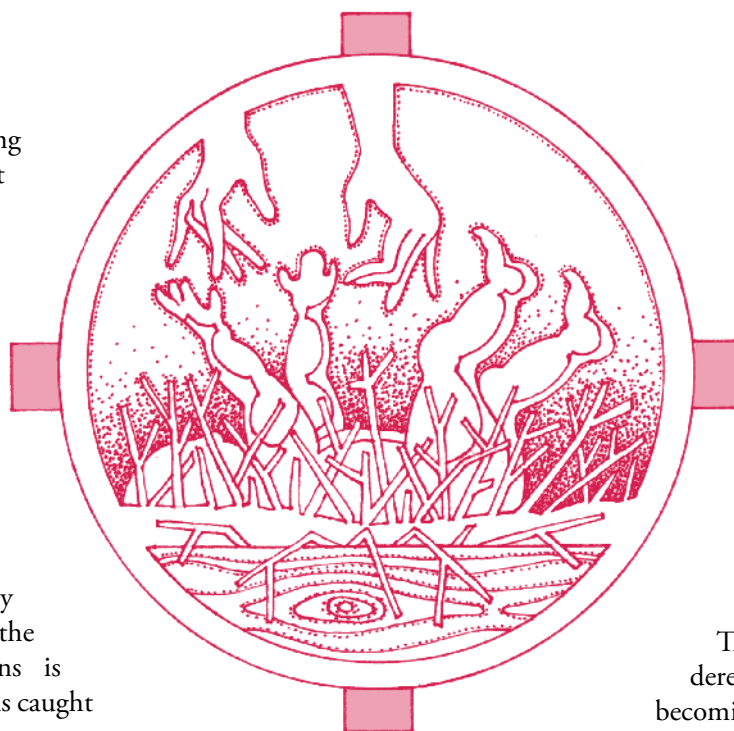
# God's longing to be human

Daniel O'Leary

They were standing together in front of the crib. Her father heard her musing to herself: *I wonder if God enjoys being a baby.* Especially around this time of Advent, the child's reflection often returns to me and fills my mind. These are the moments when I find the realisation of what Incarnation means simply overwhelming. The veil of the routine seasonal repetitions is briefly parted and the heart is caught off guard.

Another such moment happened last month. A Sunday paper offered a free pre-Christmas DVD of an old film. In 1987 Wim Wenders won Best Director at Cannes for *Wings of Desire*. Wenders' post-war Berlin is full of ponytailed angels who listen to and comfort the broken hearts and minds of mortals. On the verge of falling in love with a beautiful trapeze artist, one of them, Daniel, becomes fascinated (against holy orders) with the possibility of becoming human. Told from the angels' point of view, the film is shot in black and white, blossoming into colour only when the angels perceive the realities of humankind.

It is wonderfully touching to be privy to Daniel's musings about what it must be like to become really real, to experience surprise, to feel the cold, to hold an apple, to be touched, to take the one he is falling in love with in his arms. As he observes our human ways his desire grows stronger.



One day he finally crosses over and becomes flesh. Like a baby, or a just-dropped calf, he struggles to keep his physical balance. It is a moment of pure discovery. He runs. He skips. Grinning broadly he breathes deeply and feels his mouth; he rubs his hands together, making little sounds like "Ah!" and "Oh!". Accidentally he bangs his head and, fascinated, he stares at the blood on his fingers and tastes it with delight. "Is this what red is?" he asks a passer-by.

Like a child opening his presents on Christmas morning, Daniel reels and rocks under the delightful experience of each of his senses. He is ecstatic in his newly found humanity. His friendship with Marian grows stronger. By now the film is all in colour. The infectious exuberance of the angel made human, whether sucking on an ice cream, splashing in a puddle or staring at the colour purple, is fired

with the enthusiasm of a child's first wonder. You sense a simplicity and an innocence in his delight at being alive, in his appetite for new experiences, especially the experience of loving someone. "It is the love between us that has made me human," Daniel reflects. "That night I learned to be astonished. I now know what no other angel knows."

The child in California wondered whether God enjoyed becoming a baby. Maybe the love story of Daniel is an echo of the love story of God. Maybe God, too, in the beginning, in the loneliness of infinity, yearned for playmates. "God is sheer joy," wrote St Thomas Aquinas, "and sheer joy demands companionship."

Could it be that God created the world in the first place because of a burning desire to be exactly like one of us, and so to experience everything that human beings experience? Just as the committed love between a woman and a man creates the new life of a baby, so too, the divine essence of extravagant and unconditional longing for human love gives birth to the world and to everything and everyone in it.

"God possesses the heavens," wrote W.B. Yeats, "but he covets the earth. Oh!... he covets the earth." Von Balthasar, the 'theologian of beauty', wrote about Incarnation as the fleshing out of "God's eros, God's jealous, ravenous and loving desire for us."

Imagination is the key to unblocking the undreamed-of beauty that lies behind the question of that wondering child. It was from the untamed wildness in her heart that her quiet reflection came. She was able to form it before we told her the wrong answers, before we boxed shut her creative soul and locked up her wild wonder.

Her musings came straight from the divine imagination, still fresh as a daisy in her childhood essence. She sensed the impatience of God with divine invisibility: the need of God to be seen and heard. Unfortunately, our preoccupation with the secondary issues of the season blinds us to the many-splendoured thing at its centre. With unseeing hearts we miss the shattering and shocking revelation of the crib.

I do not know what the child's father might have said to her. Very little, I hope. Still free, her untouched soul was already moving unerringly and more deeply into the beautiful mystery. In her small heart she may well have continued to wonder whether God longed for the playful experience of

being the body and soul of everything – of all shapes and sizes, all colours and textures, all levels of life and all shades of imperfection.

Maybe she was wondering whether God, the author of difference, the artist of transformation, longed to experience what it was like to change – from small to bigger to big, like acorns that grow huge, like tadpoles that become frogs, like baby snakes that stretch long, and small giraffes that reach tall, and like babies of every colour that beam brighter and bonnier with each passing day.

**W**e ourselves, one of these misty evenings, need only tune in to the eternal child in our own souls, to hear the same questions. Did God come to us on the wings of desire, not reluctantly and with regret, as we were often told? Did God come to us with a passion for our human senses, to see and be seen, to touch and be touched, to understand and to be understood? Did God yearn to fall in love in a human way, to feel the shock of forgiveness, to say “I believe in you”, to be transfigured by courage and to shed the blood of fear?

This brings a final question: did God the Mother, in her sheer joy at becoming a baby, desire also the consequences of her planned vulnerability – that her outrageous love would soon lead her down that Jerusalem road, and up that Calvary hill, where a terrible cross of despair was being prepared for her in the broken body and tormented soul of her beloved, grown-up child?

*I wonder if God enjoys being a baby,* our small mystic reflected beneath the fixed star and the floating angels. As her heart was still and silent before the mystery, did she begin to sense that she herself was that baby, that she too, shone with the same light, that her own young body and heart were home to a delighted God, and that the winters of her life would always reveal an inevitable spring? And was this miracle true of everyone? Were we all, unknowingly, as full of God's beauty as the baby was? And if we really believed that all of this is true, how do we keep hurting each other, and destroying peace like we do? How could anything ever be the same again? ■

*Daniel O'Leary is a priest of the Leeds diocese in the north of England*

## *The Fish*

### A Christmas Story

*Joy Cowley*

**All right. I said I'd tell you about the fish.** Well, summer was early that year, and there was no going to town on Christmas Eve – because of the hay, you see. Mum was driving the tractor, Dad was on the trailer and us five kids were helping Uncle Pete load. Hard work in the heat – bales like big Weetbix tied with green twine. We had tough hands but the string still cut and there were thistles to be dug out of fingers.

Boy, were we pleased to see Uncle Pete's wife, Auntie Roimata, bouncing across the paddocks on her motorbike! It was a BSA Bantam with a spring clip on the carrier and a box with two flagons of lemon cordial and some sandwiches and I forget what else. **No, not the fish. I'm coming to that.**

So we all sat in the macrocarpa shade, us kids still moaning about town. It was the shopping, you see. We hadn't bought anything for Mum and Dad. The tree was up in the bay window. We'd made our own decorations – ping pong balls painted with glitter, silver bells from milk bottle tops, crepe paper streamers. But what about the presents? It was all right for our parents. They'd got stuff for us kids weeks before. We'd seen the parcels at the back of the garage. It was them who were going to miss out.

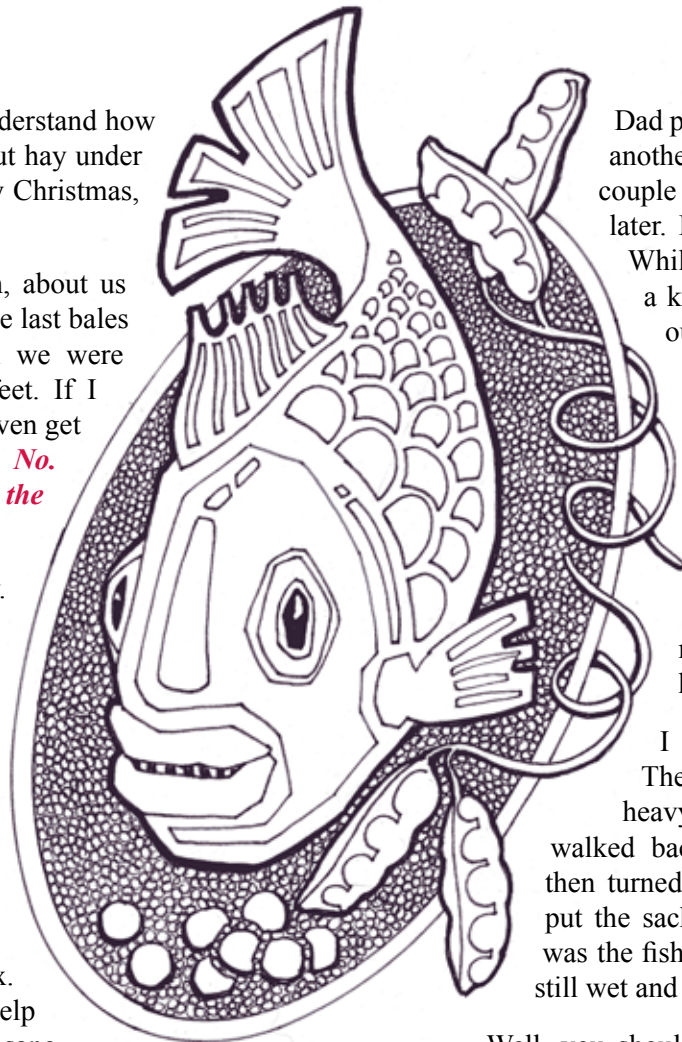
I said we should all drive into town when the hay was finished, but Mum said we'd be too tired. “Forget it,” said Dad. “Getting the hay in the barn's the best present you could give us.” Uncle Pete and Auntie Roi said, yeah, yeah, ▶▶

▷▷ too right, but they didn't understand how us kids felt. You couldn't put hay under the tree with a card, "Merry Christmas, Mum and Dad."

They were spot on, though, about us being tired. We didn't get the last bales in until dark and by then we were just about asleep on our feet. If I remember rightly, I didn't even get in my pyjamas. *The fish? No. I haven't forgotten about the fish. We're coming to that.*

I guess we woke up early. Kids always do, don't they? Our toys were by the tree and they were corker. Mum and Dad had gone around the auction mart, bought second-hand stuff and cleaned it up. I got a tool kit with real tools and a pump action oil can. The others had a bike, scooter, cricket set, a music box. Mum got some of us to help her pod the peas. My sisters sang, While shepherds washed their socks by night, all seated on the ground, a cake of Lifebuoy soap came down and soapsuds splashed around.

Mum told them off but she wasn't really mad. It was when she opened the meat safe, that she got upset. No fridge in those days, you see, and with the hot weather, the leg of lamb for Christmas dinner was as high as a kite. It smelled like it had been lying in the paddock for three weeks. Poor Mum. She threw the stinking meat out to the dogs and said, "That's it! That's it! I give up!"



Dad put his arm around her. He'd kill another sheep, he said. He'd shoot a couple of ducks. We could have dinner later. But Mum wouldn't cheer up.

While they were talking there was a knock on the back door. I went out. There in the porch was this little kid with a sugar sack in his arms. Honest, he could hardly hold it. His skinny brown legs were bowed with the weight. I waited for him to say something. He didn't. We just looked at each other. Then he pushed the sack at me. "For your Mum and Dad," he said.

I tell you, I nearly dropped it. There was something inside, heavy, kind of floppy. The kid walked backwards across the verandah, then turned and ran over the paddocks. I put the sack down and opened it. Yes. It was the fish, a huge thing, blue and silver, still wet and smelling of the sea.

Well, you should have seen my mother. Dad, too. They couldn't believe it. Dad thought the boy was someone staying with Pete and Roimata, and he phoned to thank them. Uncle Pete said he didn't know anything about it. "Come off it, man," he said. "You think if I got a fish like that I'd give it away?"

So we never found out who the kid was or where the big fish came from. Like I said, it was fresh caught, and the sea was more than 30 miles away. All I know is we had a 14 pound snapper with peas and new potatoes from the garden, and it was the best Christmas dinner I ever tasted. ■

## Aotearoa Christmas

*Come, all you shepherds and shearers.  
Put down your blades,  
shove the fleece into a corner  
and hurry on down to the birthing place.  
Christ is with us.*

*It is dark right now in Bethlehem  
but here the sun blazes in a fanfare of brass  
and gulls float like scraps of paper  
on a blue, blue sea.  
Christ is with us.*

*Not in a stable this time,  
but a house truck parked by the creek  
under a snow of manuka blossom,  
Mary, the baby, two cats and a dog  
and Joseph making pancakes on a little gas  
stove.*

*Go quietly, now, for this is holy time.  
Kick your boots off at the step  
and go in with open eyes,  
ready to be surprised by God.  
Christ is with us.*

Joy Cowley



# The Shepherd Story

Glynn Cardy

*There were some hands camped out in a paddock nearby, keeping an eye on their mob of sheep that night. Their eyes popped out on stalks when an angel breezed by and lit up the sky like Xmas-in-the-Park.*

*"Jeepers!" they said.*

*The angel replied, "Stop looking like a bunch of stunned mullets. Let me tell you what's going down. Today in a one-horse town over the hill a kid has been born. No ordinary ankle-biter. Gonna turn the world upside down. You'll find him wrapped in a blankie and lying in a feed-trough."*

*And before you could say, 'Gimme a break!' the whole sky was filled with more angels than Aucklanders in a traffic jam, and making just about as much noise. When eventually the whole show had moved on, the hands looked at one another: "Reckon we'd better check this out."*

The Christmas story is more than a slice of ancient history. Its power reaches across time and culture to speak even in our language. It's a story that can both comfort and challenge. The country location of this angelic announcement was offensive. The appearance to the shepherds happened not in the holy temple in Jerusalem where religious, financial, and political power coalesced. Rather, it happened in some unnamed rural setting, among people of little wealth.

The country location tells us that God's business doesn't revolve around the Wellingtons or Washingtons. Nor is God closeted, and cosseted, in fancy Cathedrals, colleges or holy cloisters. God is out and about. God is not just in flash places, but also round the back, in the kitchen of life, among ordinary

people, pitching in, using the tea towel, and having a natter.

In 1850 John Everett Millais, one of the English artists known as the Pre-Raphaelites, painted his *Christ In The House Of His Parents*. He tried to realistically depict the lowly life of a carpenter and his family – tools and wood shavings clutter the earthen floor. The painting met with a storm of protest. Fancy the idea of Jesus living in such an unhealthy and primitive environment!! Millais threatened the boundaries of the class-structure still firmly embedded in 19th century English society.

The agrarian location of the angelic visit caused similar offence. Shepherds were likewise offensive. While the word 'shepherd' may evoke Christmas card and Nativity pictures of sandaled saints adorned in white headdress, caring souls with lambs tucked under their arms... the reality was otherwise.

Shepherds were a dodgy lot. Shifty. You wouldn't buy a used camel off them – you might burn yourself on the bridle! They were known for their fencing, and I'm not talking about the sport or No. 8 wire. Maybe the words 'crook' and 'fleeced' originate from those times. Shepherds were social undesirables. In general they had the social standing of our tow-truck drivers or repossession agents.

The insertion of shepherds in the birth narrative alludes to the connection between the baby Jesus and the great King David, who was called from tending sheep to ascend the dizzy heights of monarchy. It's the old poverty-to-power, or rags-to-riches theme. This little baby, born in a Bethlehem shed, was the one who would be great.

Yet the theme, as you read the whole Gospel, works in reverse. The greatness of God, as seen in this baby and the adult Jesus, chooses to associate with marginal and undesirable people. Jesus was building an upside-down kingdom full of nuisances and nobodies.

His vision was for a huge Christmas party, with plenty of good tucker – lamb, Pavlova, mince pies, joy, and laughter – to go around. A party where everyone, particularly those who were vulnerable, suffering in poverty, or despised by religion and society were made especially welcome. The sign on the door read: "Losers Welcome". And the winners didn't like it.

The shepherd story has a simple message really. God turns up in the most unlikely places and among the most unlikely people and saying the most unlikely things. You'll probably find God round the back rather than out front, pulling weeds rather than pulling rank, looking grubby rather than looking grand. If God can visit shepherds God can even visit you, and just might.

If you go looking for God here are some hints:

- Firstly, avoid powerful people who think they can stuff God in their pockets.
- Secondly, don't discount those in trouble with the law or who tell you about seeing white-winged apparitions.
- Thirdly, be mindful of the little things in life, like babies and animals. That which is small, local, fragile, and unpredictable is, in God's upside-down scheme of things, often where hope is to be found. ■

*Glynn Cardy is parish priest of St-Matthew's-in-the-City, Auckland. [www.stmatheus.org.nz](http://www.stmatheus.org.nz)*

# Solar Power

The Kingdom of Tonga consists of almost 170 islands, but only about 30 of them are inhabited. Of those 30, by far the most isolated is Niuafo'ou. When one flies north from the main island of Tongatapu, it takes about an hour on the small propeller-driven, Chinese-made aircraft of *Airlines Tonga* to reach the Vava'u group. After a refuelling stop there, it then takes a further hour and a half of flying over empty ocean to reach Niuafo'ou.

Isolation is not Niuafo'ou's only handicap. Shaped like a doughnut with a crater lake in the middle, it is an active volcano. Vast black lava fields testify to eruptions in recent times. Indeed there were two significant eruptions in the 20th century. The most recent, in the 1940s, led to the evacuation of virtually the whole population to the much cooler island of 'Eua in the south. In New Zealand terms, this was like moving from Kaitaia to Invercargill. Although many have remained long-term on 'Eua, some returned to Niuafo'ou in later years, and there is now a population of several hundred, spread over half a dozen small villages around the coastline.

Being a volcano, Niuafo'ou has no natural harbour. In the past ships rarely called because of the difficulties of finding a safe anchorage. Instead of trying to anchor, ships' crews long ago would seal packages, especially mail, in tin cans and throw them into the sea, to be picked up by young men swimming or rowing out from the island. Thus Niuafo'ou gained the alternative name of *Tin Can Island*.

Those who choose to live on Niuafo'ou must accept a simpler, more rugged way of life than that of residents in Nuku'alofa or Vava'u. Their air service has only recently become regular. For lengthy periods they had no air service at all. The ship from Nuku'alofa comes every two months and its arrival is such a major occasion that schools close on that day.

Even people who are not expecting cargo will flock to the primitive wharf to buy ice-creams, a rare treat, from the ship's freezer. The few motor vehicles on the island move

at a snail's pace because the roads are deeply gouged by the rainwater that gushes down from the higher slopes of the volcano. Newspapers are rarely seen, there is no television and even the radio signal from Nuku'alofa can be poor.



(above left) – The interisland cargo vessel *Olovaha* unloading at Niuafo'ou



(above right) –Austrian schoolteacher Ferdinand with School Principal 'Opeti, in front of school buildings newly equipped with solar panels



(below) – The old SMSM convent equipped with solar panels, enabling the buildings to be used in the evenings

# for Niuafo'ou

*Michael McBryde*

**A**lthough Niuafo'ou does not have much to export, its handicrafts enjoy a reputation for high quality. In addition, small black stones, the by-products of past eruptions, are gathered in bags to be sent to other islands in Tonga, where they are used to decorate the graves of the recently deceased.

Providing electricity to small communities on remote islands presents real challenges. The traditional method has been diesel generation, but this has its own difficulties. The cost of fossil fuel has risen, so how do communities living a largely subsistence life meet those escalating costs? How can diesel generators be properly maintained when the technical skills are lacking in the community? And how can a reliable supply of drums of fuel be maintained in the absence of regular shipping and safe harbours?

With advances in the technology, solar power has come to be seen as an attractive option for small islands. The fuel comes from the sun at no cost, the technology is simple requiring little maintenance, and there are no transport problems once the system has been installed.

In 2005, an agreement between the Tongan and New Zealand Governments was signed, whereby our Government, through its international development agency NZAID, would meet the cost of providing solar electrification to every household on the island. This project would cost about \$NZ one million, and a French company based in New Caledonia won the contract to install the solar panels and storage batteries.

So Niuafo'ou became a showcase for what could be done to improve the quality of life for a small population through the installation of solar power. Problems associated with managing a project from afar and transporting all the equipment to the island were overcome, and the project was completed in little more than a year after the signature of the agreement.

As the signatory of the agreement on behalf of the NZ Government, I had long been keen to visit the island myself, but it was not until July 2006 that an opportunity arose to make a two-day visit, in the company of two Tongan Cabinet Ministers and a group of their senior public servants. From the moment of our arrival it was clear that the solar power project had made a major impression on the local residents. I was taken to the house of the Government Representative, where a very formal ceremony took place.

An enormous cooked pig with a bunch of flowers protruding from its abdominal cavity was presented. The second gift was a whole kava plant, complete with roots. Orators sitting cross-legged on the ground gave ritual speeches, in the Tongan language, on behalf of both donor and recipient. Fortunately I did not have to take actual ownership of the pig. It was redistributed among local households. But the ceremony served to acknowledge the gratitude of the local community for the New Zealand Government's assistance.

**A**solar panel does not provide sufficient voltage to run a whole household full of appliances. Its main use is the supply of light at night. For households that had relied on kerosene lamps or candles, the availability of a bright, clean and silent form of energy proved most welcome. Throughout Tonga people place a high priority on education. Now, the school pupils of Niuafo'ou could do their homework at night without straining their eyesight, and a whole bank of panels could provide some communal refrigeration.

In every village one could see neat poles with panels on top and battery boxes at the bottom. In order to build up funds for the eventual replacement of these items, a trust had been established and each household paid a levy of T\$13.00 (less than NZ\$10.00) per month. Compared to the cost of diesel-generated power elsewhere in Tonga, this represented a very cheap energy supply.

It is a simple life on Niuafo'ou, but it has its attractions. In the absence of tourist accommodation, I stayed with an Austrian teacher who had lived there for seven years and showed no signs of wanting to leave. He too valued simple improvements to his life, such as light at night. Although his school did have a standby diesel generator, he much preferred the silent and environmentally friendly solar panel outside his front door. ■

*Michael McBryde is New Zealand High Commissioner in Tonga*

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*In October  
Franciscan Richard Rohr  
spoke in Christchurch  
Here is the first of a series  
of three sessions given under  
the auspices of the Adult  
Education Trust*



Franciscan Fr Richard Rohr (right), pictured here in Christchurch with Br Peter Bray FSC, Director of Religious Education for Wellington

## The spirituality of the two halves of life

Life is a game of two halves. Most of us have been raised ‘under the law’. The law gives us boundaries. It is good because it grounds us. It is a school whereby we acquire self-control and discipline. That is the right recipe for the first half of life. It provides a ‘container’ that can hold the contents of our inherited wisdom.

The challenge of the second half of life, however, is to move beyond law. If we continue to be possessed by our own egos, we become control freaks. The most urgent task of the second

half of life is to give up self-control – and happily to prepare for death. This transition is our Damascus road, our moment of transformation, when we allow the Spirit to take over our lives. It is the process of being ‘de-institutionalised’.

The psychologist Carl Jung notes this process of transition. Jung says that many older people fail in the task of coming to terms with their shadow side and remain as “eternal adolescents”. The adolescent adult, he says, is in denial. What was a normal, healthy

goal for a young person in the first stage of life has become a neurotic hindrance in one’s maturity. “We cannot live the afternoon of life,” he says, “according to the programme of life’s morning”.

### Transformation

If we enjoy a strictly conservative, traditional upbringing we will readily see ourselves as being the centre of our little world. Like the Old Testament Jews, we are the chosen ones. The law helps us tame our egos: otherwise we may be in danger of becoming spoilt brats, incapable of holding down a steady job or making stable relationships. And if we are well loved, this gives us additional ego-security.

There is a sense in which this is how it needs to be. Maria Montessori teaches that the child needs that security and cannot live with chaos and disorder. We need to know the rules well before we can know how and when to break them. Jesus is saying precisely that in the Sermon on the Mount: ‘*this is what the law says – but I say...*’.

If the rest of our world also holds these clear laws and customs, the group ego will give us even greater security. There is a danger we will become so

### An Old Testament perspective

Walter Breuggemann points out how the Old Testament as a whole reflect the development of normal spiritual consciousness. *The Torah* (the first five books of Moses) is all about law and order and becoming God’s chosen people. Holiness consists in Israel separating itself from the impure (*Lev 16-25*). This is the religion Jesus was raised in.

We start with *Torah*; then we move on to the *Prophetic Books*, which express the capacity for self-critical thinking. The prophetic mind begins to recognise the dark side, the shadow within the self, the awareness of faults and one’s need to be forgiven. The Prophets enable us to move from the certitude of Law into self-criticism, and finally into the maturity of the third section of the Hebrew Bible, the *Wisdom* literature. These Books, especially *Job* and many of the *Psalms*, speak a language of mystery and paradox, holding together contradictions which move us into seeking forgiveness.

secure and smug and certain that we will become spiritually lost, that we will forgo *willingness* (to change) for *wilfulness* (resistance to change).

The greater this sense of security, of knowing we are right, the greater becomes the need for emancipation. Sometimes we have to undergo a precipitating event. We have to experience the 'dark night'. Like Abraham, we have to leave our security and possessions, and journey into darkness led only by the Spirit of God. In the first half of life we were fighting the devil – and that made us feel heroic. But in the second half of life our struggle is with God! Here we are called upon to live not by certainty but by faith.

God leads us into events or relationships where we are no longer in control. The Cross is the ultimate symbol of this. Indeed it may be a 'death' which precipitates the crisis: the death of a dearly loved one – real or virtual. "Unless a grain of wheat falls in the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies it bears much fruit" (*Jn. 12,24*). Without personal humiliation, shock or failure this radical change is rarely possible.

Rohr gave the example of a devout Polish couple who one day discovered their beloved daughter was a lesbian. It was as if she had died. This was their moment of *Passover*, of transformation,

when they had to learn to become truly compassionate. Later they were able to say: "if our daughter wasn't lesbian, we would never have truly grown up".

When we grow up, we learn to bear the burden of our own conscience. We no longer know for certain we are right – or good. All we know is that God is good. God loves me – and not because I am good. In fact I am a selfish prat! This is the moment we begin to fall into the hands of the living God.

Often other people do not understand what is happening to us, and we face opposition as Jesus did. Franz Jagerstatter, who was put to death by the Nazis, was told by everyone that he was wrong, even by his loving wife. Yet he followed his conscience and he died for it. Thomas More was much the same.

We won't necessarily be supported in our *metanoia* by the people we love. The journey can be a very hard and lonely one. This is why we need a guide, one we can trust. The task of a Spiritual Director is to help lead us from the first half of life into the second.

### The Second Half of Life

When a person arrives in the second half of life, the experience of the first half is not lost: it is accepted with compassion. What we are invited to do is *let go*. Let go of success. Let go of the

law. The movement of transformation is towards simplicity. The saints (like St Francis) learned to be satisfied with less and less. Their experience is the precise opposite of capitalism, where the driving force is to succeed, to win, to acquire more and more.

There is also a change in moral outlook. People in the first half of life may be ruled by 'three monkey morality' (*see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil*), rather than the Cross where Jesus 'became sin' for us. Rohr suggests it is possible to keep five of the ten commandments (not cursing or stealing or killing or lying, not being adulterous even) simply because it is the decent, proper way to be. It enhances our ego.

But the other five need the grace and wisdom which belongs to the second half of life. To make God our centre means putting aside all our false gods; we need to contemplate rather than to perform; to venerate our parents rather than just obey them; to grow beyond envy and cease to covet and desire the things we don't have: all these choices are the work of God, not of ourselves.

Mature Christians live by faith, not certainty. They become content within their own skin. They are calm, rounded human beings; they have an inner authority; they have a sense of themselves. Not that they are



### What the New Testament says

Many people completely misunderstand the Gospel. They see it like a John Wain movie, featuring goodies versus baddies. The good guy (Jesus) always wins before he rides off into the sunset. The story is understood in dualistic, win-lose terms. All you have to do is get on the side of the goodies. But this is not at all what Jesus was saying. The Gospel is about *transformation*. Most of what Jesus teaches in the Gospels make little sense in the first half of life.

A very good image is the 'rich' man and the needle's eye (*Mk 10, 23-25*). The young man who approached Jesus (*Mk 10, 17-22*) had scrupulously obeyed the law all his life. He was a good man. But when Jesus invited him to take the next step, to grow up, "he went away sorrowing, for he had great possessions". The challenge to us is not just to give

up material possessions; it is much tougher to give up one's 'ego possessions'.

The theme of transformation constantly recurs throughout the New Testament. The letter to the *Hebrews* speaks of moving from a milk diet to solid food: "every one who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a child... solid food is for the mature" (*Heb. 5,13-14*). The Gospel of *John* speaks of acquiring "perfect love which drives out fear" (*1 Jn 4,18*).

St Paul contrasts the way of the Law with that of the Spirit. *Galatians* calls the law as 'your nursemaid until the Christ comes. But now faith legitimates your lives' (3,24-5). In 5, 16-24, Paul contrasts the Spirit with that of the 'flesh'. "If you are led by the Spirit, no law can touch you" (*Gal 5,18*).

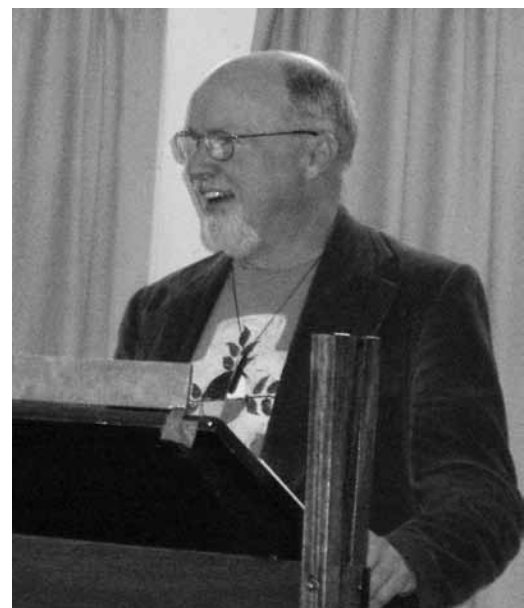
▷▷ completely self-contained; but they know what they don't know.

They are attentive and present to the world as it is. You feel safe with such people; they don't threaten you; you don't fear them. They have a forgiving attitude towards reality. Violence is abhorrent to them. They are not fanatics or 'one issue' people.

(After the Abu Graib revelations there was a survey of people in the USA as to their response. The group found to be most approving of the use of torture were the Catholics. Richard Rohr suggested that this was because so many Catholics had been brought up with a fear/punishment regime. They judged that since these people had perpetrated such despicable acts of terror, then they deserved to be tortured.)

This is precisely the meaning of Jesus' command: *do not judge*. The judging mind is a violent mind. This is quite distinct from the virtue of *justice*. Justice, in Biblical terms, is the highest form of love. It is learnt in the first half of life when we are schooled in the law and in morality. But eventually it prompts us into the inclusiveness of universal love.

What moves us in the second half of life is the indwelling Spirit. It is the Spirit who emerges to take control. It is not that the Spirit comes upon us; in fact the Spirit has always been there within us waiting to emerge. To understand this process fully is to come to appreciate the life of the Blessed Trinity. ■



Richard Rohr OFM, in Christchurch

*Fr Rohr's other sessions, on Prayer and the New Creation and Male Spirituality, will follow early next year*

## *A Mother's Journal ...*

I'll call it a *Walking Mass*.

Yesterday was Sunday. It is our only day off each week and it was sunny. I'm somehow grateful that with the nearest church of any shape two to three hours drive away we have to make up our own worship. Getting out of our winter shade, out of our valley's puddles of cold air to walk up a hill was yesterday's plan.

Finding socks and getting shoes onto small feet is frustrating and slow even if I have done it a thousand times. Then comes jerseys, water, snacks, hats and sticking plaster for Rohan's new shoes. We stride off up the path by the river, the children bounce. First Grandma Pamela goes back for her new walking pole, then a hundred metres on I'm sent running back for Gulab Jamon's dog biscuits. Gulab Jamon is a brown and white Indian sweetmeat and our newish brown and white puppy. She is terribly sweet. Seven-year-old folklore asserts that no dog can manage a walk without their personal snacks.

The scattered islands of yellow sun are warm. The children run ahead dragging small branches with rattling leaves for Gulab to chase. We're running to keep up too for the first few kilometres. Soon it is time for a morning snack on a wayside bench.

Shanti points out the wonderful cascades of red and amber autumn vines. Dad gives a small treatise on chlorophyll

and deciduous leaves and evergreens. We learn that trees use the autumn leaves to dispose of waste products – making the bright colours as they drop off. Rohan notices that autumn leaves are yellow and our 'wees' is yellow too.

Then we break through the cedars and burnished chestnuts to see snowy peaks floating far away. At a small village there's brief tribulation with mangy dogs who nearly eat Gulab Jamon. Mum tells a story about elephants and leopards. Dad's one is about Balu the Bear. Not exactly homilies, but just right for our congregation. We notice the children outpace Grandma up hills and over rocky ground. But she walks steadily on – less stopping and starting. Seventy years of walking makes one consistent I guess. Like praying too.

We're at the top of the hill!

A picnic in the sun is our Eucharist. We thank God for food, for strength and for this day. Then we break home-made bread, drink cold clear water and for ten minutes relish midday sun on our skin. Even up here the angled rays are warm. Soon we're off down the hill and home again, refreshed by mountains, puddles, cedars, bread, cold air, yellow leaves and a brown and white puppy. I'm pretty sure God skipped church in the buildings in the valley and came walking with us too. It was a Sunday morning shared.

**Kaaren Mathias**

*Kaaren Mathias is a mother of three living and working with her husband, Jeph, in a village in Himachal Pradesh. She is focussed on keeping her kids happy, improving public health and enjoying the beautiful surroundings*



# Among the Incarcerated

Diane Pendola

The grayness of the jail tank is more than the concrete walls, the steel bars, the light of the bare bulbs muted by inmate-made newspaper shades. It hovers like a dark spirit. It enters like osmosis – through your cells and into your blood. Walking down the hall the guard's skeletal key turns in the massive steel door, like the ones in the old horror movies that threaten to unlock your own worst nightmare. You have to exert yourself to move, to exchange a word with the jailer.

When you arrive the women are sleeping. They are sleeping away their time in a fog that blankets them, that suffocates them so that they cry out in their sleep, possesses them so that it is an effort to fully awaken. But Vicki hears you. Stirring amidst the haze she makes an effort to greet you. Are you worth waking for? Can she smell the wind on your skin, the earth in the crevices of your hand? Does some breeze, however briefly, breath a breath of hope into her chest?

Her face is lined, not with age but with spent youth, spent years, spent life. Who can say wasted? But her face shows the scars. Her eyes reveal the furtive hiding and seeking what has never been found. The lean comfort of her body defies her face. Her body stretches out on the hard mattress sleek and feline but the face averts itself—not quite sure. It is cocked backed on her neck, taut, like a trap set to spring on any interloper prowling too close to the only food she's got.

Yes, the defenses are there, clearly in the crooked smile and set jaw. But if you follow those eyes down into the blackened alleys, the tar-paper rooms lit by the glow of cigarettes and the fire of candles heating tarnished metal spoons; if you watch those eyes watching the blunted needle, seeking the sunken vein; if you do not shrink away, if you remain long enough, follow far enough,

you will find a heart. And if you look deeply enough the eyes will tell you that her heart is gazing at you. It is not easy to return that gaze. Stripped of pretension you follow that gaze down to your own heart and wonder: is there enough room?

Is there enough room? I ask myself the question. And honestly must answer: no, not enough. Yet I keep returning. And my return stretches me and opens me. In my return I am invited, once again and over again, into a sacred and deep place. I am invited in as a witness. I am invited to stand beside another human being. I am invited to be humbled and stripped of my pretentiousness, made small enough to enter, for a Godly moment, the mystery and magnitude of another person's life. I am made room for – and this is the special gift of contemplative presence.

I remember working a *Kairos* which is a four day Christ-centered experience for people inside prison. Forty people who participated in a similar experience outside the prison (called Cursillo) and forty inmates came together to create an experience of God's unconditional love and forgiveness and to forge a sense of community both within the prison walls and without. During the four days the outside community and the inmates were divided into table families with three outside members and four inmates to a table.

At the end of our first day an outside team member from my table shared with me her sense of total inadequacy. She felt unable to respond with the 'right' answers to the incredible depth of pain and struggle in the lives of the women at our table. At the same time she expressed her awe at their reserves of faith and courage. She felt her own faith, her own courage pale in comparison and she wondered what she had to offer them.

We don't have the answers to the kind of suffering the women shared with us that day. We don't have answers to give them about why their children were taken away; why they themselves were abused as children or battered as women; we can't answer the why of drug addiction and of poverty and of racism and injustice. But we can hear them. We can hear their lives. We can stand with them in their pain. We can give them our tears and our outrage. We can let their questions become our questions, committing us to work for changes within society that reflect true justice. We can give them our respect. And we can allow them to give to us a share of their faith and courage. These are the gifts which we can give each other and for which we can make room.

Contemplative presence is first and foremost about unconditional love and acceptance. *In the heart of the Church, my mother, I shall be love*, St. Therese of Lisieux summed up her contemplative vocation, and so sums up my sense of contemplative vocation in the heart of our jails and prisons. To be able to honor a life – perhaps a life that has never been honored before – to be made witness to the depth of that human spirit and to say Amen; to see and to hear and to touch what might have never been seen or heard or touched before; to accept the invitation to enter what might appear to be a dirty stable, an outcast's den, a manger of straw and find there a mutual rebirth of spirit and the heart of Christ: this is contemplative presence. This is the Word made flesh and dwelling among us. ■

©Diane Pendola, was actively engaged in prison ministry for ten years. She co-founded Skyline Harvest in the Sierra foothills of northern California in 1986 as a resource center for incarcerated women. Today the center is dedicated to cultivating an awareness of the sacred throughout our human community and the natural world. Learn more at: [www.ecocontemplative.org](http://www.ecocontemplative.org)

# The Parable of the Caterpillar

Jacquie Lambert

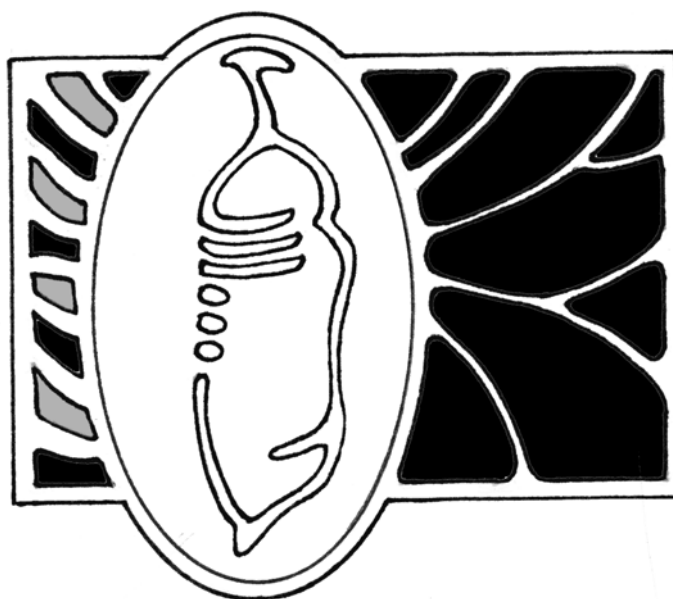
Each spring/summer our kitchen bench hosts an annual parade of monarch caterpillars and chrysalis in various stages of development. It has been something we have done since our now 14-year-old-teenager was a young toddler and although some of the magic seems to have faded for her alongside the other priorities of adolescent life, and I suspect I continue the tradition more for my own spiritual nourishment than anyone else's, the fascinating transformation of these small creatures still brings a smile to the whole family.

It is however a process also fraught with angst and great ethical dilemmas as my daughter and I argue each year about the need to be selective on the number of caterpillars the swan plant can support. This is highlighted by the burgeoning financial cost of the rescue as my husband trudges yearly to the plant store to buy additional plants. The solution we have devised is to rescue four or five chubby individuals at a time and bring them inside on their own branches and leave the remainder unmolested on the swan plant outside to take their chances.

This year one individual caterpillar in particular stood out for the spiritual lessons she seemed to impart. She was one of the first bunch of three caterpillars we brought in for the season. They were already quite mature and it wasn't long before they became restless. This is one thing I have noticed about the process. When the caterpillars are looking to move on

to next stage they begin to become agitated and start randomly climbing all around the swan branches and even down the glass to the bench.

In our house, my study is in a corner of the kitchen and while I was sitting at the computer one day, I looked down to find one of the creatures at my foot. Now in caterpillar terms she must have just completed the equivalent of a ten km walk across the bench, down onto the floor and over to my desk and so



it was with some guilt that I replaced her on the swan plant, and I'm sure I caught a flicker of irritation in her eyes. Of all the three she continued to be the most recalcitrant needing to be put back many times before she finally settled and curled upside down to begin her chrysalis.

This was not the end of her problems however (there's one in every bunch isn't there), and this little pet unlike all the others, chose to hang off a leaf instead of a stem. This didn't bode well for her survival since leaves are not

really strong enough to support the weight of the chrysalis and in a glass the leaves don't last long enough anyway. Sure enough, in a couple of days the leaf had dropped. What to do, what to do I wondered as I looked at the poor thing lying on the bench. Feeling like the hand of God I decided to intervene and super-glued the top stump of the chrysalis to a piece of twisted paper towel and jammed it under the lid of a coffee container to hold it out horizontally. It worked but I wondered what Darwin would have thought.

When she finally hatched out she was indeed a beautiful butterfly but clearly the seclusion and development process doesn't add any further common sense. She came out as she went in, a little lacking in discernment. I had put all three 'ripened' chrysalis' outside in case they arrived in their new dresses overnight. The next day they all appeared and the first of many choices in their short lives began. With the wide world before them, the

first two spread their wings and headed off into the garden to experience the delights of nectar for the first time. The third however, our little precious, took a different route and headed straight into the open lid of our barbeque and had to be rescued once again as she got herself stuck between the bars of the cooking grate. With some trepidation for her future I gave her a flying start in the right direction and wished her luck which I suspect she will need in abundance!

### ***So what lessons are there for the learning?***

- We all need the support of others in our journeys. As fellow travellers we can choose to leave others in the wilderness to find their own way in the battle of life or we can offer what protection and support we can. Unprotected, only the strongest will survive. A safe environment gives everyone the best chance to mature and reach their potential. We need variety not just strength.
- Look for the moments of restlessness in your lives as these may be epiphanies of a new transformative process on offer. The trick is to acknowledge the restlessness and carefully broker the urge to wander and the need to become still.
- Make sure you are securely attached to your spiritual branch. Choose your home wisely. We all need to be rooted

in some tradition and practice as we go within to explore and develop our relationship with God. Even when we can fly, sometimes far away from our roots, we will often return to create and nourish life from among those same branches. It is who we are.

- Should we rescue another when they fall aside, and how often? The wisdom here is that there is no one wise answer and sometimes we will make mistakes. I think the trick is to give careful thought to exactly what, how and when you offer. Providing space, support and opportunity for individual growth is different from directing and energizing the growth itself. We can help people pick themselves up, dust themselves off and offer a listening ear, but only the individual can choose to grow through and overcome their obstacles. And there will always be those who

need more support and guidance than others – my little monarch is a classic example. But be wary the difference between support and control. I assisted in the fundamentals of life but left the other choices to my small friend.

- We must all fly alone under the grace of God at some stage. Only then does the real learning begin. No matter whether we are supporters or mentors or other travellers on the same spiritual branch, we must let people grow and test their wings, blessing them on their way regardless of our concerns for them. Some will return to us, others will call another garden home. The important thing to remember is that God is not the particular plant we call home, but is instead the soil itself nourishing all plants who send their roots down deep enough. Love and trust and let go. ■

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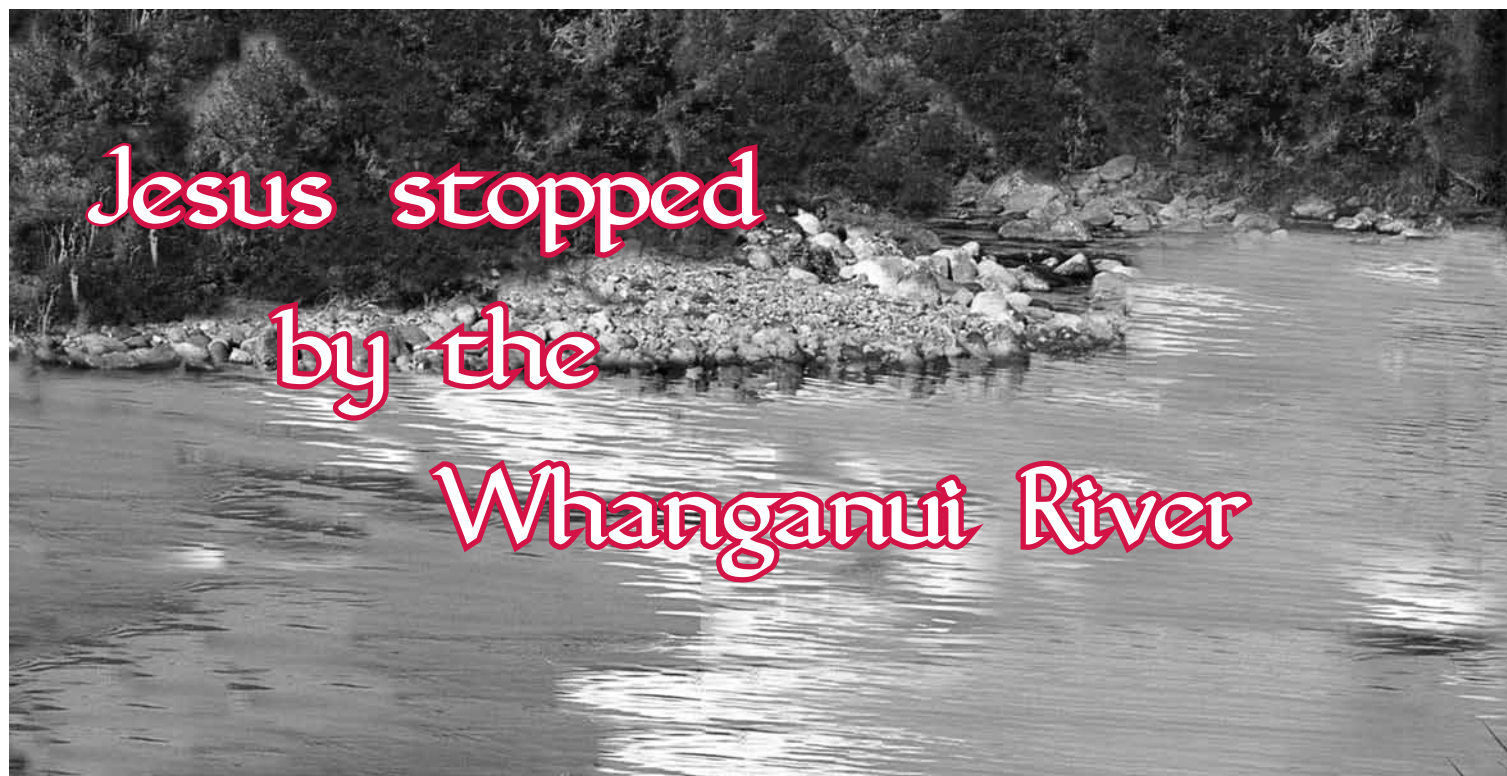
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*Colleen Hopwood is a participant in the three-year Walk by Faith course. This is one of her written assignments*

Jesus stopped by the Whanganui River and decided it was time to rest awhile. It had been a full-on day and he needed to replenish his soul, regain some strength, and sleep. He found a warm spot in a little shade and laid himself down in the gentle fauna of Aotearoa. He thought of the sacredness of this place, to the tangata whenua of this land, and recognised the connection between all of that and his creator Parent God.

It had indeed been a busy day and it wasn't over yet.

He had sat at the kitchen table of a mother whose son had been sent to prison; he'd listened while people argued about the flow of a river – whether to change its god-given course and use it for electricity or leave it to feed and nurture the people of its place. He had accompanied a solo dad to the Salvation Army shop to buy clothes for his children. He'd walked beside a doctor who had to decide to prolong the life of an exhausted, terminally ill man who wanted to die, or let him go gently to a new world. He'd listened while people argued in parliament over the right of homosexuals to make a legal and binding commitment to each other. He had helped a young couple lambing on their GE-free farm and had read the proposals regarding the restructuring of the local Catholic diocese. Relaxing in this beautiful place and embracing the gift of it all from his parent God, Jesus began to dose off wondering if the river the fuss was about was as beautiful as the one he chose to rest beside.

In his dreams he saw the mother at the table crying over her lost son. Jesus spoke to her of Love and got her to thinking about the baby, toddler and child that he was. In his dream he saw her pull out the family photo album and smile through her tears and, after a short time, pulling the shredded photo of her boy from the rubbish and mending it with great love. He saw them meeting at prison and crying as they hugged each other. Jesus smiled in his sleep and rolled over onto his side thinking how she would wear her best coat and stand tall when she lined up for a visit on Sunday.

Who are all these people, some shouting about power and wealth and others calling strong but gentle messages about nature and creation and the rights of the river? Some say it needs to be tamed and controlled to produce electricity for the big businesses and thousands of homes. Others say its gifts cannot be measured and it is needed by everyone in its natural state to feed the souls of the country through which it flows.

All the while, the river flows on, vulnerable and beautiful, praising the Spirit that created it. The sounds of the river beside him woke Jesus and he sat up thinking of the dad with the little ones needing clothes. He soaked his feet in the river and washed his face with the waters and decided to call in on a friend he knew, who could and would love to help the father in his new state of parenthood. As he walked, he thought about the young doctor and hoped that reminding

him of what was awaiting the old man in a new world, had helped him make the kindest decision for the old man. By now a new soul would be part of the cosmos in the new life force selected for him by a loving God.

It was a hot day, so before leaving the riverside Jesus soaked his T-shirt in the waters and, with a prayer of thanks, he put it on and continued on his walk, helping the Kingdom of God through its labour pains. He enjoyed the feel of the earth between his toes as he set off in search of his friend. Passing the farm he'd helped on earlier, he was asked in for a cup of tea. Enjoying the friendly atmosphere and a hot scone from the oven, he relaxed and shared the radio and the news told them of the passing in parliament of the civil union bill.

There was a silence in the room, as the young folk had felt Jesus was a very good person and he may not share their views on the matter. The husband anxiously told Jesus that the local church, to which many around them including themselves belonged, was adamantly against the bill, and they feel for their neighbours who are a loving, committed gay couple who would like to make a commitment that is legally binding and to celebrate their relationship. Jesus sat a while and asked "do they love one another as you do?" Being assured that they did, he reminded them of a request from

God: "love one another as I have loved you". They shared a wine together to celebrate all God-given love, and a short time later they parted at the farm gate, Jesus on his way to find his friend and the young couple going to visit their neighbours with a large bunch of flowers.

Refreshed from his sharing with the young folk, Jesus walked into the town and saw in the café window the bishop of the diocese enjoying a quiet coffee. Asking if he could join him, Jesus sat with his own drink and they discussed the state of the world and the church. Thinking he would never see this young fellow again – and it probably wouldn't be too interesting to him anyway! – the bishop began to speak of the concerns he had regarding the current state of the established church. He mentioned the idea of giving communion to divorced people, married priests and, unbelievably, women priests. Where would it all end? The poor man was quite beside himself and said: "sorry to put all that on you. Why should you be interested!"

Jesus suppressed a little chuckle and after a moment said: "The church of Jesus was established to bring about the kingdom of God on planet earth. it was to bring freedom to the people, not rules and structures of control. It is to bring about lives of love, justice, honesty and a relationship with Jesus Christ. Don't be afraid to let it happen!"

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There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world (*John 1:6-9*).

Some years ago I read a fascinating article by Andrew Greeley, American priest-sociologist, about the role American Catholic schools could play in integrating millions of politically and economically marginalised Hispanic Catholics into American mainstream life. Just as in the 20th century, Catholic schools had helped ensure the socialisation of Irish, Polish and Italian Catholic immigrants into WASP society, so too could Catholic schools do something similar for contemporary immigrant groups. I wonder if an important goal of catechesis is integration into mainstream society. I wonder what are we to make of the fact that more American Catholics voted for George W. Bush, the Republican nominee than ever before in November 2004.

The story of John the Baptist, who testified to the light, offers a useful model for understanding discipleship. The Synoptic gospels provide some information about this extraordinary man – *Luke* tells us about his birth while all three dwell at some length on his arrest, imprisonment and death in Galilee during Herod's reign. The gospel narratives make clear that John

## Reflecting on John

*Susan Smith has now completed commentaries on Matthew, Mark and Luke, thus covering the three-year cycle. Here she begins John. These commentaries will continue over the next 11 issues*

was not part of mainstream Palestinian society – he seemed to have lived a solitary life in the Judean desert, but when he preached that that he had seen the Spirit descending on Jesus, identified as the Lamb of God, he antagonized Jerusalem's religious leaders. This man sent by God failed to relate to Palestine's religious and political elites.

John is sent by God (*John 1:6*) to witness to the light, the Logos, the Word of God. Some turn toward the Light and others turn from it. People's responses are well captured by the author's use of light and darkness as symbols of the moral choices that people make. For example, one Jewish leader, Nicodemus the Pharisee, comes to Jesus **out of the night seeking the light of the world** (*John 3:2*). On the

other hand, in *John 13* after Jesus has washed the feet of his disciples, Judas **goes out into the night** to betray him.

I am not suggesting that we alienate ourselves from mainstream society. However, as contemporary witnesses to the light, we should not lose sight of our vocation to be a prophetic people, which can mean alienating political and religious elites. This may soon prove to be a costly exercise for church organisation! The government has passed legislation stipulating that charities – and many church institutions and religious congregations are established as charitable trusts – would lose their preferential tax status if they were to criticise government policy. Still, losing one's preferential tax status is better than losing one's head although it may still prove quite costly. ■

*Dr Susan Smith is a Mission sister who teaches Biblical Studies at the School of Theology, University of Auckland*

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# Taking the pulse on Geering

*A Religious Atheist? Critical Essays on the Work of Lloyd Geering*

Edited by Raymond Pelly and Peter Stuart

Published by Otago University Press 2006.

Review: Murray Rae

Critical engagements with the work of Lloyd Geering do not receive the same publicity in New Zealand as does Geering himself. The impression may therefore be gained, encouraged by Geering himself, that his views are opposed only by religious fundamentalists who doggedly refuse to accept the discoveries of our modern and enlightened age. The truth, however, as this book amply demonstrates, is that very few scholars of theology and religious studies are persuaded by Geering's presentation of our religious options in the modern world, nor by his analysis of Christianity, of religion more generally, or of contemporary society. A consistent theme that emerges in this book is that, as a self-styled prophet of the global future, Lloyd Geering is remarkably out of touch with the present age. A recurring refrain amongst the impressive array of contributors is that Geering misrepresents what is actually going on in contemporary society,

consistently presents his readers with false alternatives, and has not kept pace with developments in the various disciplines with which his writings engage.

A central and questionable feature of Geering's effort to reinvent religion is his unswerving commitment to scientific rationalism, to the 'secularisation thesis' as it was promoted in the 1960s, and, latterly, to theological non-realism. Scientific rationalism holds that in order to tell the truth about the world we must dispense with the 'mythologies' of religion and deal only in categories that pertain to the natural world and that are open to investigation by the natural sciences. Geering, however, shows little awareness of the degree to which scientific rationalism has come under sustained and powerful critique during the past half-century.

Religious talk, by contrast with the scientific, has little to do with truth, Geering alleges, and reveals only the things that we value. In religious terms, Geering is a non-realist. The term 'God', he contends, does not denote any reality outside of ourselves but is merely a linguistic symbol for the values we hold dear. Geering is entitled to the

view, but he does his readers a disservice when he makes out that this non-realist view is the only alternative to religious fundamentalism. As is carefully explained by most of the contributors to this volume, there are vibrant and intellectually powerful strands in the Christian tradition, at least, that fit neither of Geering's options.

Several authors in the book comment on Geering's blinkered devotion to the now widely discredited secularisation thesis. It was commonly argued in the 1960s that religion was on the wane and that, as a feature of modern society, it would soon dwindle to utterly insignificant proportions. Peter Berger, one of the leading proponents of the secularisation thesis in the 1960s has more recently argued that the thesis was wrong. Religion is very far from being a spent force, even in traditional guise, and yet Geering remains committed to the now widely discredited 1960s dogma.

These are but a few of the themes in Geering's writings that are critically examined in this volume of essays. It is to be hoped that the book receives even a little of the attention that Geering himself has earned over the years, thus to correct some of the profoundly misleading assessments he gives of the modern religious landscape. ■

*Dr Murray Rae is Senior Lecturer in Systematic Theology and Theological Ethics at Otago University*

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## Some choice tastings from the 2006 vintage

Kathleen Doherty

I should be worried. I have just perused a book entitled *1001 Books You Should Read Before You Die* and found to my horror that I have read only 235 of them. That means 766 to go: I doubt if I will make it. Bearing up in the face of such failure is possible because (a) I have read and loved hundreds of books that don't get a mention in this list, and (b) there is a problem of credibility because of the omission of *The Wind in the Willows*, the favourite book of all time – and anyone who thinks it is only for children should read it again, especially chapter 7, *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*. Cheered by this rationalisation, I offer a few of the books which have enriched the year.

### An Irish craftsman

When John McGahern died earlier this year, aged 71, the *Irish Times* carried pages of tributes from all the great names of Irish literature: every one wrote of the honesty of his writing, his skill in depicting the changing face of Ireland. How fortunate then that we have so much of the man revealed in *Memoir* published in 2005 and now released in paperback (faber and faber pbk \$28.99).

Reading this, one becomes very aware that the novels had their genesis in the writer's harsh early life. His mother died when he was only 10 – he never ceased grieving for her, probably because his tyrannical father did not allow him to grieve at the time, and the last paragraph of his memoir written 60 years later is a lyrical outpouring of love for her. John McGahern, quintessentially Irish, nevertheless spent years in self-imposed exile in England following the banning of his novel *The Dark*, published in 1965. His masterpiece is acknowledged to be *Amongst Women* (1990), praised by fellow-novelist Seamus Deane as “a millimetre away

from perfection”. *Memoir* deals with only the early life of this extraordinary man, but it is a beautifully crafted and fitting last work from one who said that it is a writer's work to “look after his sentences. Nothing else.”

### Writings from Hell

The circumstances surrounding the writing and subsequent publication over 60 years later of Irene Nemirovsky's *Suite Francaise* (Chatto and Windus pbk \$36.99) is so extraordinary that one could be forgiven for thinking that they were part of the fiction. The author was a Ukranian-born Jew, who had converted to Catholicism in 1939 and was living in Paris with her husband and two children when World War II broke out. She was already an established author and her reaction to the war was to plan a series of five novellas portraying France in this terrible time. Only two had been completed when she was arrested under the race laws in July 1942 and sent to Auschwitz where she died within weeks. Her husband went to the gas chambers later the same year.

The children spent the rest of the war on the run, the elder, Denise, who was 12 at the time of her mother's arrest, taking with her from their home as a memento the notebook she had seen her mother writing in so often. She didn't read it until 1996 when the sisters decided to give it to an organisation documenting memories of the war. Denise painstakingly copied out the minute script so that she could keep her own record of what she thought was her mother's diary but what she found was in fact two complete novellas and

notes for three more. They are works remarkable for their depiction of life under extreme pressure in a society which is splitting apart.

There is an immediacy about the writing which comes from Nemirovsky's acute observation of what was happening all around her: this is a country under occupation depicted by someone who was there writing at the time it was all happening. To be engulfed by the nightmare and yet be able to write with such clarity and humanity is a rare achievement. One very poignant note: the diary excerpts which form one of the appendices of the volume reveal that two days before her arrest Irene Nemirovsky went into the woods to write, taking with her Anna Karenina, an orange, and the diaries of Katherine Mansfield.

### Skeletons exposed

The setting for Suzanne Berne's novel *The Ghost at the Table* (Penguin Fig Tree, \$34.99) is New England on a Thanksgiving weekend, but the situation will be familiar to anyone who has been involved in any ritual of a family gathering where what is not said is usually more important than what is, and everyone has their own angle on family stories. The time span is only one long weekend, but such is the detail and the characterisation that one has lived through a great deal at the end of it. The forced cheerfulness which hides old resentments, the secrets cunningly alluded to, the acknowledgement that family relationships are the most difficult and dangerous of all – Suzanne Berne explores one family and leaves you feeling glad you are not part of it. ■

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## A spiritual classic

### *Learning to Dance*

by Michael Mayne

Published by Darton, Longman and Todd 2001. (Now reprinted 2004)

Price \$34.95 (approx)

**Review: Mike Crowl**

**M**ichael Mayne is the author of one of my favourite books: *This Sunrise of Wonder*. The title is taken from one of the innumerable poems Mayne seems to have ready at his fingertips, and the book is a series of (long) letters to his grandchildren, letters he hopes will encourage them as they grow to look at and enjoy the things he's enjoyed in his life.

Mayne enjoys many things: the detail of nature, but particularly English flowers, and English country birds and animals. He enjoys literature, but particularly poetry, and he quotes poets by the handful in his books. He enjoys the company of other writers – many of them long dead – who have written about nature, and about life in relation to the natural world.

And of course, he enjoys his Christian faith. 'Enjoy' might not be quite the

word: he sometimes struggles with faith, as we all do, and he sometimes puzzles over its seeming complexities and contradictions. Nevertheless, his books are grounded in his faith, and the interweaving of faith and his other loves is what makes his books special.

*Learning to Dance* is not very new – it came out in 2001 – but it's well worth hunting down. In it he takes the theme of the Dance, in all its connotations, and works through it alongside the months of the year, and the way things in nature change as the year changes.

But he by no means limits himself in this book to the visible natural world around us. The dance of the bees in the first chapter is one most of us will be unfamiliar with; shortly after he flings us out into space and the cosmos and describes the extraordinary way the Universe holds together. At the opposite extreme he delves into the micro-world of DNA, and then races on to look at the way the dance affects words and painting and music.

I was so taken by a section in the DNA chapter that I copied it onto my blog

page. And then there was another section which I had to go back to – in the May chapter – where he talks about the Fibonacci numbers, and I couldn't resist copying this onto my blog as well. Somehow Mayne can enthrall you with things you thought you already knew well enough.

**B**ut fascinating as these first half dozen chapters are, it's the second half of the book that's really valuable. Here he talks of the darkness that can come to Christians – and others. Mayne is no stranger to darkness: for at least a year he was stricken with ME, and confined to bed. (He wrote a powerful book about that, too.) He also looks at the power of love, and the lack of it; the need for forgiveness, and the giving of it; and the work of faith, and how difficult it can be to hold onto.

I found this second half to be the most affecting part. Enthralling as the first half was with its details of life far and wide, it was the depths of this second half that moved me most. Hugh Montefiore wrote that Mayne's book 'deserves to be a spiritual classic.' He's right. ■

(Mike Crowl's blog page:  
<http://mikecrowlsscribblepad.blogspot.com/>)

## Something to catch the eye

*Ribbonwood Calendar 2007*

Trish Harris

**Review: Mary Betz**

**T**rish Harris's calendars have perched on my desk for the past two years, opening to a different journal drawing each month, a few poems or reflections scattered throughout. This year's calendar has beautiful fresh new drawings – in alternately bright and soothing colours – whose images variously puzzle, delight, rest and challenge the onlooker. Trish's elegantly simple spirals, waves, fronds and other shapes of nature in complex communion beckon us into mystery and contemplation.

The little calendars fit easily into a DL envelope, which makes them easy to send to friends within NZ or overseas, and their spiral-bound hardboard covers allow them to stand freely on a desk or be hung on the wall. See her website for a preview of this year's calendar, as well as greeting cards from past year's images.

Many the time as my eyes stray from the computer while searching for a word or phrase, I am caught and held by one of Trish's images, invited for a moment to pause from the work of the mind to partake of some food for the soul. ■

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## Republican 'rats' jump ship

The mid-term elections in the US gave a "thumpin" to the Republican Party according to George W. Bush. The war in Iraq was a key campaign issue but sex scandals and corruption also mired the Republicans in a sea of disaffection. The day after the defeat Donald Rumsfeld, still in a state of denial concerning Iraq, was sacked and the pressure is now on Dick Cheney. It would not be surprising to learn that, "on the advice of his doctors", Cheney should retire from politics. But what will now change in American politics?

The rats were already leaving the sinking Republican ship. Richard Perle, ex-chairman of the Pentagon's Defence Policy Advisory Committee and prime instigator of the Iraq invasion, now says they should have considered other strategies. The journalist Bob Woodward, having praised Bush in two books, now derides him. Can we expect Paul Wolfowitz, former No. 2 at the Pentagon and a leading proponent of the Iraq war, to resign as President of the World Bank?

For six years Bush has led America in a Middle East morass which has had the backing of the Democrats who, arguably, can be just as hawkish as many of the neocons. Hillary Clinton, speaking at Princeton University this year, aligned herself with Senator John McCain and called for sanctions against Iran, "*A nuclear Iran is a danger to Israel.*" Her fealty to Israel is confirmation of the huge financial support given to her by Zionist organisations in New York. (These organisations also endorse her aspirations for the presidency in two years' time.)

The Democrats, as well as the Republicans, view any threat to Israel as being a threat to American global interests. Bush can expect the Democrats to continue to share this common ground. On the other hand,

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### Crosscurrents

John Honoré

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it makes political sense for him to share a changed approach to Iraq from which both parties would benefit.

The Democrats' majority will oblige them to confront a trend which the Bush years have accelerated, and that is the enormous gap between the rich and the poor. Half of all Americans share a mere 2.5 percent of the nation's wealth while the richest 10 percent own 70 percent of it. What economic new deal will a Democratic majority in congress propose that could change the social inequalities created by the considerable tax rebates given to the rich? Any change would be hotly contested. Deregulation of trade and increasingly weaker unions have resulted in a disillusionment among voters caught in a poverty trap, paradoxically in the richest country in the world. Nevertheless, there must be hope. There has been change and as *The Guardian* stated, for that alone the entire world owes the American voters its deep gratitude.

### The Inconvenient Truth

Global warming, so graphically presented in Al Gore's movie *An Inconvenient Truth*, has finally shifted the tectonic plates in John Howard's mindset about climate change. "We are not going to drown in a sea in a couple of weeks' time... we have to be calm in our responses", says Howard. John Howard has a problem. He has never presented a sound reason to the Australian public for not signing the Kyoto protocol.

It seems that the Republican rout in America has not altered the thinking of George W. Bush regarding climate change. He continues to ignore the evidence and to refuse to recognise

the Kyoto protocol. Tony Blair, Helen Clark and just about every other leader in the free world recognises the dangers. That leaves only one country in the world that agrees with Bush – Australia.

John Howard, ever the wily politician, faces a growing public backlash against his prevarication over the issue of global warming, particularly with the present 'big dry' afflicting the whole continent of Australia. He argues that signing the pact would harm Australian economic interests. This contention, of course, is exactly the attitude of the US Republican party.

If the Democrats in America agree, in some form, to the Kyoto protocol it would leave Howard as the only non-signatory to that historic agreement. Al Gore has suggested that Howard is in a strong position of being able to influence America to accept a Kyoto style agreement. John Howard has a final chance to act like a statesman and lead the Australian government towards reducing its greenhouse gas emissions. Otherwise, he will remain the caricature of the 'deputy sheriff of the South Pacific', beholden to a Texan now rejected because of his failed international policies.

### Waitemata Cake Tin

"The Horror! The Horror!" cried Kurtz when he saw Trevor Mallard's proposed design for a new stadium on the Auckland waterfront. The astronomical cost of establishing a ground for the Rugby World Cup in 2011 and the bickering for a suitable site, have prompted Trevor 'Bullyboy' Mallard to threaten a change of venue to Christchurch. "Sacrebleu!" cried this columnist when he heard this and immediately checked his tickets for Uzbekistan.

With Auckland in gridlock in more ways than one, \$500 million to be spent on the rugby cup in five years' time is pure farce. Until sanity returns we can only laugh and hope that Helen and Trevor have a jolly Christmas as well as all *Tui Motu* readers ■

## Good luck with the Lefebvrists

By the time this page appears in print, the precise terms of Benedict XVI's decision to allow a wider celebration of the 'Latin Mass' will probably have been made public. By 'Latin Mass', one means the pre-Vatican II form of celebration, codified in 1570 to bring unity among the variety of rites hitherto in use in the Western Church.

The Pope's action is being taken in part to provide a mode of worship of which a small minority of the faithful wish to avail themselves. But much more is it motivated more by the desire to facilitate the reconciliation with the church of the faithful associated with the *Society of St Pius X* (SSPX), the breakaway group headed originally by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre and now by four bishops ordained by him. The retention of the use of the Tridentine Rite is the most obvious feature of the Lefebvrist movement. Since the election of the present pope, cautious moves towards reconciliation have been taken by the Holy See including a meeting between Bishop Fellay, the current leader of the SSPX and the Holy Father.

The Lefebvre schism has a considerable following in France. Its adherents reject key teachings of the Vatican Council on such matters as religious liberty and ecumenism. The revolt has involved such happenings as the forcible seizure of churches in Paris and Bordeaux. The French bishops have taken alarm at the possible terms of the impending papal action and have made strong representations to Rome that any moves to bring about reconciliation must not be on terms that constitute surrender to the rebels.

While less drastic for New Zealand Catholics than for our French brothers and sisters, the implications of the Pope's decision are still for us considerable. Will a conservatively-minded priest, of whom sadly there are some among our

more recently ordained clergy, be able to impose a Sunday celebration of the Latin Mass on an unwilling congregation? Does the decision imply a move backwards in church thinking, casting at least a partial shadow on the decisions of Vatican II and on the subsequent moves to implement them?

While not claiming to possess greater wisdom than the Pope of Rome and fully applauding his charity and good intentions, I fear that moves for reconciliation are doomed to failure. A widening of opportunities to celebrate in the Tridentine form will not satisfy the Lefebvrists (or Traditionalists, as they would want to be called). The issue of the form of the Mass is only the tip of the iceberg. The estrangement of the Lefebvrists from the church is far deeper. They are convinced that the Council transformed the nature of the church and did so for the worse.

Bishop Williamson, one of the four Lefebvrist bishops, put this clearly in his *Thought for Christmas 2005*: "Vatican II and its followers meant to adapt the Catholic Religion to the modern world by changing the Faith and transforming the sacraments. Whereas by refusing the Conciliar novelties, by cleaving to the Faith of all time and by keeping to the sacraments of the Lord, the SSPX together with its comrades in arms has done no less than save the true Catholic religion from destruction by the Council". Or as Bishop Fellay put it, "We will say no, and no, and no".

Precious little room here for common ground. Nothing less than the abandoning of key positions asserted by the church at the Second Vatican Council will satisfy them. Holy Father, in your efforts to bring about the reconciliation of the Lefebvrists, we wish you luck. ■

Humphrey O'Leary

*Fr Humphrey O'Leary is rector of the Redemptorist community in Glendowie, Auckland*

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# *Doubt*

**G**eraldine Brophy returns to the Court Theatre as director of John Patrick Shanley's play *Doubt*, set in a Catholic school in the Bronx. It is compelling theatre brilliantly performed by four seasoned actors. To paraphrase Shakespeare, *doubt's the thing wherein Shanley will catch the conscience of the audience*.

The play is about a school run by an obdurate Mother Superior who suspects a young priest, Father Flynn, of preying on the only black pupil in the school. The 12-year-old child is caught with alcohol on his breath after a private meeting with the priest. Father Flynn pleads innocence, Sister Aloysius, the Mother Superior, never moves from her conviction of guilt.

A young nun, under the unbending discipline and authority of her superior, is caught in the middle of these two protagonists. She is impressed by

Father Flynn's message of "never being alone when in doubt", but confused by her superior's instruction to be less trusting and less idealistic.

What Shanley graphically presents are the pressures against a revelation involving religious authority and (in the 1960s era) the ignorance of the Catholic culture about priests preying on children. Nevertheless, there is also good reason to fear false accusation, and Father Flynn's first sermon presents the image of a pastor with compassion and understanding of the human condition. Sister Aloysius appears unmoved by the sermon and even more suspicious of his true intent.

Whether innocent or guilty, the priest deserves an unbiased judgment. However, it is obvious that the Mother Superior will not be satisfied until he is removed. She seeks evidence against him. For that purpose the mother of

the boy is called in for an interview but she defends the priest, guilty or not, as being "good for my boy". She insists the priest's good influence makes life bearable at home where the father regularly beats the boy for a suggested perversion in his nature.

For Catholics educated in convent schools, as this reviewer was, the play was a reminder of the old days of mortal sin, unquestioned deference to superiors in the Catholic hierarchy, guilt about everything, but never doubt. Shanley believes that doubt requires more courage than conviction; so where does the play leave the viewer? Pope Benedict has reflected that "the believer and the non-believer share, each in his own way, doubt and belief... it saves both sides from being shut up in their own worlds."

There is, of course, an emotive *denouement* which leaves the audience to question their own attitudes. I recommend the play.

*John Honoré*

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