

Tui Motu

December 2005 Price \$5



to you
is born this day
a saviour

(Luke 2,11)



The Great Hall: a Gothic extravaganza with ceiling soaring 80 feet above the marble pavement. The columns are of Italian cipollino.



Mount Stuart

Mount Stuart on the Isle of Bute is accessible from the mainland by regular car ferries. It is about two hours from Glasgow

The Chapel is of gleaming white Carrara marble, has a cosmatesque floor and is lit by an octagonal lanthorn, modelled on Saragossa cathedral



Castell Coch lies a few miles north of Cardiff in South Wales, and can be reached from the A470 to Brecon



Castell Coch



*left: exterior of Castle Coch.
above left and above: the splendidly decorated interior of the castle drawing room, work of Bute's friend, artist and architect William Burges
right: hand-basin in Lady Bute's bedroom*





John, 2nd Marquess (1814-48)
business man & entrepreneur

Two geniuses of the Victorian Age

*While on his travels in June,
the editor discovered the works of a
Victorian master craftsman*



John Patrick, 3rd marquess –
mystic, scholar & builder

If ever a man was born with a silver spoon in his mouth it was John Patrick Crichton-Stewart, 3rd Marquess of Bute. Born in 1847, he inherited a vast fortune which made him the richest man in Europe. The money came from black gold – coal excavated in the Welsh valleys and exported in huge quantities through the nearby port of Cardiff to fuel the burgeoning industries of Britain and Europe.

At the beginning of the 19th century the first Marquess of Bute had married a Welsh heiress and thus acquired extensive estates in south Wales. His grandson John (*above left*), the second Marquess, was a highly successful entrepreneur, a Victorian Bill Gates, who saw the potential of his Welsh inheritance and mortgaged all his wealth to build the Cardiff docks. Every ton of Welsh coal passed through the docks, and the Butes were paid five pence per ton.

At its height Cardiff docks handled 170 million tons of coal per year – a veritable fortune of fivepences. At his father's death in 1848 John Patrick, the 3rd Marquess, inherited all this wealth. He became a scholar, an antiquarian, something of a mystic – but, above all, a philanthropist and builder. He restored Cardiff Castle to its mediaeval splendour and surrounded it by the spacious Cathays Park providing a gracious recreational area for the citizens of the Welsh capital. Nearby, a magnificent civic centre unrivalled in modern Europe, was built.

At the age of 21 John Patrick converted to Catholicism and became a passionate devotee of Victorian Gothic. He was a patron of the pre-Raphaelite school and of the Arts and Crafts movement. All this is reflected in the 60 or more building projects which he sponsored and financed over the next 30 years.

His greatest pride was the family home on the Isle of Bute, hundreds of miles from Cardiff, lying snugly in the Firth of Clyde near Glasgow. The Stewarts had lived on that island for 600 years when John Patrick inherited the family estates. In 1877 the old manor house burnt down. He at once engaged the Edinburgh architect Robert Anderson to rebuild, and for the next 23 years until his death nothing delighted the Marquess more than to watch and direct the construction of his new home, Mount Stuart, a *tour de force* of Victorian Gothic.

This Victorian polymath has always fascinated me, so last June I went to see Mount Stuart for myself. If you find yourself in that part of Scotland, don't miss it. The Isle of Bute is easy to reach from Glasgow; indeed once it was the favourite holiday destination. You approach through extensive parkland via the inevitable visitors' centre. As you walk up to the house, you may glimpse the shoreline and the distant Scottish mainland. The great house is of red sandstone and rises to a great height (*opposite*).

The somewhat ponderous exterior belies the delights within. The building is strictly symmetrical: an outer square of luxurious chambers surrounding an inner square, the Great Hall, which rises 60 feet to a riot of stained glass. Twelve great windows represent the constellations, and when the sun falls upon them dozens of tiny embedded prisms catch fire, sending shafts of colour like laser beams through the vast and magnificently adorned interior.

Every room is tastefully, even lavishly furnished, with a splendid collection of Scottish and European paintings. But the pearl of Mount Stuart is its chapel, constructed within of gleaming white Carrara marble and crowned by a lantern of red stained glass; strong sunlight causes the whole interior to be suffused by a warm, rosy glow.

The exquisite taste of the 3rd Marquess is also to be seen at the family 'bach', a fairyland castle high up among beech woods and visible from Cardiff's northern suburbs (*see opposite*). I found Castle Coch also a delight to explore, even though it seems to have been more of a folly than a family home. John Patrick's passion was in the design and construction of these astonishing buildings. Once they were finished he lost interest and moved on. He died young – at 53. Indeed the family graves, under trees by the sea at Mount Stuart, reveal that few of the Stewarts lived beyond middle age. Great wealth does not seem to guarantee long life.

Mount Stuart now is a prime tourist attraction and a favourite venue for weddings and other such functions. The present heir has renounced his title and moved away to indulge his own passion – which could not be more different from the interests of his illustrious ancestor – motor racing. ■

Christmas

The Board and editorial team wish all our readers a happy and blessed Christmas – and good reading for 2006

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A child is born. No event in life surpasses a baby's birth for sheer wonderment, thankfulness and delight. It is no surprise, therefore, that throughout the Christian world Christmas is the feast of feasts.

This year, *Tui Motu* focuses on the child of Bethlehem. This child we believe is none other than God's Son. Mystery of faith! In this unique divine act every human preconception of power and prestige is challenged. Omnipotence is made flesh in vulnerability and powerlessness.

This astonishing paradox is only intelligible in terms of unconditional love. At Bethlehem this love is primarily expressed by Mary. In giving birth there is a sense in which a mother

gives her all. These ideas are expressed in this *Tui Motu* through a series of extraordinarily beautiful articles. Since none of the authors knew what the others were writing, we can only rejoice and applaud this journalistic miracle!

However, throughout these articles and in the artist's description (*below*), there runs an ominous undercurrent of threat. This child is born into a largely hostile world. Wars, tsunamis, economic and social exclusion: these are the commonplaces of our world, which still awaits redemption by the love of God made visible in the child of Bethlehem.

May this Christmas brings us a little nearer to understanding this aspect of Christmas – and living it. *M.H.*

cover picture

The Marian College Triptych



The triptych is in the chapel of Marian College, Christchurch. It was painted by one of the teachers, Ken Frame. The three painted panels of this portable altarpiece depict the three major events in the life of Mary. The central panel (*our cover*) is the *Madonna and Child*. "The composition," writes the artist, "is borrowed from Renaissance artist Leonardo da

Vinci. In this image a worried Mary gazes upon a Piwakawaka (fantail) on her lap. In Maoridom the Piwakawaka is symbolic of impending tragedy – prophecy of Christ's crucifixion. Behind the figures, who are in contemporary dress, is the Lyttelton Harbour and the Christchurch Port Hills.

Here we see a modern day Mary and Christ in New Zealand light within a local landscape."

The left panel shows a young Mary at the time of the *Annunciation*. The right panel is the *Assumption*. *Tui Motu* is indebted to Marian College for allowing us to use the *Madonna and Child* for our Christmas cover.

Photography: Tony Stewart.

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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The loveable radical

At Rod Donald's funeral in Christchurch Cathedral on 10 November, the Green Party Co-leader Jeanette Fitzsimons reminded us that the fundamental principles Rod operated by were ecology, peace, social justice and democracy. From an early age Rod had a very strong sense of humankind's destructive and unsustainable exploitation of natural ecosystems and was deeply concerned at where this journey was leading us and our children. In 1972, Rod, a 15-year-old at St Andrew's College, set up the school's *Ecology Action Group* and four years later he initiated Christchurch's first community-based waste recycling centre.

It is a very special person who can hold and advance radical and visionary views and yet be disarmingly acceptable, likeable, respected and loved by such a diverse range of people. While there are those who disagreed with Rod's views, few disliked him as a person.

At his funeral we heard about a man who loved, was loved and will be deeply missed. He was a dedicated partner, a proud dad and a loyal friend to many people. His energy and commitment to ecology, justice, peace and democracy was huge. For much of his political life he was a voice for the unheard and was a strong advocate for people having a say in their own affairs.

He was committed to fair trade, ethical finances and non-violent conflict resolution. Bob Brown, from Australia, highlighted Rod's international standing, calling him a

"global green" and a "noble New Zealander". Jeanette told us that Rod, as a result of his electoral reform and MMP campaign, changed Parliament from a place representing the élite to a forum better representing New Zealand's diversity of peoples.

Rod walked lightly on this earth, living simply, caringly and carefully. He walked the talk. He had the ability to be effective, inclusive and communicative at so many different levels. He would arrive at our doorstep at 10 pm at night, on his bike, delivering tickets for a fund-raising and awareness-raising movie, engage in a quick friendly word; next day be in Wellington debating and influencing high level Government policy.

I joined the procession of cyclists that followed the electric bus carrying Rod, his family and close friends to the Cathedral. As we slowly cycled in silence through the streets of inner Christchurch, it seemed time itself stood still out of respect. By the time we arrived there was, of course, no room inside, so I joined the large, quiet and reflective crowd that gathered in Cathedral Square listening to the service in the warm sun.

How can one make sense of the sudden and totally unexpected loss of this remarkable man? A close friend said in the final eulogy that while Rod is no longer with us we can ensure that the legacy of this peace-loving and loveable radical, partner, dad, friend, public figure and ecological visionary will live on.

Andrew Dakers

Response

Of all the many publications that cross my desk at Parliament, *Tui Motu* is one of the few I really look forward to receiving and read from cover to cover each month. As I am a Green MP, you may well imagine that I have been following readers' responses to the 'The dream-Apostle Paul' editorial with considerable interest.

First of all, may I say how touched I was that the original comment summarised the various electoral contestants so lucidly and pithily, and that it ended with such clear recognition of the life-giving principles of our Green kaupapa. However, such a tribute has naturally brought forth a variety of

The Dream-Apostle

feedback, and I'm grateful to the team for allowing me this chance of a reply, particularly on two issues – abortion and agriculture.

Abortion

The *Green Party* has no clear policy on the ethics of abortion. This is because when we have discussed it, we have discovered that members have a diverse range of views, and it has therefore been left as a conscience issue about which each of us makes our own judgment.

Since I came to Parliament in December 1999 with the first group of MPs to be here as the *Green Party*, I cannot recall any vote on this.

We do have an extensive Children's policy which starts from the premise that 'Every Child Matters'. We believe that all babies and children deserve the best possible start in life and we campaign hard to end child poverty, reduce violence against children, and improve health, housing and education for them all – including improved ante- and post-natal health care and better support for parents.

Personally, I find abortion a very difficult issue. I do not have space here to properly or fully express my opinions, but am happy to engage in discussion with readers/groups should opportunities present themselves.



▷▷ Agriculture

Turning to the criticism of our Agriculture policy from Des McSweeney, he has extrapolated out from our policies in a quite fantastical way. We are committed to doing everything we can to make our agricultural and horticultural practices more environmentally friendly, but we recognise that change is difficult and takes time, and that there is a huge amount of research to be done, as well as support given to those who do wish to make the transition to organic.

If we want the environment to nurture

us and our plants and animals, then we must nurture it in return. We can do this by keeping it free of genetically modified organisms, by reducing the amount of dangerous chemicals we use, by working to end pollution of our waterways, and the rest – but only with and alongside farmers in whose interests we also work.

I do believe that Green policies which seek to nurture both children and the physical environment on which we all depend for life, are consistent with the teachings of the Apostle Paul and of the New Testament. Like my fellow Green

MPs, I am always open to invitations to speak at church and community forums – and if you would like more detailed information about any of our policies, please feel free to get in touch or to visit our website.

Finally, may I thank those readers and contributors who have in any way expressed grief and condolences at this time of the loss of our Co-leader and friend, Rod Donald. Your support for Rod's family and wider whanau at this time has been much appreciated.

Sue Bradford, Green MP

Ms Bradford is Green spokesperson on Agriculture

letters to the editor



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

Praying for more priests

Kathleen Taylor (*TM Oct.*) believes we have prayed for 30 years for more priests and that is quite long enough because we might be stopping God doing something else more exciting! She then refers to God as though He

has gender ("He/She") which may give us the clue to what she thinks God ought to be doing – placing women in positions of authority in the church.

Any prayer worthy of the name has to be subject to the condition 'Not my will but yours be done', so we need not fear that we could be doing the impossible and compelling God to do things He does not want!

Patrick Cronin, Nelson

Dream Apostle – 3

In *Nov. letters* Chris Sullivan takes issue with your editorial claim that the Greens "really do care for the little ones".

The Greens are the only party whose policies are consistently directed towards maintaining our planet in a healthy state for the benefit of future generations. Other parties, in paying homage to the Golden Calf of economic growth, pander to the media hype of consuming beyond our hearts' desire. Unsustainable agriculture, exploitation of non-renewable resources, loss of species at an ever-accelerating rate, global warming are ignored.

They gained votes through the agency of some of our Christian institutions who misguidedly advocated voting on the basis of candidates' record on abortion. Winston Peters's and Peter Dunne's opportunist pose of 'pro-family' demonstrates the sad efficaciousness of political expediency that can sideline nature, the very basis of life itself.

As Greenies we are thankful for every young life saved. But we fear that some of these 'saved ones' will one day curse us for having brought them into a world that has not enough healthy topsoil left to grow their food, its water resources depleted and the remainder fouled by industry, while poisoned air and catastrophic weather extremes have become the norm.

Change will come when the cost of our inaction becomes intolerable. Will it come too late?

Frank Hoffmann, Papakura

St. Mary's Environmental Care Group

Single issue voters

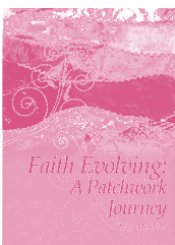
I did not vote Green at the last election, more's the pity. It may well be true that the Green Party is pro-choice, but the election was not a single issue one. The Green Party is the only party that has the care of God's World as a key issue: think on that if you support National.

George W. Bush is anti-abortion, and many Christians voted for him for this reason. However, one cannot separate out a single issue and ignore others. Many innocent people have been and are being killed in Iraq, a war opposed by many church people. The lack of action in New Orleans was partly due to Republican policy of non-interference in State affairs. Reduction in social services is also a Republican policy.

R Allbrook, Hamilton

Faith Evolving: A Patchwork Journey

Trish McBride



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Parihaka Day

Looking out from behind veiled curtains at the firecrackers illuminating the night sky, I am moved to wonder what it is exactly that we are commemorating on this latest Guy Fawkes night. Of course I know that it was a plot by a handful of radical men who happened to be Catholic, seeking to overturn the government of the day in England.

Like millions of subversives around the world who have tried similar radical action, when they were caught they were hanged. Surely that is where it should have ended. So, why has it taken such a grip on our nation's consciousness that we turn out every year and want to spend up large and commemorate it?

I find it really ironic that we gather to fire off rockets and celebrate the violent overthrow of a small group of plotters 400 years ago – and totally ignore the fact that 5 November is the day when 124 years ago New Zealand showed the whole world one of the early examples of community non-violent resistance to state tyranny. I speak of the passive resistance of Te Whiti o Rongomai and his compatriot Tohu Kakahi and the people of Parihaka in Taranaki.

During the 1860s wars, the Crown confiscated a significant amount of land in the Taranaki, and from 1880 sent Pakeha surveyors to this land. In response to these unlawful confiscations, these two great Christian leaders refused to respond in any violent way and instead initiated some amazingly creative forms of peaceful resistance. One thing the resisters did was keep changing the surveyors' pegs so that the land couldn't accurately be divided up into blocks. Another was that at night they would come out and build fences through the roads and fields.

Finally, when the government had had enough of this peaceful resistance, the troops arrived en masse on 5 November 1881 (ironically on the anniversary of Guy Fawkes) and faced a gathering of approximately 2000 Maori sitting peacefully in front of their Pa. They found the children in front playing stick games and other childlike pursuits. Sitting behind them were several hundred women weaving, singing, praying. Then came the men sitting passively, unarmed in the face of the invaders' guns. These 2000 sat while several hundred arrests were made, and their homes and crops destroyed.

They offered no resistance. Doesn't this remind us of the psalmist and Jesus?

Te Whiti and Tohu were arrested and led away. The government suspended *habeas corpus* (having to produce an accused in court) and instead sent them straight to prisons in Hokitika, Addington, Lyttelton and Dunedin for up to two years. For most of them, no court cases and no trials. Just locked them up in jail. The punishments were severe. Many never returned having died in the severe South Island winters.

Families were torn apart. Imagine the chaos that caused to the infrastructure of village and home life. Who would rebuild? Who could farm? Who could dig, sow and hoe, take out the boats, protect the Pa? The women and children were left to fend for themselves. Never did English justice and law look so tatty as in that period.

Most New Zealanders now appreciate that the widespread theft of the land was a blot on our early Colonial history, the repercussions for which are still reverberating at the Waitangi Tribunal and in various land claims. Parihaka was a classic case of a land grab.

But what a fantastic response lifted straight from the pages of the Gospel and the teachings of Jesus! Te Whiti and Tohu had heard the missionary message and passionately believed in a gospel of peace and justice. They remain wonderful models for us today.

We should honour with great pride their imaginative creativity efforts. Remember they were confronting the most powerful Empire in the world without weapons except their own truth. This happened long before Mohandas Gandhi (who knew of Te Whiti and Parihaka) stated his revolt against English rule in India. Imagine the self-sacrifice involved, the commitment, the pain, the passion.

Isn't it time to develop a campaign to institute a national day to honour them? Guy Fawkes has had a good innings. Four hundred years is long enough. He should be consigned to a footnote in history books. It's time for the story of Parihaka and its people to be honoured and celebrated. It's time to celebrate non-violence and peacemaking. Perhaps our churches and schools could take a lead?

Let's turn the Fifth of November into a **Parihaka National Day**.

Christopher Carey

What Yet Might Be

*Advent is the season of expectation, suggests Mike Riddell:
awaiting the coming of Christ and looking at the realisation of our own gifts.
Mary, Mother of Christ, is a wonderful exemplar*

Gestation is the highest calling of life. The space between what has been promised and what is yet to be is God's foundry, in which everything is transformed. This is a work often silent and hidden, and yet of everlasting consequence. Through it we find our vocation and purpose; through it our will and that of God blend to produce something fresh and beautiful.

Advent is more than just another season. It is the key to making sense of our own troubled lives with all their longings and disappointments. Essentially it is a celebration of the virtue of waiting. Not the dull frustration of standing at a bus stop watching the minutes tick away, but the fecund anticipation of the woman in child. Advent is a reminder that the womb of faith is the hollow in which God brings dreams to fruition.

Paul tells us that the whole of creation groans in the labour of birth: a groaning which we in our humanity share as we long for transformation. This metaphor of the universe as *hapu* has much to reveal to we who grow impatient with ourselves and our world. The mystery of creation may require time and space beyond our mortal ken – a metamorphosis which cannot be hurried. Advent is the darkness in which we await the light.

The account of Mary's harbouring of the Christ-child is a story to renew our own hopeful perseverance. She is

rightfully the touchstone of gracious partnership with God. From her response to the prompting of the Spirit we learn how to wait proactively; to render the frustration of waiting into the high art of co-creation. Several attributes displayed by Mary provide themes to consider in this season.

Openness

The first is that of *openness*. The Annunciation comes out of left field, and seems as unlikely as anything which might be imagined. She is, after all, a humble woman of no great account in the wider world. One can only imagine how she explained to Joseph that she had been chosen by God for this great honour. And yet, despite some consternation as to the news which Gabriel brought her, Mary is open to the possibility.

Advent is a celebration of the virtue of waiting

One of the mechanisms by which we resist the will of God is that of self-doubt. It is easy in this world to believe ourselves to be of no account, and that our existence is of no great significance one way or the other. This is a subtle denial of the giftedness of life, and the understanding that every life has meaning and purpose. No matter what our abilities or circumstances, there are things to be brought into being

through us that will not come unless we allow them to.

We may not all bear the Saviour, but we all have something to give birth to which is unique to us. Allowing such a notion to bloom in the imagination is often the first step toward its fruition. And sometimes the consequences are beyond our understanding. How could Rosa Parks have envisaged what would flow from her tired feet, and the refusal to stand when a seat was available in the 'whites-only' section of the bus?

Acceptance

At the core of Mary's faithfulness is *acceptance*. Her declaration, "Be it unto me according to your word", is a confession of deep trust in the goodness of God. It is an attitude which is as much misunderstood as it is adopted. Contrary to some interpretations, this is not resignation to passivity, in which all human aspiration should be repressed in favour of divine *fiat*. Rather it is the willingness to bring that which is given in our life – all of our resources – to the task of participation in that which God has planted in our imagination.

The great mystery of faith which Paul reveals is: "Christ in you, the hope of glory". This is not some form of psychic domination, but the wonder of a partnership in which we are called to join with God in bringing into being that which is not yet apparent. As my German theology lecturer used to say: "God does not rape". Our willing

acceptance is a vital aspect of the work of God being done within us.

James K. Baxter wrote: “A relevant comparison may be that of a gardener to whom God has given the job of planting and watering an orchard. He may choose in measure what seeds he plants. He may choose how he prunes and waters. Yet God gives seed, soil, moisture, life, the strength to perform the task, and guidance in its performance. God chooses to work with us, not merely to command, as he worked with and through and in the man Jesus. The life of the church is a continuation of the life of Jesus.”

Endurance

The most difficult element of Mary's faith is surely *endurance*. In a world which seems set against her, she must continue to nurture the Christ-child. Against prejudice and gossip, through misunderstanding and loneliness, in both travel and persecution she sets her own will in resonance with the divine, harbouring within her the embryonic hope which is yet to appear. In these difficult days she has little but her own sense of God-given purpose to sustain her.

There are some gifts and visions within us all which must remain secret from the world until they come to ripeness. This period of incubation is commonly much longer than we wish it to be. In some instances it is only death which breaks open the husk of our contribution to the world and allows it to take root. To persevere in the face of adversity and disillusionment is a large part of the work that is asked of us. Many times we are tempted to doubt that which God has whispered in our hearts.

But it is precisely this longevity of faith which transforms our experience from the futility of ‘waiting for Godot’ to the privilege of carrying a life-giving hope within us. We speak of ‘bearing’ children, and that is what we must do with our dreams. And, so I’m told, the closer to full-term a woman gets, the more difficult the responsibility of such bearing.



Annunciation: Woelfel, Nigeria. From Christ for All People. ed. Ron O’Grady

Birth

The end to which all of this leads is *birth*. For Mary it is the honour of giving earthly life to the One who is Life. This source of great joy is not simply a reward for what has gone before. Rather it is the public revelation of Mary's quiet vocation. Now others can know what she has known through all this time: ‘Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed’.

We too should hold to our conviction that what God has begun in us will be brought to completion. Those God-breathed children of our imagination will take shape and form at the right time, and will have more significance than we ever could have guessed. This is the way in which God works – in partnership and friendship, quietly and unobtrusively, through the small and neglected.

There are undoubtedly times when our lives seem shallow and frail; too wretched to be of any consequence. Yet unseen within us there is life growing and hope unfurling. Our task is to trust in this process and see it through despite our doubts. As philosopher A.N. Whitehead described the work of God: “It dwells upon the tender elements in the world, which slowly and in quietness operate by love”.

Advent is a time of hope: hope for salvation; hope for our world; hope for ourselves. By encountering once again the story of that unique gestation, it may be that we feel once more the flutter of our own God-given dreams within us. ■

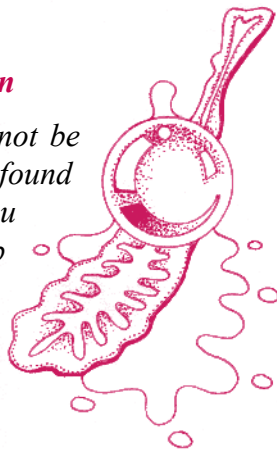
Mike Riddell is a writer, dramatist and theologian living in Dunedin

Thoughts on Advent

Joy Cowley leads us on a contemplative journey through the season of Advent. We await the coming of Christ in hope – conscious that Christmas brings challenge as well as comfort

Luke 1: 30: *The Annunciation*

The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son and you will name him Jesus.”



Reflection

We are suspended in a quiet moment of beauty. What is it that holds us there? Pearls of rain on a cabbage leaf? The white hair of a wave combed by the wind? A Mozart sonata? The eyes of a newborn child? Beauty takes us on a journey to a place so deep that it is beyond words. All we know is that the moment is sacred with Presence and we are open to receive it. The Lord is with us. Like Mary, we are blessed.

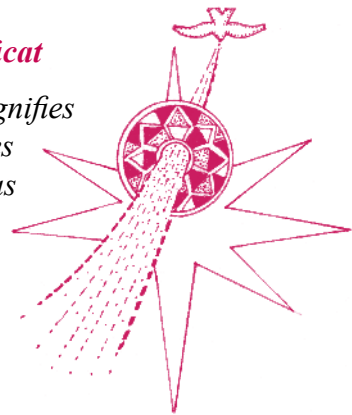
Later we may reflect on the experience and recognize it as wordless prayer, a connection with the Divine, and our response is one of gratitude. We realize that too often we live in our heads with our focus on another time and place, not here and now. The sacred lies in the present moment and our openness. This is a sensate experience of seeing, hearing, touching. The beauty out there connects with the beauty within us and in that moment of wonder, we become pregnant with God.

Let us imagine a world in which there is no religion. None at all. Where do we encounter God? What experiences fill us with holy awe? How do we react to our sense of wonder? When we reflect on these experiences, we understand why we have religion. We are naturally spiritual beings and most of us need to respond to our everyday experiences of the Divine. How we formulate those responses, gives rise to belief and structured wor-

ship. As Jesus said, the Sabbath was made for us, not the other way around. God meets us where we are.

Luke 1: 46 - 48: *The Magnificat*

And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant..”



Reflection

Mature Christian journey is one of gratitude, rejoicing – and sacrifice. The word “sacrifice” is not popular in today’s society but for us it has particular meaning. It describes the way the spiritual being is called to give up his or her smallness to God’s greatness. It’s a gentle sacrifice, a release of tightly held ideas, openness to the moment, a love and respect for nature.

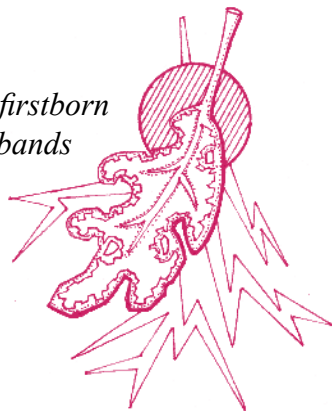
We no longer need to control the events of our lives. We no longer expect other people to have our values. We can let go of attachments – all our pet likes and dislikes – and be at peace with our environment. In this gentle sacrifice, we lose our sense of isolation. We gain a sense of oneness with the universe. We discover that our being too, proclaims the greatness of the Lord and our spirit finds joy in God our saviour.

What does being pregnant with God mean to each of us? How do we make space for the growing Christ in our lives?

The holy baby was a spiritual being on a human journey. So are we all spiritual beings on a human journey, and Jesus’ example encourages us to the fullness of humanity.

Luke 2: 7: *The Birth*

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn



Reflection

Sacrifice and new life are two sides of the one coin. In all of nature, a death occurs to make way for increase. Autumn leaves fall and become compost for new leaves on a tree that is a year larger. The egg ceases when the chicken is hatched. A grain of wheat falls and becomes a plant with many grains of wheat. The placenta, a living part of the mother, dies when the child is born.

This is the way of sacrifice, the way of life. When we can understand sacrifice as a principal of growth, we see the greater significance of Jesus' life and teaching, and we understand that both Advent and Easter are about birth.

Mary gave birth in a stable. We reflect on all the times we have been in labour with some kind of new birth. When emotional pain comes, we rarely see it as blessing or at all productive. We don't want to journey with it. We want to go back to the pre-pain state. Yet the only way to live is forward. When we are in a birthing pain, we have two consolations: it is the way of growth and our God has been there before us in all that we might be called to experience.

When we reflect on emotional pain suffered in the distant past, we see how that became compost for new growth. From that new growth come the fruits of wisdom and compassion. Would we have the gifts of wisdom and compassion if we had never suffered pain?

Luke 2:15: *The Shepherds*

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us."



Reflection

In those days, shepherds had a bad reputation. They lived on the fringe of society, nomads who sometimes robbed and killed travellers, stole each others flocks and were generally lawless. It is interesting that while *Matthew* describes Jesus' visit from the Magi, wealthy intellectuals from the East, *Luke* tells us how angels appeared to people at the other end of the social spectrum.

For the rest of us who fit somewhere in between, this is very reassuring. There is none too high and none too lowly. The good news is for all. We are little sparks of the Divine struggling with our journey, and the great fire of God comes among us to show the way. It's the way of openness, of connectedness, of gentle sacrifice, of compassion and rejoicing. And whatever our culture or religion, it is the way for us all.

We are part of a Christian tradition that has been around for over two thousand years. It carries with it a lot of human history, some of that history noble, some rather shabby. God speaks to us through all of it.

Everything is lesson. Where do we find the new life in our worship? What inhibits our growth? What nurtures and sustains us? This Advent, do we hear the angels singing? Do we see what the Lord has made known to us? ■

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Power within powerlessness

*A baby present at Midnight Mass
prompts Daniel O’Leary to reflect – if God-made -human
gives away all power, then why shouldn’t we?*

It is 11.45 pm on Christmas eve. Everything is ready – except the homily! Our church had fallen down, literally. We were trying to keep our parish family together in the school hall. The day was spent in taking care of the essentials – finding an ordinary table for a makeshift altar, replacing infant chairs with ones big enough for well-padded adults, coaxing the caretaker for adequate heating, extra lighting for the partially sighted, making space amid the clutter for readers and eucharistic ministers to manoeuvre, finding a piano and a microphone that worked.

As we started Mass, I was blaming myself for not having a homily prepared. When the assembled parishioners came to their feet for the Gospel, I noticed a tiny baby, no more than a few days old, asleep in her mother’s arms. An idea hit me. I spoke briefly about the Almighty Creator and Judge that we worshipped and feared. “How frightening would it be”, I asked, “if this omniscient God thundered into our world just now?” I stooped down to lift aloft the small child, no bigger than my fist. “There,” I said, “there is the power of God. Who can be afraid of a God like that?”

There are many faces to a baby. When you think about it, a baby is an amazing symbol of both power and powerlessness. Or, perhaps, more accurately, of power within powerlessness. As I felt the totally trusting



photo: Mary Ann Bishop

baby stir sleepily in my hands I thought about her utter vulnerability, her total trust. How ambiguous and paradoxical it all was. And how shocking, too. This is what love does. It gives away its power. It renders itself destructible. All of this runs against the grain of our competitive and controlling nature. How can weakness ever be understood as the secret of true love? With every birth we ask ourselves the same question.

When loving couples have a baby, their lives become as precarious as that of the baby of their love. The beauty they have created shatters their former security. Their lives are irrevocably transformed.

But that is what love is like. It surrenders. It has no more masks, no more expectation, no more certainties. The Bethlehem baby’s defenceless presence, his shocking and precarious weakness, his overturning of all our ideas about the nature of God, stun us into silence. It is in this sacred silence, during these few precious days, that the hard thoughts within us can soften, that the unforgiving walls of judgment and blame can crumble, that the cold shadows of our pride can be melted by the warmth of an infant’s smile. Such is the power of a baby.

As R.S.Thomas puts it:

*When we are weak, we are
Strong. When our eyes close
On the world, then somewhere
Within us the bush
Burns. When we are poor
And aware of the inadequacy
Of our table, it is to that,
Uninvited, the guest comes*

There are so many reasons why our splintered world, with its broken dreams, sorely needs the life-giving good news revealed in the faces of a baby. Fearful and anxious, how urgently we await this revelation of God’s accessibility in the fragile body of a child. Aggressive and violent, how much our trigger-happy leaders can learn from God’s way of establishing peace in the open trust of a baby.

At a time when anxious millions are only too familiar with the ‘half-life’

of mere existence, how life-giving it is to see, in a kicking, delighted infant, the call – and permission – for us too to ‘go barefoot’ into each day, to live our lives to the full abundance of Life incarnate. And, in a divided, greedy world divided between rich North and poor South, how desperately we all need the ultimate example of simply possessing nothing so that others may simply live.

There is a cross, too, in the face of a baby, for love and pain are conjoined twins. “And thy own soul a sword shall pierce.” I think of my mum’s heart when she realised from my brother Joseph’s face that he was a Down’s syndrome baby. She must have glimpsed a life of pain to come for all the family. If you dare to love, be prepared to grieve. How right she was! The perennial Infancy Narratives do not hide the shadow of Good Friday that falls across the heart of the Christmas baby. In fact the story of the baby’s birth is based on the death and resurrection of the grown man.

It follows that God’s glory and beauty are revealed in poor, humble, hurting and self-effacing lives of faith and compassion. It can be fully present in failure, disgrace and ignominy. The mystery of God is disguised and veiled in the most hopeless places and people, in the margins of life, in the helplessness of a baby.

Babies transform us by not threatening us. They bless us with the inner freedom to be ourselves – just as they always are. A baby is an invitation that draws out what is best within us. We do not resist a baby’s love, in fact, we sense we need it. Small wonder that God’s redemptive self-emptying resulted in the wonder of a baby.

And that Jesus, too, held up the child as the epitome of his mission and power. Babies heal us. “The moment I first looked at my baby,” a young father told me, “the stammer left me.” They transform what is negative so that it cannot be transmitted any more.

In saying *Yes* to life, the child takes the *now* and makes it special. Because it yearns for life, it is as if it is insatiably addicted to growing. The small child reaches for the moon through the windows of its wonder, and it stirs us to do the same. The child does not quit on life. It has an indelible curiosity about tomorrow, a passion for the possible. It does not need to hope or believe. Like God incarnate, it delights, writes Thomas Aquinas, in the joy of simply being there.

Christmas is the celebration of the truth that God is always accessible within whatever is happening to us, not outside it; that if God cannot hold us in our sin and shame, then God is dead; that if God is not touching us in

our weakness, then Christmas is a cruel joke. Cardinal Avery Dulles wrote: “The Incarnation does not provide us with a ladder by which to escape the ambiguities of life and scale the heights of heaven. Rather it enables us to burrow deep into the heart of planet Earth and find it shimmering with divinity.”

A trusting God risked placing a powerless baby in human hands to reveal and ‘earth’ the essence of divine, vulnerable and unconditional love. Astonishing though this mystery is, we still need sacramental moments to keep reminding us of it. Otherwise, because we are congenitally forgetful of our destiny, the miracle would grow dim and distant.

These moments of revelation come to all of us in different ways. For a few of us it came during that Midnight Mass in a small Yorkshire school, when a trusting mother risked letting go of her baby into the clumsy hands of her parish priest. Such are the ordinary ways that the extraordinarily beautiful mystery will be remembered, and the perennial star will be re-lit – to warm and guide us through another year. ■

Daniel O’Leary is a priest of the diocese of Leeds, England

The wolf will lie down with the lamb



A baby hippopotamus that survived the tsunami waves on the Kenyan coast has formed a strong bond with a giant male century-old tortoise. The hippopotamus, weighing about

300 kgm, was swept down Sabaki River into the Indian Ocean, then forced back to shore when tsunami waves struck the Kenyan coast on December 26, before wildlife rangers rescued him.

“It is incredible. A less-than-a-year-old hippo has adopted a male tortoise, about a century old, and the tortoise seems to be very happy with being a ‘mother,’” said ecologist Paula Kahumbu.

“After it lost its mother, the hippo was traumatised. It had to look for something to be a surrogate



mother. Fortunately, it landed on the tortoise and established a strong bond. They swim, eat and sleep together. The hippo follows the tortoise exactly the way it follows its mother.” (AFP)

Putting Herod back into Christmas

Anglican priest, Joy Carroll Wallis, pleads for a return to balance in the way we remember the circumstances of Jesus' birth. Herod is as much a part of the story as the angels and shepherds.

From a 2004 Advent sermon.

How people love Christmas carols! When I was a priest in London, carol singing around the parish really seemed to get everyone in the mood for Christmas. We always had a real accordion and an old-fashioned lantern on a pole; we were always wrapped up warmly, and we would stop and sing carols under selected streetlights. It was a scene fit for a Christmas card. People came out in droves, mostly non-churchgoers, to listen and put money in our collecting box for the homeless. When we were finally all sung out, we would trudge back to someone's house for mulled wine and mince pies – all very English! Great memories.

But we need to beware! Our culture loves a sentimental Christmas, and the Christmas carols that we sing are a big part of that. The words often paint an idyllic picture of sanitary bliss that has very little to do with the reality of what Jesus came into this world to do. This week my husband, Jim, was reading the Christmas story to our son, Luke. He read how Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem on the donkey, that there was no room in the inn. But there was a stable, and, as Jim read, "the stable was warm and clean!"

But this sanitisation of the Christmas story is a relatively recent development. It's interesting that before the Victorian era, Christmas songs were much more likely to reflect the reality of Jesus' entry into our world. Carols would not hesitate to refer to the blood and sacrifice of Jesus or the story about Herod slaughtering the innocent children.

As an example of the contrast, read through the words of *Away in a Manger*. Jesus is the perfect baby, and "No crying he makes..." My guess is that Jesus cried a lot. We know from the Gospels that the more Jesus saw of the world in which he lived, the more he mourned and wept regularly. A Jesus who doesn't weep with those who weep, a Jesus who is just a sentimental myth, may be the one that our culture prefers, but that Jesus can do nothing for us.

About 10 years ago Cliff Richard released a Christmas song that reached the top 10 in the charts. The lyrics of *Saviour's Day* reflected his Christian faith and included lines such as, "Life can be yours on *Saviour's Day*, don't look back or turn away..." I picked up a teenage pop magazine where there was an article reviewing the season's Christmas songs. When it came to *Saviour's Day*, the writer said, "This song is OK, but there's no holly, no mistletoe and wine, no presents around the tree, no snow, no Santa, in fact this song hasn't got anything to do with Christmas at all!"

A radio DJ in the United States once said, "What Christmas is all about is the celebration of living in a great nation like this." It's not a celebration of this "great" nation; it's about Jesus Christ. It's so easy to let the world reduce our spirituality to nostalgia and sentiment. As Michael Van Horn said, "We must be careful not to lose the connection to the truth of the story because it is that story that shapes our identity as the people of God."

Another danger of sentimentality is that we tend to lose interest in the parts of the story that are not so comfortable. We smile at the warm, cosy Nativity scene, but have you ever spent a night in a barn? Or given birth in a barn? The reality is very different. Some scholars suggest that in *Luke's* account it's not just that the inns were full but that Mary and Joseph were forced to take the barn because their family had rejected them. Joseph has relatives or friends of relatives in Bethlehem. So, rather than being received hospitably by family or friends, Joseph and Mary have been shunned. Family and neighbours are declaring their moral outrage at the fact that Joseph would show up on their doorsteps with his pregnant girlfriend.

No sooner have the Wise Men left the stable than King Herod plots to kill Jesus. He is so determined that he is willing to sacrifice many innocent lives in order to get to this one baby. Herod recognises something about Jesus that in our

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sentiment we fail to see: that the birth of this child is a threat to his kingdom, a threat to that kind of domination and rule. Jesus challenges the very power structures of this evil age. Herod has all the male infants in Bethlehem murdered. Not so cosy. This is the Jesus who entered the bloody history of Israel, and the human race.

But we don't want to think about Herod. Van Horn calls him the "Ebenezer Scrooge without the conversion, the Grinch without a change of heart." We Christians like to talk about putting Christ back into Christmas, but let's not forget to put Herod back into Christmas. Herod represents the dark side of the gospel. He reminds us that Jesus didn't enter a world of sparkly Christmas cards or a world of warm spiritual sentiment.

Jesus enters a world of real pain, of serious dysfunction, a world of brokenness and political oppression. Jesus was born an outcast, a homeless person, a refugee, and finally he becomes a victim to the powers that be. Jesus is the perfect saviour for outcasts, refugees and nobodies. That's how the church is described in Scripture time and time again – not as the best and the brightest – but those who in their weakness become a sign for the world of the wisdom and power of God.

My boys and I enjoy watching the animated movie *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*. It describes an island of misfit toys where all the strange and unusual toys lived? The island is an interesting picture of our church communities. The church is not a gathering of people who have it all together, who look and act alike, who have no problems to speak of. The church is a community of people who are broken and needy, who in their weakness trust in the grace of God. This is the kind of church that Jesus the outcast, the misfit has created.

The gospel that acknowledges brokenness, pain, and the tragedy of life is good news for us all. There is hope for all who find this season tinged with despair or pain. Perhaps we mourn the loss of a loved one and their absence on Christmas day is more painful each year. Perhaps our lives are full of struggle. Perhaps we despair over the state of our world.

The news of ever-increasing poverty in America, and the news of the war in Iraq – whose mission was supposed to be accomplished by now but is clearly not – is a mess and

getting worse by the day with more and more casualties. A war, like most wars, that has not lived up to its promises seems so much out of sync with the message that we sing in our Christmas carols. The Jesus of the Bible came to give life to those who are living with real grief and pain. This is not often the stuff of our Christmas carols.

The greatest Christmas song is that of Mary's, found in the second chapter of *Luke*:

He has shown strength with his arm;

He has scattered the proud in the imaginations of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, And lifted up the lowly;

He has filled the hungry with good things,

And sent the rich away empty.

(Lk. 1,51-53)

Mary's *Magnificat* tells us that this new king is likely to turn the world upside down. Mary's declaration about the high and mighty being brought low and the lowly exalted is at the heart of the Christmas story. The son of God is born in an animal stall. Mary herself is a poor young woman, part of an oppressed race, and

living in an occupied country. Her prayer is the hope of the downtrodden everywhere, a prophecy that those who rule by wealth and domination, rather than serving the common good, will be overturned because of what has just happened in the little town of Bethlehem. Her proclamation can be appropriately applied to any rulers or regimes that prevail through sheer power, instead of by doing justice.

This story that begins in a smelly barn finally ends on a cross. By human standards it is a message of weakness. Christmas reminds us that our God has come into our broken world, and that human judgments are not the Last Judgment, human justice is not the last justice. The power that humans exercise over us is not the last power. As we enjoy our caroling, let's remember to put Herod back into Christmas. Amen. ■



Above: Flight into Egypt, from The Blessed Virgin Mary's Book of Hours, (Turin 15th Century). The picture of the Flight is surrounded by scenes of the slaughter of the Innocents. Below left to right, Herod sends a soldier with sword in pursuit of a terrified mother. Top left, a bird averts its proud gaze, indifferent to the cruel scene. Top right, humanity is represented as a brute with a human face and grotesquely long nose.



Dalit woman outside her wrecked home in Tamil Nadu, S India. Relief provided by the Women's Development Resource Centre

One year ago a disastrous tsunami swept across the Indian Ocean the day after Christmas and killed 200,000 people. Its shadow still clouds the lives of millions of Asian people

Norman Habel

Christmas will never be the same again!

Christmas will never be the same again. Not since the 2005 Asian tsunami! On Christmas Day we expected Peace on Earth! A few hours later we faced the opposite – turmoil deep in Earth. One moment we were celebrating the birth of a special child! The next we were witnessing the death of thousands of children – all special to their parents. Christmas will never be the same!

We have all been moved by the devastating scenes in India and Indonesia – loved ones swept out to sea! Children wedged between branches high on a tree! Waves falling like massive walls on the shore! Life will never be the same for fishermen and women on the shores of India and Sri Lanka. Mother sea had always nourished them. On that sad day, their mother killed and consumed her children. They felt that the gods and the sea had betrayed them. Even after six months posters continue to appear cursing the sea.

Why? Across the planet Christians ask why? Why this wild tsunami? In our churches we ask the same question and many still seek an answer.

What would you have done?

There was one question I did not initially ask when the tsunami scenes first appeared on TV. What would I have done? In that split second when I first saw the disaster descending what would I do? In the split second after the first waves rolled through and I discovered I was still alive what would I do? I had assumed that my first inclination would have been to run to save my life. But would I? Would you?

I was recently in India where I met an old Jesuit friend who has been working among the tsunami torn regions of Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. He has met hundreds of orphans and knows even more parents who have lost their children. He has numerous stories of tragedy and survival. He also has stories of what people did in that split second when they could still make a decision.

Some ran! But many did not! A priest celebrating Mass at the shrine of *Our Lady of Health* on the Tamil Nadu coast, felt the vibrations, ripped off his robes, raced naked onto the beach and chased hundreds of pilgrims up to higher ground. A father, seeing his child swept out to sea, chose to follow the waves and die with his child.

The first tall wave thrashed through a coastal village and stripped a group of about 50 women of everything – including their saris. They stood naked on the shore. Nakedness meant shame in their culture. They chose to stay huddled together on the beach and die in the next surging waves rather than run naked among the men and children!

What split second decision would you or I make if faced with such a crisis? Would we pray? Run? Rescue?

Would you have rushed to help?

In Batticalao in Sri Lanka, the first people who rushed to the aid of the devastated Tamil Christians were the local Buddhists. For years Buddhists in Sri Lanka had been engaged in an ethnic war with the Tamil Tigers. In a split second the tsunami evoked compassion and peace! A hundred soldiers from the much maligned Sri Lankan army, raced to the rescue of Tamils in Dutch Bar in Sri Lanka. In the process all the soldiers perished. They did their duty rather than run! In an instant, the tsunami evoked a sense of common humanity, a surge of solidarity.

The Dalits deep in the mountains of Sri Lanka are rejected as untouchable by the caste people on the shore. With the urging of the Dalit women the men drove truckloads of food and clothing down to the shore to help their caste neighbours and a new bond was forged. I have just returned from visiting impoverished Dalit women in the mountains of South India. I know first hand that they gave to help homeless people on the shore – gave from a daily salary of about one Australian dollar!

Does it take a tsunami to break the barrier of hatred and open our hearts to see all people as members of the same human family, a family suffering and in need of compassion? Does it take a tsunami to initiate a flow of compassion, compassion without borders, without discrimination, without question? Maybe that is the message of the tsunami!

Where is God in the tsunami?

There are, of course, fundamentalist groups who acclaim the tsunami as an act of divine punishment – the Noah story all over again! But that is not our God! That is not the God we know in Jesus Christ! We begin with Christmas! We begin with the Incarnation! As *John* says, “the word became flesh and dwelt among us”. Yes, ‘among us’ in a stable and in a tsunami! And God became flesh, a human being, a child! In that split second when Mary conceived, God joined the web of creation. God became flesh. God became part of suffering humanity!

When we survey the tsunami scenes we see violent seas and shuddering shorelines. But we also see our God. We see the God who in Jesus Christ suffered on the cross – and continues to suffer with us, walking among the debris. This Christmas we will see the

Christ child not only in the manger but also in the arms of a weeping parent on the shattered shore.

The Christ child is like Tsunami Baby 81. That baby was the 81st orphan admitted to a local hospital in Sri Lanka. The baby had survived among the dead bodies and rubble until found nine hours after the disaster. In the days that followed the tsunami, nine women claimed the baby as their son!

Our God too claims that child. Our God suffers with that child – and all the parents who lost a child. Christmas will never be the same again.

Or will it? ■

*Norman Habel is a Lutheran Pastor
in Adelaide, S Australia*

Why? O why this wild tsunami?

Why? O why this wild tsunami?
Why this cruel mystery?
Why? O why these raging waters
Sweeping loved ones out to sea?
Was our God consumed by anger
As when Noah faced his rage?
Or is there a deeper reason
Earth has taken centre stage?

Why? O why this mass
compassion?
Why this change of human heart?
Why amid the graves of thousands
Do our hatreds fall apart?
Even in the poorest village,
Even where the outcasts live,
Those with something sell their
jewels,
Those with nothing give and give!

Lord, you've suffered down the ages,
Waiting for a surge of love;
People of your planet hating
In the name of God above!
Now you speak in one tsunami,
Stirring what lies deep inside.
Is this how your son once suffered,
Died when love was crucified?

Is that God among the debris,
Weeping on a battered shore,
Holding in her arms an infant—
One! No, two! No, maybe more!
God made flesh knows human
grieving,
God made flesh knows our distress.
Help us, God, to find you weeping
With an infant at your breast!

Words – Norman Habel 2005.

Melody – Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* from the Choral (9th) Symphony

Joyful! Joyful! We adore you! Together in Song: Australian Hymn Book II, #152

Bible Society ad

As long as I can remember I shared my room with a man on a cross. This symbol of Christian faith was no mere decoration. This was the Jesus born at Christmas. To love him was as much a part of my childhood as loving my parents. His wooden body was beautifully carved. He had long curly hair, a trimmed beard and was as handsome as any well-bred German.

He and countless replicas provide a decent income for a host of Bavarian woodcarvers. Most of them live in or near the village of Oberammergau, where – in a moving drama – the story of his life, but mainly of his death, is acted out by the local people every ten years. Thousands come to watch this spectacle, from Oklahoma and Sunderland and Brisbane and pretty well everywhere else, to take home just such a carved crucifix. Plastic replicas, much cheaper of course, are on sale too, kitsch that is bad for the carvers and not worthy of the Son of God.

This tortured Jesus went with me all the way round the world, a friend to a German refugee child in New Zealand and eventually back again to my room at Lincoln Theological College. He was, after all, the reason I was there. He was hard to think away. He belonged to me, and I to him. He was moreover a work of art that did not offend.

The childhood crucifix over my desk survived my priesting for many many years. Pious habit kept it there. Did it still, in its stylised formality, express my relation to Jesus? Less and less. In fact gradually, imperceptibly, the image began to deny the reality.

To start with, this romanticised Aryan hero was hardly the rebellious young rabbi who had deeply offended the religious establishment, as prophets generally do. His evident closeness to the God of the Jews made him a potential threat to the occupying Roman governor who had the divine role of the Emperor to protect. There were very good political and religious reasons to get rid of him.

Execution was cruel, bloody, totally humiliating – and common. Jesus shared it with two ordinary criminals, stripped naked, all of them. Nothing like the artistically sanitised hero over my desk. Yet I still managed, only just, to live with my un-Jewish Jesus. He fitted the faith I had learnt at Sunday School and the theology taught to ordinands.

For a long time I accepted that the Son of God died a cruel death because of my sin and everybody else's. Someone had to pay. God in his great love had decided to let his Son pay – with his life. Nothing less than execution would do. Only the death penalty could atone for the sins of the world. Who would benefit? Those who believed this and praised God for it. The rest of humanity, it seems, was not saved.

I believed that to be true and intellectually sound. In his classical work of theology *cur deus homo* – why God was a human being – St Anselm explained all this within the framework of medieval philosophy. This wasn't child's stuff. Yet the complex Latin which I had to learn seemed to translate well into the simple language of illiterate people and even the semi-literate minds of would be clerics.

It wasn't until I started putting away childish things that this theology began to fall apart. I began to understand that this doctrine of sin and punishment (and death) was the very thing Jesus had rejected. The religion of punishment and rewards was no longer to operate in the new order. New values now prevailed. I began to see that this was what many of Israel's prophets had been trying to say long before Jesus. No wonder the Temple authorities

The Father acqu

Why did Jesus have



The molten crucifix in the church

were angry. A God of unconditional love did not fit their idea of justice. Worst of all, this undermined their authority.

This young rabbi had the temerity to suggest that you didn't even have to belong to the chosen people to be God's friend, and if you were God's enemy,

mitted of murder

e to die on the Cross

Paul Oestreicher



of St Francis of Assisi, Nagasaki

that wasn't the end of hope either. There was no need for God's Son to die to appease the Father's anger, any more than he expected Abraham to kill his son Isaac. There was no need to kill animals or humans to appease God.

No more sacrifice then? Different sacrifice. In Christ's Kingdom the

sacrifice of our selfishness, our greed and our pride was called for. Kill your pride and love your enemies: a revolutionary, threatening idea. The nations, as *Matthew* tells it in the parable of the Last Judgment, would be measured by their humanity and their compassion, not by their dogmas and rituals.

The teaching about loving enemies, even God's enemies, was disturbing. No one need die to give us hope. No one was beyond the scope of God's mercy. Judas, the traitor, was still a welcome guest at the Last Supper with Jesus. He hanged himself in shame, but could have come back like the Prodigal Son and been received with open arms. As for those who thought they were justified in executing Jesus, justified by the rules of the Temple and a need for law and order, of them Jesus prayed to his Father: "Forgive them, they do not understand what they are doing".

In the event, the Christian churches decided not to forgive the Jews for the best part of two thousand years. And, in theory at least, the churches still condemn the majority of 'unredeemed' humanity to eternal damnation.

Am I now saying that Jesus was 'soft on crime'? By our standards, yes. Our nation and many others have said goodbye to the gallows, but the churches were slow to welcome that. Jesus was trying to put an end to the vicious circle of violence that threatens to destroy us all. That made him *the* Son of Man, the prototype of humanity that makes him in the profoundest sense a true Son of God.

Why then did he die? Not to save the world, but to die humanly as he was

born humanly; more than that, to die painfully as a criminal with other criminals, humanity at rock bottom. Pursue justice uncompromisingly, and that is what you risk. His was the death of *the* prisoner of conscience. He died like St Stephen and Oscar Romero, Edith Stein and Sophie Scholl, Gandhi and Rosa Luxemburg, Martin Luther King and Mother Maria Skobtsova, Franz Jägerstätter and Maximilian Kolbe and innumerable human beings, Christian and of every other belief and none, who lived and died to defeat evil with goodness.

That kind of goodness you cannot destroy. To those who loved him then (and now) he was not dead but mysteriously came back, if only for a short time, still in all his humanity. But not as superman confronting Pilate and the High Priests in triumph. Incognito. Still poor Jesus. The glorious mystery of the risen Christ.

So, one day I took leave of the icon on the wooden cross, but not of the suffering Jesus, suffering in every abused man and woman and child. One crucifix over my desk has given way to the image of another. It was carved in stone and had its home in the Church of St Francis of Assisi in the Japanese city of Nagasaki. The nuclear inferno that turned 60,000 people to ashes left the stone molten, leaving only the outline of the crucified Christ who died 60,000 times on that August day 1945. They all had to die, the Allied war propaganda said, so that others might live. It was a lie like the lie that Jesus had to die that we might live. He died because his unconditional love is a threat to our pride and the hope of the world. ■

Dr Paul Oestreicher, priest and political scientist, is former Director of the Centre for International Reconciliation at Coventry Cathedral. Canon Paul has been a tireless campaigner for peace and nuclear disarmament

Spirituality Begins at Home

The final section of Satish Kumar's 2004 Schumacher Lecture:
to seek a spiritual life, begin with yourself

Where do we begin this spiritual revolution? We begin with ourselves. Self-transformation is the first step towards social, political and religious transformation. All transformations start at the bottom and move upwards to embrace the larger world. That is the law of the natural world. The great and mighty oak begins with the sowing of an acorn in the soil. After the seed is sown, for a few weeks or months no-one knows whether that acorn is living or dead or whether it will ever emerge into the world. But that unseen transformation under the earth's surface enables the acorn to emerge out of the soil as a tiny tender shoot. It is still small and insignificant but only from that insignificant beginning starts the process which eventually results in the mighty oak tree.

My mother used to say, "It is better to light a candle than curse the darkness, but before you can light other candles you need to light your own candle. Be your own light. Then you can offer yourself to help others. How can you make someone else happy if you yourself are not happy? But your happiness is born of your kindness to others."

So, personal, social and political transformation go together because when we are free from fear and anxiety and at ease with ourselves, then we are able to engage with the community around us and with society at large to bring about social and political changes to improve the lives of all. That selfless act of altruism in turn brings us a greater sense of fulfilment, satisfaction and happiness. Thus personal and political interact.

There are three practical steps towards spirituality: Trust, Participation and Gratitude.

Trust

So let us explore a few areas of spirituality. First and foremost among them is removal of fear and cultivation of *trust*. If we look deeply we will realise

that many of our psychological difficulties stem from fear. A sense of insecurity, the ambition to be successful, the desire to prove ourselves, efforts to impress others, craving for power over others and to be in control, addiction to shopping, consuming and possessing, all are ultimately related to fear. This personal fear expands into social insecurity and political insecurity. So the first step towards spiritual renewal is to look at the phenomenon of fear in our lives and realise that much of this fear is aggravated by more fear. Fear breeds fear, and fear is led by fear. We go to great lengths to build psychological and physical defences but they only increase our fear. Even when we have nuclear weapons to protect us we are not free from fear.

Moreover, history has proved that nuclear weapons are no defence and bring no security. The attack on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York proved that ultimately all defences are futile. The attackers can attack with a knife or a razor blade, so where is the justification for spending so much effort, time and resources in building nuclear warheads when they bring no defence and no security? The most powerful country in the world, the United States, is also the most insecure country in the world. Paradoxically, the more defences we build, the more insecure we are. Western societies seem to be obsessed with safety and security and go to great lengths to insure themselves against all eventualities. Such obsession has a paralysing effect.

The first step into the spiritual sphere is to understand fear and cultivate trust. Trust yourself. You are as good as you are. You embody the divine spark, the creative impulse, the power of imagination which will always be with you and will protect you. Trust others: they are in the same boat as you. They long for love as much as you do. Only in relationships with others will you blossom. You are because others are and others are because you are.

We all exist, flourish, blossom and mature in this mutuality, reciprocity and unity. Give love and love will be reciprocated. Give fear and fear will be reciprocated. Sow one seed of thistle and you will get hundreds of thorny thistles. Sow one seed of camellia and you will get hundreds of camellia flowers. You will reap what you sow; this is the old wisdom. And yet we have not learnt it.

Then trust the process of the universe. The sun is there to nourish all life. Water is there to quench the thirst. The soil is there to grow food. Trees are there to bear fruit. The moment a baby is born, the mother's breast is filled with milk. The process of the universe is embedded in the life-support system of mutuality. Hundreds of millions of species - lions, elephants, snakes, butterflies - all are fed, watered, sheltered and taken care of by the mysterious process of the universe; trust it. As Julian of Norwich said: "All shall be well, all manner of things shall be well."

Participation

The second spiritual quality is *participation*. Participate in the magical process of life. Life is a miracle: we cannot explain it; nor can we know it in full, but we can actively and consciously participate in it without trying to control it, manipulate it and subjugate it.

Participation is easy and simple. We have been given two wonderful hands to cultivate the soil and grow our food. Working with the soil in the garden meets the need of the body as much as the need of the mind. Industrial farming has taken away our birthright to participate in the cultivation of food. Large-scale mechanised and industrialised farming is born of our desire to dominate. Small-scale, natural, local farming - still better, gardening - is a way of participating with the rhythms of the seasons. England should be gardened, not farmed. Animals should be freed from the prisons of factory farms. Growing food is one

example of the principle of participation. Baking bread, cooking food, sharing the meal with family, friends and guests are as much spiritual activities as they are social and economic activities. The culture of fast food has deprived us of the fundamental activity of participation in the daily ritual and practice of physical and spiritual nourishment. It is wonderful that people all over Europe are inspired by the Italian movement of *Slow Food*. Slow Food is spiritual food. Fast food is fearful food.

Slowness is a spiritual quality. If we wish to restore our spirituality we have to slow down. Paradoxically only when we go slower can we go further. Doing less, consuming less, producing less will enable us to be more, to celebrate more, and to enjoy more. Time is what make things perfect. Give yourself time to make things and give yourself time to rest. Take your time to do as well as to be. It is in the dance of doing and being that spirituality is to be found.

Once, the Emperor of Persia asked his Sufi Master, "Please advise me: what should I be doing to renew my soul, revive my spirit, and refresh my mind so that I can be happy in myself and effective in my work?" The Sufi Master replied, "My Lord, sleep as long as you can!" The Emperor was surprised and amazed to hear this answer and said, "Sleep? I have little time to sleep. I have justice to perform, laws to enact, ambassadors to receive and armies to command. How can I sleep when I have so much to do?" The Sufi Master replied, "My Lord, the longer you sleep, the less you will oppress!" The Emperor was speechless: he saw the point of the Sufi sage. Even though the sage was blunt, he was right.

Western countries are in a similar position to the Emperor of Persia. The longer we work, the more we consume: we drive cars, fly in planes, burn electricity, go shopping and produce waste. The faster we do these activities, the more damage we inflict on the environment, on the poor and on our own peace of mind. So

true participation is to live and work in harmony with ourselves, with our fellow human beings and with the natural world. Participation is not about speed and efficiency; rather it is about harmony, balance and appropriateness of action.

Gratitude

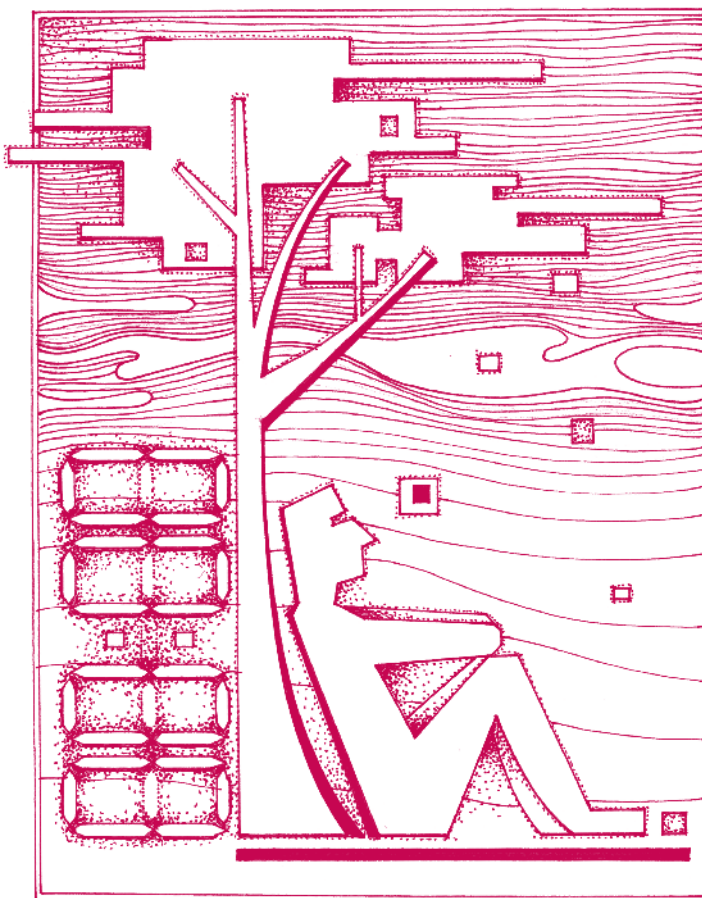
The third spiritual quality is a sense of gratitude. In our Western culture we complain about everything. If it is raining then we say, "Isn't it awful weather? So wet and cold!" When it is sunny we complain, "Isn't it hot? So hot!" The media are full

something else, something better. Then whatever other people do we don't learn to appreciate it either. "I had a terrible childhood," we complain. "My school was awful," we reflect. "I'm never appreciated by my colleagues," we grumble, and this kind of criticism goes on and on.

In order to develop spiritually we need to balance our critical faculty with the faculty of appreciation and gratitude. We need to train ourselves to turn our minds to recognise the gifts we have received from our ancestors, our parents, our teachers, our colleagues and our society in general. We also need to express our thankfulness for the gifts of the Earth.

What a wonderful Gaian system it is, that we are part of! It regulates climate, it organises the seasons and it provides abundance of nourishment, beauty and sensual pleasure to all creatures. When we are in awe and wonder at the workings of the sacred Earth we can feel nothing but blessed and grateful. When food is served we are filled with a sense of gratitude. We thank the cook and the gardener but also we thank the soil and the rain and the sunshine. We even express our gratitude to the earthworms who have been working day and night to keep the soil friable and fertile. However green a gardener's fingers are, without the worms there will be no food. So in praise we say, "Long live the worms," and further we join the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins and say, "Long live the wet and the wilderness yet." It is the beauty of the wild which feeds our soul while the fruit of the Earth feeds the body.

The generosity and unconditional love of the Earth for all its creatures is boundless. We plant one small seed of an apple in the ground. That tiny seed results in a tree within a few years and produces thousands and thousands of apples year after year. And all that from a tiny pip, sometimes self-sown. When in the autumn apples ripen with their fragrant, juicy, crisp flesh we eat to our



of complaints and criticism. Debates in the parliament are mostly concentrated on the negative aspects of government policies. The Opposition blames the Government and the Government complains about the Opposition. The national culture of blaming and complaining permeates throughout, even in our family life and in our workplace.

Because of the dominance of a culture of condemnation we learn to condemn ourselves too. "I am not good enough," is a widespread feeling. Whatever we do we don't appreciate it. We think we should be doing something different,



hearts' content. The tree knows no discrimination; it asks no questions. Poor or rich, saint or sinner, fool or philosopher, wasp or bird, one and all can receive the fruit freely. What else can we feel for the tree but gratitude?

And from our gratitude flows humility, as arrogance comes from complaining and criticism. When we are critical of nature we come to the conclusion that nature is not good enough: it is imperfect and unreliable. Nature needs our technology and engineering so we go to great lengths to improve on it, but we end up destroying it. With a sense of gratitude we go with the grain of nature, we work in harmony with it and we appreciate its miraculous qualities.

TO SUMMARISE...

The point I am making is that there is no dualism and separation between matter and spirit. Spirit is held within matter and matter within spirit, but we have separated them and have made spirit a private matter and have allowed matter alone to dominate our public life. We need to heal this rift urgently. Without

such healing, the material world, the Earth itself will continue to suffer catastrophic consequences, and spiritual insights and wisdom will continue to be seen as idealistic, esoteric and otherworldly practices totally irrelevant to our everyday existence.

When we are able to heal this rift we will be able to instil spirit in business, in commerce and in the economy. We will be able to create a politics which works for all. Our religions will not be divisive; on the contrary they will become a source of healing and resolving conflicts. The movement for environmental sustainability and social justice will inspire rather than agitate and, personally, human beings will be at ease with themselves and with the world around them. The marriage of matter and spirit, of business and spirit, of politics and spirit, of religion and spirit and of activism and spirit is the greatest union required in our time.

People are hungry for spiritual nourishment; this hunger cannot be satisfied by material means. Therefore,

the great work we have in our hands is to create space and time for people to discover their spirituality as well as the spirituality of others.

It should not be necessary for me to make a case for spiritual space but because in the last few hundred years Western culture has been in denial of spirit and has been busy elevating the status of matter, our society and culture have lost their balance and wholeness. In order to restore this balance I have emphasised the importance of spirit. In an ideal world people would recognise that spirit is always implicit in matter. Traditionally that is how it was. People took pilgrimages to holy mountains and sacred rivers; life was considered sacred and inviolable. We recognised the metaphysical dimension of trees. The speaking tree, the tree of knowledge and the tree of life express the implicit spiritual quality of the tree. Regaining this perennial wisdom is life's greatest imperative. ■

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Page from a mother's journal

It's the last Friday of the month – time for the Critical Mass bike ride around town. For the group bike ride I need to wheel out the Red Bike – with its child seat on the back, and hitch it up to the Bike Trailer which will carry our other two children. This family transport system means I can get around flat Christchurch with our three children and without a car or using petrol AND I get exercise which is good for me AND we reduce congestion on the road AND we're slowing the rate of global warming due to carbon dioxide from fossil fuels AND we get to ride around in the Critical Mass bike ride which is fun and social! (AND I guess it's also true that cycling does make me feel overly smug at times – there are just so many good reasons to bike!)

This month we take along a big Green banner to wave. Riding a bike can be a political activity too. Some friends are riding with their children this month so we'll all meet up at The Square. Helmets on, do up the buckles, careful not to pinch a chubby little chin in the process, seatbelts on and we sail across the road. Cycling around the city streets in a large group, we are a curious mix of lycra-clad legs, commuters with their office trousers



tucked into socks, dreadlocked students with frayed wide jeans and a few scruffy children. We are not obstructing the traffic – we ARE traffic too! Three or four people pedal on each side of me and cyclist groups glide ahead and behind like curious insects. Rohan shouts out "I'm a biker," and waves at pedestrians from his regal bicycle seat. Our twins start to sing "Daisy Daisy give me your answer do". Us adults lament again the dearth of Cyclist Revolutionary songs. Dammit – I'll have to write one!

We feel invincible and ride in the middle of the road, instead of the

usual teetering in the gutter. I feel a deep sense of belonging, these are my kind of people, this is my kind of revolutionary activity (excuse the pun). It is subversion of the System that is constructed on Cheap Fossil Fuels and the prestige attached to the Glossy Steel Box on Wheels.

We have reached a Critical Mass – and on further thought – I think this is a Mass of the religious type too. It is a motley gathering of people with a shared vision and hope, flying (or rather pedalling) in the face of the

dominant culture. The bicycle is part of my faith and spiritual journey. It's a journey and protest I'm glad to share with my children. ■

Kaaren Mathias

Sexuality and a truly human civilisation

At the September Colloquium in Palmerston North, Neil Vaney looked critically at sex and the moral code



Over the last year I have been in discussion with groups of Directors of Religious Studies. Our focus has been on why so few young Catholics show a vibrant faith life after leaving school. Among many factors that one DRS identified as the single value that most found near impossible to sustain in the face of youth culture was the church's vision of sexual life and ethics. They meet huge resistance to Catholic sexual norms and many abandon them. Is there any possibility of Catholic sexual norms being presented credibly in this modern world?

A Catholic Cul-de-sac?

This is an instance where competing ethical claims cannot dialogue when they no longer share a common story. Whereas today's sexual narrative is one of individual pleasure and fulfilment, the church's story is one of God's plan being writ in nature's design. For dialogue it seems essential that both stories need to embrace a wider perspective in which sexuality is treasured as a power to preserve a planet fit for humankind and all other sorts of life.

Human sexuality is unique in special ways. Biologically, sex provides for the continuation of the species. It is also where body meets spirit, and biology breaks out into personalised individuals. Each of us differs genetically only about one percent from our parents and others of the opposite sex. The challenge to any moral vision of sexuality is to hold together the biological drive that sustains the human project and the discovery of personal uniqueness and attraction that makes the human project worth sustaining.

Catholic sexual ethics may have weakened its vision by getting diverted

into a battle over *proportionalist* versus *intrinsic goods* approaches to sexual norms. At its heart is the question about what makes a particular action right or wrong. Proportionalists believe that an act is right or wrong when we analyse and weigh up all its consequences, its context, the physical good or bad that it entails, plus any previous commitments we have made. If an action brings about more good than evil then the act is moral; if we bring about more evil than good it is wrong and to be avoided.

After studying many cases it may emerge that some classes of act such as abortion or adultery are nearly always wrong but there may be rare situations where this is not so. Those who espouse the *intrinsic goods* approach believe there are some goods so basic to human life and flourishing eg marital fidelity, that it is always wrong, regardless of circumstances or intention, to act directly against such a good.

My difficulty with both these approaches – but especially *proportionalism* – is that they seem to embrace a very individualistic vision of the human person. It is the feeling individual that is the centre and test of morality, shaping moral responses that meet individual needs. This is a distorted view of the human condition as we live it in an embodied way on a fragile and sensitive planet.

One of the key insights of both *Genesis* accounts of creation is that humanity is shared (*Gen 1.27*). Man and woman together are the two sides of the mirror needed to image God. When they fall out of harmony with each other, then distortion and self-deception also creep into the relationship between the couple and God. They in turn exploit wild nature. Sin is the breakdown of

communication and trust. Yet it is the very need to share information and tasks that is vital for the emergence of human beings as the dominant species on the planet.

Sin attacks the core of the call to be fully human. Humans survived because of our ability to store and share knowledge and techniques across generations. Immorality or wrong-doing is a threat to the bonds that weave humankind together. It seems to make more sense to search for morality, not in the weighing of goods and evils that beset the individual, but rather to approach this task the way epidemiologists search for the sources of an outbreak of infection. They strive to track down the almost invisible pollution or toxins that accumulate in the air or waters till a heart attack or cancer finally kills an individual. Similarly the moralist should survey the common ailments that afflict human relationships, the failures to trust and love that end up destroying the moral fabric of society.

Proportionalism and Sexual Dilemmas

It is important to acknowledge that *proportionalism* is an attractive way of dealing with intractable situations. Let's take the case of a 14-year-old girl pregnant at the hands of a violent and unstable step-father. The girl disclaims all responsibility and wants no part of a baby she could barely cope with, the mother is terrified at the prospect of further stress to an already fragile relationship, while nobody dare guess the stepfather's reaction. A quick hidden abortion seems to provide an easy way out for everybody. ▶▶

▷▷ When we examine this case in more detail, however, we can see the dangers hidden in such a solution. First of all there is the tendency to see moral problem-solving in terms of rational calculations. What research into the process of moral reasoning has shown us, however, is that a sense of bonding and solidarity most shapes moral character. And it is the modelling of such attitudes by mentors and friends that is the most powerful formative influence here. For the young woman having the abortion, what she may learn is exactly how dispensable her life and all life is. For the stepfather this is just another confirmation that bullying and intimidation will always carry the day. It is quite possible that the same situation will be played over again a bit further down the track.

A second shortcoming of *proportionalist* reasoning is that it can easily overlook the reflexive dimension of moral acts. By this we mean that doing normally forbidden things, even for the most valid and pressing of reasons such as defending one's own life, may entail a hidden cost. By the early 1980s nine thousand American Vietnam War veterans had taken their own lives. This figure shows the high levels of stress and depression that remained with many veterans from the brutal killings they had witnessed and been part of.

Epidemiology and Sexual Health

When Smoke Ran Like Water by Doctor Devra Davis is a fascinating story illustrating how apparently

random deaths and the environments of particular cities and industries are linked. Using events like the infamous lethal smog that blanketed London in 1952, killing 12,000 people, Davis traces how the accumulation of statistics has changed the public awareness of health issues. This is the science of environmental epidemiology. In the 1960s and '70s tobacco companies and high industrial polluters strenuously denied that there was any demonstrable link between smoking, industrial pollutants and diseases such as lung cancer. It was researchers such as Davis whose tireless collection of data eventually proved the existence of such links beyond doubt.

I would like to suggest that there is something of a parallel between physical and moral pollution and their effects. It is very difficult to show that having ten cigarettes a day or living in a smoky polluted city have led directly to an individual death. The number of variables is just too high. In a somewhat similar way it is notoriously difficult to demonstrate that an abortion has had a negative impact on a particular couple's married life.

Nevertheless, I believe that from the sexual revolution that began in the 1960s and '70s there is now enough accumulated data to point to signs of moral sickness throughout our global society.

Illustrations from the fields of population imbalance, sexually transmitted diseases and pornography may be useful here. Global fertility rates are now 50

percent lower than in 1972, falling at a faster rate than in any other time in the last 650 years, since the time of the Black Death. For Germany this would possibly mean the shedding of a fifth of its population of 82.5 million over the next 50 years. Statistics on STDs are no cheerier. During 2004, some 4.9 million people became infected with HIV and in the same year there were 3.1 million deaths from AIDS. When we turn to New Zealand our problems with STDs may seem trivial yet reported cases of chlamydia and gonorrhea have increased 65 percent in the last five years. Another area of concern is the impact of pornography which is easily accessible on the internet. This is where many teenagers get their sexual information.

Conclusion

This rapid overview of some sexual hot spots suggests to me that our debate in Catholic ethics over how to evaluate the rightness or wrongness of a particular activity for an individual has mistaken the area where we should have been dialoguing with people of good faith. It can be very difficult to demonstrate right or wrong in particular instances. What we do see clearly, however, is that the story of sex as primarily an area of personal choice and individual fulfilment is leading us globally towards ruinous outcomes. If we were able to focus more on these social and global levels, we might be able to point to the Catholic vision of sexuality as a sharing in God's self-giving and a call to self-transcendence as a far deeper and more life-giving hope for our global health and survival. ■

De Paul House... a place of hope

"For I know well the plans I have in mind for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare, not for woe! Plans to give you a future full of hope" (Jer 29:10-11)



A testimony

My first time to meet with the De Paul House service was in 1993. I was married and had one child, my three-month-old beautiful boy. My sister introduced me to Sr Marie, the administrator. My husband and I needed to apply for New Zealand permanent residency. With only my husband's income of \$10.00 an hour we couldn't afford to pay a consultant to do the application.

Sr Marie welcomed us and was very helpful. She did what we needed, and after three or four months we received Permanent Residency. The following year I had a beautiful baby girl. I was always happy to be in the classes for the mothers to fulfil myself with all the skills I never had before.

A haven for the homeless

*Annie Gray visits De Paul House, on Auckland's North Shore,
and talks with clients and staff*

High on the Northcote hill, with tantalising views of the Waitemata Harbour and sited alongside a busy main thoroughfare, sits De Paul House, offering accommodation for families in need for the past 20 years. When I visited the emergency housing and family support service, there were eight families in residence some of whom have been there for nearly a year.

De Paul's accommodation coordinator, Sr Jo Ann Power, of the *Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul*, says the reasons people come to De Paul House vary enormously – everything from serious financial hardship to overcrowding to relationship breakdown.

One resident I met has been there for 10 months with her husband and four children (*see story below*). She is working at a full-time and a part-time job for up to 60 hours a week to try and save the money for a deposit for the family's own house. And in just ten months at De Paul House the reduced rent her family is able to pay has meant the long work hours are paying off

and she has saved \$12,000. The banks still haven't offered a mortgage but she remains hopeful and says she couldn't have done it without De Paul House.

Asked what is the best thing about being in the house, this resident (who didn't want to be named) says the family is there to try and turn their life around. She sees De Paul House as a blessing for the whole family.

Sr Jo Ann says each of the families in the house agree to participate in the programmes the house runs while they are living there. These include a play group for younger children, sewing and cooking classes and life skills programmes. Budgeting and relationship services are also available in the wider community, if needed.

The *Daughters of Charity* took over the running of the house in 1986 and have administered it on behalf of the Catholic Bishop of Auckland since then. But a new lay administrator, Warren Coley, has now been appointed and the Sisters are preparing to move out and hand over the house to a team of lay people. Sr Jo Ann says many of

the Sisters are getting older, and there are also new calls from the church in other places. She is fully confident the present staff, Board and volunteers, are more than ready and able to run the service.

Sr Jo Ann is due to finish by the end of March, but is not yet sure where she will be heading. "God hasn't told me yet."

De Paul House survives mainly on donations and grants with about 10 percent of the funding coming from Government. The house costs around \$350,000 – \$380,000 a year to run. The Annual Report shows that in the year to March 31, 2005 the house admitted 19 homeless families with an average length of stay of 18 weeks. During the same period 16 families were re-housed.

As those at the house see it, all these families have had an opportunity to gain some breathing space, strengthen their family unit, to set goals and to plan and work towards affordable housing and independent living. ■

*Annie Gray is a journalist and editor
with Open Door Publishing*

In 1995 my husband suffered a stroke and was paralysed on the left side. I did a course to become a Nurse Aide to look after my husband and to help me get a job to feed my family. I did my course in Communication Skills and Nurse Aiding at AUT. In 1998 I had another baby girl, and I also had a part time job. In 2001 I had a full time job as a baker where I used all my cooking skills. All my children went to the Playgroup and learned lots before they started school. With the English as my second language I can't help them very well.

In 2003 I had baby number four. Later that year I started working at North Shore Hospital as a Health Care Assistant and we lost entitlement to accommodation supplement and the family support. In December 2004 my family and I moved in to De Paul House. We had been renting for 11 years.

While here we received a letter from Internal Affairs saying our application for citizenship is approved so now we are waiting for the ceremony. We feel like 'home sweet home' here, and it's safe for the children to play in the playground. My two-year-old says: "this is my park". I sat her down one day to explain to her we are going to move to our own house soon. My baby said, 'NO, this is my home', and pointed her little finger down to the floor.

I have great hope that one day my family will settle in a family home, but it is very difficult to save enough money. I would love to say "Thank you very much" to De Paul House and all the staff. With the words only it's not enough for what all of you have done for my family. ■

Culture Wars in the USA

*Two recent visitors to the USA – from different ends of the earth
– see similar disparities*

Peter Matheson

It's the small things which catch one's attention: the line of little flags on a grassy bank across the street. You go over and find that each *Stars and Stripes* marks a war: Korea, Vietnam, Iraq – with the names of the local men who died there engraved on a stone. One memorial was for the wounded "in all our wars". Flags fly on cars, in front of homes. Stickers with *Support the Troops* on every tenth car or so. This is a nation scarred by war.

And at the airports it's not just the fingerprinting. You have to take off coats, shoes, belt, remove your laptop from its case. You simply don't have enough hands, somehow, to hold boarding card and passport as well. On one occasion my bags were singled out for special attention. As my passport and ticket were taken away I recalled the chill feeling going through *Checkpoint Charlie* into communist East Germany so many moons ago.

At Philadelphia airport the young counter clerk had ticketed my baggage stub with another name. Who ever checks that detail? When I got on the plane to LA, therefore, not only was my seat double-booked, but when the mix-up with my luggage was noted, dark and sinister things were imagined, and although everyone was buckled up for takeoff I had to leave the aircraft, was marched back up the gangway to the gate, and only there was I saved from missing my connection onto the *Air New Zealand* flight by the evidence of my paper ticket. This is truly an anxious country.

The divide between rich and poor in America hits you in the face. In Atlanta I was attending an international conference in one of the swanky, downtown hotels which cater for such occasions: all marble floors, gleaming

brass, soaring spaces and casually smart people. To save money I was staying with friends out in Decatur, and rattled out there and back everyday on *Marta*, the excellent light rail system. Generally, I was the only Caucasian there among the baggy pants and bright, tight skirts, the dark glasses and sprawled bodies of Black America.

One early Sunday morning I got talking to a senior anaesthetist, who was in utter despair at the breakdown of the health service. She talked enviously of New Zealand. (We have a fantastic image in the US – and not just because of *Whale Rider* and the *Lord of the Rings*). Similarly, hospital chaplains spoke of the agonising decisions for poor families. *Medicaid* will pay, say, for a transplant operation – but leaves the patient to cope with the huge pharmaceutical bills that follow.

the worst part of Katrina was the moral shock of the plundering

One friend from New Orleans had lost his home to *Katrina* – and with it, every precious reminder of his family's past life. Yet the worst part of the disaster, he said, was not the winds or the consequent floods, but the moral shock of the plundering, the irrefutable evidence of a community torn in two.

On the other hand, in Concord near Boston, one of the most affluent towns anywhere in the States, I saw Hallowe'en in full swing, and conspicuous consumption on a grand scale was in evidence. Gardens sprouted life-size scarecrow figures slouched in barrows. Gargantuan black fabric spiders hung from the outside walls.

Skeletons dangled in the doorways, tombstones littered the lawns, and families of ghosts danced in the breeze. Quite bizarre!

Big money was also massively in evidence at a private school whose Parents' Day I attended, sitting in on chemistry, Latin, history and Shakespeare classes. There were superb teachers with only 15 children per class. At the other end of the scale I talked to a maths teacher in an inner city school in Philadelphia, coping with 35 students in his classes. He, too, was creative and committed, but was fighting against almost impossible odds.

The tertiary education system relies hugely on philanthropy. Generous donors pour millions of dollars into state-of-the-art libraries and research centres: every second room or piece of equipment seems to have been donated in someone's memory.

Politically, the credibility of President Bush is eroding, crumbling away day by day as gasoline prices rise (modestly enough by our standards). The Iraq war drifts on from bad to worse, and Cheney's henchmen bite the dust. No one I spoke to had a good word to say about the Federal Government. There is a quiet revolt going on. New York, for example, is one of several states forging ahead with its own environmental policies.

Culturally, the nation is split – and not just on Evolution and abortion. The chasm between readers of the *Washington Post* or *New York Times* and those who have to garner their information from local sources or from the unspeakable TV news broadcasts is becoming unbridgeable. One should never underestimate those who still cherish a rich Enlightenment



America faces the enemy within

Bernard Sabella

I have just returned from a month-long trip to the United States. The hospitality of the people I visited, whether Anglo-Saxon, Black, Hispanics, Palestinian, Lebanese, Iraqis, Christians, Jews or Moslems reflected the kaleidoscopic nature of the US that contributes to its strength as a multicultural society. But apart from this hospitality of the people-to-people kind, I felt ill at ease during my trip through five different states.

As I moved from Indiana to Illinois to Michigan to Maryland and finally to Florida I became increasingly aware of the huge disparities that divide Americans from Americans.

These disparities touch on basic living conditions and opportunities: from the squalid tenements of the very poor to the lavish residential palaces of the very rich. Certainly kids growing up in the tenements, irrespective of city of residence, would not be able to compete with the kids living in palaces. The system as such would be against them; all the individual will and determination they may possess comes to nothing against the odds of making it into the system.

But the concern is not simply for the very poor. I observed 'middle class' neighbourhoods that are being pushed downwards due to the high cost of living; and that includes health care, insurance schemes, the costs of raising up kids and the simple running of daily life. Yes, I have heard of stories of success amidst extreme odds, such as the Afro-American single mother whose work and friendship association with the Christian Brothers in Chicago led her to earn higher degrees in nursing, thus setting up a model for her own children to follow suit into higher education. But from what I have seen, this and similar stories remain the exception rather than the rule.

While it is so easy to accuse US society of being riddled with consumerism – and hence being a society losing its soul, the trend towards consumerism is universal and not restricted to the US. Some would like to put the blame for consumerism and its spread on United States capitalism, but the realities of the global economy would make this an unfair accusation at the present time. Nevertheless, what struck me on this trip to the US was that the responses that are given to the challenges of a

consumer society suffering from unbridgeable disparities were themselves consumerist. Run by élites, whether in commerce and advertisement, in government, in media, in televangelism and in other areas, it appears that the message sent out is one intended for consumption, often of the 'quick fix' nature, rather than one for attacking the root causes of the phenomena of malaise and disparity in the society.

The ideals of the America of yesteryear are frequently invoked. But what one sees all around, including and some would say particularly in the élites running the economy and society, is an absence of a sense of purpose that is holistic – for the good of the entire society rather than being focused on particular interests and goods. A comparison of the US with some of the countries of the third world may be an appropriate one – to the disbelief of many I am sure. Elites that run some third world countries care only for their own interests which are fuelled by visions of power, glory and speedy profit. The disparities seen in so many troubled countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East are likewise seen across the United States. The responses of the élites are often similar, thus reinforcing each other and, in the process, rendering the world in need for a sense of direction and purpose.

America, in spite of its internal disparities and inequalities, remains the leading power in today's world. But the US cannot lead if it does not have a sense of purpose at home and if disparities continue to disadvantage millions of its citizens, particularly the youth. While no magical formula can reinvigorate the American sense of purpose, the challenge is of such a magnitude that processes of a systemic and popular nature need to guide the effort.

The demise of the US as a world power, if it were to happen, would not be because of lost battles and wars outside the country but precisely because of its inability to face the challenges of disparities and inequalities at home. In such an eventuality not only the American people would lose but all the rest of us as well.

Dr Bernard Sabella is the Executive Director of the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees, Middle East Council of Churches, Jerusalem

▷▷ heritage, with its literary and artistic traditions, symbolised by the glorious second-hand bookstores that pop up everywhere. On the other hand, the populist, Bible-Belt mentality rampages on, though its excesses repel Republicans and Democrats alike.

Many people are caught in the middle, unedified by the New England or Californian 'pointyheads', but equally

dismayed by the empty rhetoric coming out of Washington and at the evidence of scandalous structural problems. At the Unitarian church in Concord I heard a group of teenagers just back from a visit to their sister church in Rumania reflecting personally, as only young Americans can, about the life-changing experience of encountering a society with none of their affluence – but with so much else.

So maybe the tide is changing, culturally as well as politically. Certainly the USA is a society in an increasingly reflective mood. Even the sticker *Support the Troops* is ambiguous. For a growing number who display it, what it means now is *Bring the Troops Home!* ■

Peter Matheson was Professor of Church History at Knox Theological Hall, Dunedin

Journey Through Mark

Susan Smith

The Beginning (Mk 1:1-8)

Mark's gospel is our oldest canonical gospel, probably written around 69-70AD. It is also our shortest gospel, 16 chapters compared with Matthew's 28, and Luke's 24, both of which were written some 15 or so years after Mark. Mark's story of Jesus of Nazareth occurs during a turbulent period in the history of Palestine as Jewish feeling against Roman imperial rule ran high, and sometimes erupted in revolts that were brutally suppressed.

Though there is on-going scholarly discussion about the identity of the community for whom Mark's gospel was written, it is usually assumed to be a Christian group living in Rome during the reign of the Emperor Nero whose persecution of Christians is well known. It is for this community that Mark tells the story of Jesus, a suffering Messiah, who despite his death at the hands of Jewish and Roman religious and political leaders, remains faithful to God. Jesus' fidelity to God in spite of everything models a response to persecution and harassment that Mark's community should follow in their own experiences of oppression.

Mark's gospel opens with John the Baptist, the one crying in the wilderness, proclaiming the coming of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. Mark's language is not likely to win him friends in high places. "Good news" and "Son of God" is also the language that Roman writers used when speaking of the Emperor. For example an inscription dating from 9 B.C. about the Emperor Octavian tells us that "the birthday of the god (the emperor) was for the world the beginning of his good news". Therefore, Mark had a real nerve in appropriating such language to talk about Jesus of

Nazareth, a Galilean village artisan. It is easy enough to see why Nero would have been upset about Christians who preached that this man, a Jewish non-entity, was the Son of God!

All this may seem far removed from the Christmas season which is just about upon us, and its attendant advertising onslaught to which we are subjected. But, just as the Baptist, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, challenged the imperial and oppressive culture of his time, we too are called to stand up to the dominant consumer culture of our time. The pre-Christmas advertising seems to become 'slicker' each year, and as I watch the TV my heart goes out to young struggling parents whose children, the most vulnerable members of our community, are bombarded with messages about what they should have.

It is obvious enough that the advertising industry unscrupulously targets children in the supermarkets and warehouses. We can see all too often how distraught young mothers have difficulty coping with these advertising strategies. We are aware too that TV advertising strikes at children in the evenings as parents busy themselves preparing meals for younger family members. This is not a good time to sit down and talk with children about their needs and wants. The challenge for us is how can we, following the example of the Baptist, be voices crying in the wilderness against the excesses and seductions of the dominant consumer society? ■

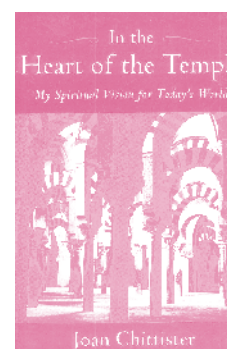
Dr Susan Smith is a Mission sister who teaches Biblical Studies at the School of Theology, University of Auckland

An Advent exercise: *Give yourself one hour undisturbed. Sit down and read the Gospel of Mark right through*

JOAN CHITTISTER

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Three haunting stories of tragedy beautifully told

Kathleen Doherty

I have to confess to not knowing anything else about his beliefs, but in one area I am in total accord with Montesquieu, the 18th Century French thinker of the Enlightenment, who wrote “I have never had a care that an hour’s reading could not dispel”. Well....almost total accord!

It was a belief shared too by Etienne Vollard, the tragic proprietor of the bookshop *The Verb to Be*, in Pierre Peju’s novel *The Girl from the Chartreuse*, first published in France three years ago and released in English translation earlier this year, (Harvill Press, \$39.95). This is a little perfection of a book, only 165 pages long, which yet manages to take the reader into the lives of three isolated people thrown together by a terrible accident. For Vollard, books have been his only companions since childhood. A gentle man trapped in a grossly large body, he ran his bookshop as much for what it gave him emotionally as for the service he provided. He wanted “to ensconce himself at the heart of his large web, surrounded and shielded by books.”

His reading had provided him with an enormous store of stories which he had committed to memory: Goethe, Nietzsche, Victor Hugo, Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov, and it is from this store that he draws when he sits at the bedside of Eva, the little girl who lies in a coma after being hit by his van fully loaded with books. Eva’s mother is a woman who dreams of being far away and alone. She has neither the ability nor the inclination to sit with her daughter and talk to her and possibly reach her through the fog of a coma. That is left to Vollard, who until this accident had the belief “Leisure, light. Literature: true happiness!”

Of course, the stories, the words, the books, are not enough. The child comes out of the coma and Vollard becomes her prime visitor in the rehabilitation centre in the Massif de la Chartreuse in south-eastern France where La Grand Chartreuse with its ranks of silent white-robed monks was founded in the 11th century. He calls her La Petite Chartreuse – the little Carthusian nun – for her silence and her gravity, and this is the title of the book in the original French. The end is tragic and inevitable, the two people drawn together by books are gone, their isolation ended by death. It is a moving and powerful novel and very memorable.

A tale of vagrancy

On the home front, the fiction publishing event of the year must be Maurice Gee’s 16th adult novel, *Blindsight* (Penguin, \$34.99). It begins and ends with the same chilling statement: “Father taught us how not to love” and in between is a dark story of sibling love and loyalty which is heartbreaking and beautiful and told in the fine prose which has thrilled Maurice Gee readers for 40 years.

Reading this novel in the week when television news stories were full of the plight of a group of Wellington’s homeless people who hang out in the Cuba Mall was a poignant exercise. The vagrant who is the brother of the narrator bears more than a passing resemblance to the ‘bucket man’ who wandered Wellington streets by day and slept in the Tinakori bush until his death in 2003. Like him, Gordon has opted out of society. When his sister finally tracks him down he has retreated so much into himself that she is unable to break through to his

world, or to drag him back to hers. It is a bleak and timely tale. Read it, and you may never look at a vagrant in the same way again.

A soldier’s heart

A viewing of the film *Gallipoli* made by the Turkish director Tolga Ornek sent me back for a re-reading of *No Better Death: the Great War diaries and letters of William G Malone*. After seeing the graphic archival footage which Ornek has used in his documentary the fact that anyone could produce such diaries and letters seems little short of a miracle.

Lieutenant-Colonel William Malone, British-born, arrived in New Zealand in 1880 and settled in Taranaki where he combined farming, studying for the law, and training with a volunteer corps, the Stratford Rangers. By the time World War I broke out he was living in New Plymouth with his second wife – his first having died in childbirth – and children from both marriages, and was serving as commanding officer of the Wellington (Taranaki) Rifle Volunteers. He signed up for service with the NZEF on the day war was declared and was immediately given the command of the Wellington Infantry Regiment. By 1 November 1914 he was on his way to Europe, by April 1915 he was on Gallipoli.

The diaries and letters cover only one year, the last year of his life. He kept a detailed journal, with observations about the conditions, the men under his command, his thoughts on the war, and the appalling situation on Gallipoli where at one stage it was impossible to take a step in any direction without stepping on the dead. Malone was a devout Catholic and took every



A family under seige

Accusation: a wife's story

by Mary Fielding with Jane Westaway
Longacre Press
Pbk. \$29.95

Review: Elspeth McLean

Those who have had to cope unprepared with a major crisis in life may be familiar with the platitude that such challenges make you stronger. They may question this conventional wisdom. What about the people who are ground down? And, if you're not ground down, can the gaining of that strength have a price that's too high? Mary Fielding's *Accusation: a wife's story* made me ponder on these questions anew.

Mary (not using her real name), with writer Jane Westaway, gives her account of the aftermath when her husband Steve was charged with committing an

indecent act with intent to offend. It is claimed that twice he masturbated in his car in a public place in an average-sized New Zealand city in the presence of teenage girls.

Mary believes he is innocent. Her struggle to see Steve treated fairly by the justice system is all-consuming, affecting her mental and physical health, her relationship with Steve and their two daughters and her work as an accountant. It also makes her question her belief in the police and our justice system.

This story is much more than a bald account of poor policing and bad judgment. It says much about the way crises can affect a family and the role of friends and supporters in those times. Sometimes I got a little lost in Mary's rhetoric, but mostly the book is easy to read and compelling. Often, it made me wonder how I would have reacted

to such a circumstance in my own marriage. Who would I have taken into my confidence? At one point, when Steve and Mary's marriage seemed in danger of fracture, I was guilty of not recognising their exhaustion and merely wanting to give them a good talking to.

On other occasions, it was rewarding to be with Mary as she found insights into her own behaviour and relationships. I almost shouted *Yes!* when one of the daughters told Mary that she and Steve should have been honest with their children from the outset rather than trying to shield them from the drama.

I believe Mary did become a stronger person as a result of this crisis. I am not sure about Steve. He's not telling the story. Was the price for either of them too high? You would need to read the book and decide that for yourself. ■

▷▷ opportunity to attend Mass and receive Communion, and to make his confession. His writing show a man who had deep compassion in the midst of the carnage – he writes of finding several dead Turks who have been lying unburied for ten days “...some women are worrying about them and will weep. I will try to get them buried tonight.”

He wrote chatty and cheerful letters to his children, commenting to his daughter “I don't see any little girls and boys now” and telling her of the beauty of the red poppies on the hillside. But it is the letters to his wife which make this such a remarkable legacy. He was deeply in love with Ida, 16 years younger than himself and mother of the three youngest of his 8 children. She was constantly addressed as “sweetheart... dearest love... the sweetest beloved and dearest sweetheart in the world”. From the hell that was Quinn's Post he wrote

to her on 23 July 1915 “...every night before I go to sleep and every morning when I wake I mentally take you in my arms and hold you to me so tightly...”, and on 5 August “I am prepared for deathmy desire for life, so that I may see and be with you again, could not be greater, but I have only done what every man was bound to do in our country's need.” That was his last letter. Three days later, leading his men to the capture of Chunuk Bair, William Malone was killed, probably by friendly fire. He has no known grave.

This is a very personal, very intimate book. Published to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the Gallipoli campaign, it takes the reader into the heart of one man, one family. The greatest tragedy is that their tragedy was repeated thousands of times over. (*No Better Death* edited by John Crawford, is published by Reed, \$49.95). ■

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Insights into fatherhood

7 Days That Matter: building your father-son relationship

By Mark Barnes

Published by The Family Action Centre,
The University of Newcastle (2005)

Review: John Kleinsman

It's 8.30 pm and tomorrow he has two end-of-year exams. Somehow my 13-year-old son has managed to do no homework since arriving home from school five hours ago. He has made his bed – for the first time in months. He has practiced his guitar – twice – and he has been to soccer practice. It wouldn't surprise me if he starts to show interest in the pile of unfolded washing any minute now. He has had his third – or is that fourth? – reminder to do some study, and now I am officially 'on his back'. He's just headed off for what I know will be a long shower. I'm exasperated and he's tired. The radio continues to blare from his room. I retreat. I pick up the book 7 Days that matter and it falls open at the chapter 'Helping your son develop his independence' and I read "Don't agonise, organise – spectacular achievements are always preceded by unspectacular preparation." "Help him get organized by drawing up a plan."

I feel a failure.

"What type of father do you want to be to your son?" That is the question that Mark Barnes puts to readers in the book's opening pages. He then devotes the rest of the book to exploring this question. The book is full of anecdotes and solid practical advice based on hundreds of conversations the author – himself a father – has had with other fathers. Totally grounded and realistic: "Keep in mind that we all struggle with being a father. Staying committed is the key to the struggle." There is no suggestion that there are short-cuts or easy answers.

I'm starting to feel a little better. I am not alone.

Many of the insights in this book are profound: "His future happiness in a relationship could well depend on how you as his father treat your partner and how you go about displaying love and respect." Much of it I have heard before, but I am reminded of things I had forgotten, and of the things that are most important. There is much food for thought – the book is written to stimulate personal reflection. And the opportunities for personal reflection are rich, with each chapter concluding with a helpful bullet-point summary, and a series of often challenging questions.

This book is not just well written, it is well designed, with male readers definitely in mind! Along with the questions and summaries there are cartoons, quotes, and short discussion pieces that cover a wide range of relevant issues including health matters, sport, attitudes to referees, hair cuts, fashions, cars, communication, time management, homework, stress, sex, valuing women, money and attitudes to work.

"Silent and listen are spelt with the same letters" – it is often light-hearted but definitely not light. Neither is it preachy. It can be picked up and put down as the mood takes you or as situations demand! It is a book that needs to be reread as you and your son grow through different stages. It will be helpful whatever age your son is, but the younger he is the more benefit you will both get. "Every day matters."

Men, it will even be helpful for your relationship with your daughters. Women, buy it for the men in your life! In fact I thoroughly recommend every wife and mother to read it with their husbands.

It's late and I head down the passage to say good night. There has been no music coming from his room for the last hour



and he has only appeared twice, both times to ask study-related questions. I'm feeling positive – I know deep down that he is a great kid. I make a mental note to remind him more often that I "have faith in his judgement and trust in his instinct." I walk into his room and he is lying on his bed with a book. He is wearing his headphones – even so I can clearly hear that he is playing "Deep Purple" very loudly! I start to see deep red! "Have faith ... trust in his instinct." I can't resist making a dig. 'At least he is reading Charles Dickens,' I tell myself. 'Stay positive.' I keep my feelings in check. "Patience is a virtue ... Speak when you are angry and you will make the best speech you'll ever regret." I smile at him, and then it occurs to me in a flash that building the father-son relationship is just as much about me acknowledging my own need to grow and become more relaxed and fun to be with, and that my son is there as much for me to learn from him as for me to teach him to grow into a man.

We say goodnight and I kiss him and tell him I love him - as I do every night, except that tonight there is real emotion behind the words. ■

John is married to Kerry and they are the parents of three gorgeous children, two of them spirited teenagers. This article reproduced with the permission of Daniel Kleinsman

7 Days That Matter is available from:
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University of Newcastle,
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Callaghan NSW 2308

Place de la Discorde

Crosscurrents

John Honoré

It seems that no longer the wind stands fair for France, and the same wind is blowing in other capitals in the Western world. The Mistral is violent and cold, synonymous with the struggle to integrate an angry underclass of disaffected youth which seeks recognition and equal rights. The riots in Paris are ominous.

A new *modus operandi* of revolt is the torching of cars in the poor and segregated suburbs of French cities. It draws attention to the increasing gap between the ideal of the revolutionary maxim of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* and the reality for these French citizens. For them the maxim is a lie. It is a political lie, voiced by three statesmen at war with each other, who have promised much but delivered nothing.

The President, Jacques Chirac, maintained a haughty silence which fuelled an idealistic and self-centred debate between the Minister of the Interior, Nicolas Sarkozy, and the Prime Minister, Dominique de Villepin. Sarkozy, fading in popularity, called these second and third generation Africans and Arabs born in France and therefore French citizens, *racaille* – scum. He promised to get rid of them.

De Villepin responded with vacuous words concerning unity and equal opportunity. But the truth was out. They had no answer to the problem of segregation, racism and the marginalisation of the poor into suburbs which are really ghettos. These people are neither “scum” nor “foreigners”. Sadly, they are considered by many as being just that, so suddenly another revolution is in the making.

The problem stems from the days of colonialism, the war in Algeria and the unemployment generated by declining industries, such the textile factories in the north of France which no longer employ unskilled labour. In the north the unemployment rate reaches 50

percent of the Arab population. These people are feared, loathed and suffer from inadequate housing and lack of representation. No one wants to know them. Such conditions breed suicide bombers, militants and activists who are conveniently, but wrongly, grouped by politicians as being ‘Islamist terrorists’. These so-called Islamist terrorists are now a problem on every continent in the world. They fight against their inferior status and will no longer tolerate a society that ignores their plight. What is happening in France is the rise of an underclass that is becoming militant in its anger and threatens the fabric of political stability.

This revolt, this burning of cars and torching of property, is fuelled by unemployment and racism. Parallels can easily be drawn in other countries. As Olivier Roy, a professor in Social Sciences, states: “the struggle to integrate an angry underclass is one shared across the Western world”.

France must respond to this crisis with serious political and economic reforms in order to reaffirm the basic rights of its ‘other’ French citizens. Otherwise the Mistral will blow away the nobility of that revolutionary maxim.

Two loose cannons

The price Helen Clark paid to remain in power, namely conceding the Foreign Affairs portfolio to Winston Peters, is already an embarrassment. Being outside Cabinet and not participating in the relevant committee decisions, Peters has reduced the status of Minister of Foreign Affairs to that of a roving ambassador. After Peters’ performance at APEC Phil Goff called him a ‘mother-in-law’, meaning better outside Cabinet and outside the country than in. Obviously, the more ‘roving’ that Peters does the better.

But the downgrading of Foreign Affairs has taken a more serious turn with the arrival of another *parvenu* on the scene – the new United States Ambassador to New Zealand. Mr. Bill McCormick is a millionaire restaurateur and a substantial supporter of George W Bush. His opening remarks were particularly gauche. He said that he was disappointed that New Zealand was not participating in the US-led war in Iraq. What’s more, he believes that Saddam Hussein did have weapons of mass destruction.

Both Peters and McCormick are enjoying ‘the baubles of office’. If one can hold a government to ransom or contribute enough money, then a sinecure is sure to follow. As a result, foreign affairs is in the hands of amateurs with no credibility and no experience in the field of diplomacy. Theoretically, our relationship with USA depends on these two men. It is a frightening thought.

\$\$\$

The news that New Zealand will host the rugby world cup in 2011 was greeted like a line of \$\$\$ symbols on a pokey machine which heralds a ‘win, win, win’. Jock Hobbs, the driving force behind the successful bid, assured us that benefits will flow “not just in terms of rugby but commercially as well.” Business chiefs promise a huge economic bonus and Helen Clark can’t wait to write more cheques in support.

Apart from the euphoria of money, money, money, will rugby submerge all other sports in media coverage and hype? Who and what will fill the enlarged stadiums after the event? Are we talking about a game here or the commercial exploitation of rugby? Will the ‘ordinary bloke’ even be able to afford a ticket?

At the moment, it’s all congratulations and *go, go, go!* 2011 could be the year to do just that. I have plans already for a conference in Uzbekistan. ■

A letter to the Holy See

A *Tui Motu* reader has forwarded me a copy of a letter he sent recently to the Holy Father. With his permission I share it with the general readership.

Pope Benedict,
Vatican City

Dear Joseph,

Please do not think me bad mannered in addressing you by your baptismal name for Jesus greets you with that name and I am your brother in Jesus.

Recently, Joseph, our diocese of Dunedin has been evaluating 'our diocese in the years ahead' and this process has got me thinking about 'the church in the years ahead'. May I offer my thoughts to you. But I must admit I really do not know anything. I am a 73-year-old sinner holding no degree in Theology or Philosophy.

Joseph, why not 'close down' Head Office in Rome for three years? All Cardinals, Monsignors and priests on the staff at Head Office would go off to mission stations in Africa, South America, Cambodia, Iran, Iraq and other similar countries during that three year period. They should not take their best vestments and robes of office: shorts, sandals, cotton tops and a change of underwear is sufficient in hot countries. No cell phones either so they will not be tempted to ring you, Joseph.

There will be a lot of apartments in Rome vacant whilst these staff members are absent, and good use of that accommodation could be made by inviting the poor people in Rome to stay there as guests. But retain the domestic staff at Head Office as they can continue cooking and cleaning to meet the needs of the poor who will be living with you.

Some practical advice for your staff going to the mission fields would include taking some condoms with them to give to AIDS

clinics – in those AIDS plagued countries they will be useful to combat the spread of that dreadful illness.

Don't worry, Joseph, about how the church will survive during that three year period. Local bishops are not idiots: they will perhaps better serve God and God's children with the closure of Head Office.

There are heaps of other things you and I could talk about, Joseph, so I would like you to come over here for a chat. My wife and I have a bedroom for your sole use (unfortunately you will have to share our toilet and shower). Colin Campbell, our bishop, lives not far from our house, and you and he can also chat about things. You and Colin can have the sole use of our lounge for your discussions.

Hoping you can pop over. Just ring and let us know your flight arrival and I will meet you at the airport.

Yours in Jesus,
Lance Bardwell

What can one add to a letter like that, except say that one is envious not to have written it oneself? The notion that the church can get along quite well without a Head Office has a long and honourable tradition behind it. For the first thousand years of Christianity no such body existed. Barely four hundred years ago, after the Council of Trent, the Roman Curia took on its present form. A three-year trial of a Head Office-less church would clarify the best way for things to go in the future. Would Joseph – sorry, Pope Benedict XVI – be game to try the experiment?

By the way, Lance tells me that he has not yet had word of his letter being received by the Pope. ■

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

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Synod on the Eucharist

Iwonder why in the hell they brought us here and put us through all this – to say absolutely nothing more than what has been painfully said for decades,” a comment by a bishop in the *National Catholic Reporter*, expressing the frustrations of many who took part in last month’s Synod in Rome.

They had hoped that, with a new Pope, there might be a break from the authoritarian atmosphere that dominated John Paul II’s papacy and that problems facing the church could be discussed openly. “As bishops, we have a pastoral duty and an obligation before God to discuss and debate the difficulties burdening so many of our people,” said Archbishop John Dew, of Wellington.

The Eucharist was the theme of the Synod, and one of the pastoral concerns was the increasing number of Catholics who are being denied this sacrament because of a shortage of priests. Some bishops have priests celebrating nine Masses on a Sunday: “pastorally speaking, we cannot cope,” they said. And so there were many calls for discussion on whether the priesthood should be restricted to celibate men. *Viri probati* was a term used, (married men of proven virtue) – why should these not be considered for ordination? How does one refute the charge of hypocrisy when former Anglican clergy – married with families – are accepted, while Catholic *viri probati* (including ordained priests, now married), are considered unsuitable?

The whole idea was condemned out of hand by those who said the solution was to redistribute priests from country to country and “pray to the Holy Spirit for more vocations”. Translated, this means ‘pray for more celibate male vocations’. (Do they ever consider the possibility that God has already answered years of prayers and said: “No! You’re making the wrong request. My ways are not restricted to your ways”?)

There were also many calls from bishops to re-look at the plight of (in John Dew’s words) “those whose first marriages ended in sadness; they have never abandoned the church but are currently excluded from the Eucharist”.

Again there was a resounding ‘no change possible!’ from those who sought to stifle serious discussion. Cardinal Scola, the Synod’s official secretary, made the extraordinary statement that because the Eucharist is a gift, Catholics do not have a “right” to receive it. (Presumably, he would say it’s still a mortal sin *not* to receive it. Surely a contradiction?)

Joseph Ratzinger was a prominent theologian at the Vatican Council, where the theology of the Eucharist was fiercely debated. Now, 40 years later as Pope, he reminded the Synod fathers of a change of emphasis which emanated from the Council that, as well as being a sacrifice, the Eucharist is

also a meal. The sacrifice makes present again for each generation the saving action of God through the death of his Son, Jesus, but this real presence is offered to us in the form of a meal given as nourishment for the divine life we received in Baptism.

We have the two elements: praise directed to God and nourishment directed to people. Vatican II, especially in its changes to the liturgy, came out much more firmly in talking about the “bread of life”, both in the wording of the Eucharistic prayers and in the actions of the Mass. Therefore you do not have someone serving a meal with his back to the people and speaking in an unintelligible language. At least, the Synod emphatically endorsed the Vatican II liturgical reforms.

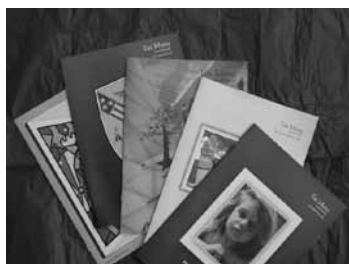
The shorter word for the Eucharist, *Mass*, comes from the Latin dismissal “*Ite missa est*” – “go now, you are sent forth”. We receive the Body and Blood as food and drink so that we are nourished to “go in peace to love and serve the Lord” by serving the needs of God’s people and the planet on which we live.

In God’s plan, the sacrificial Eucharistic meal provides the vital nourishment for people of faith to build the kingdom of love, justice and peace on earth. If people are being deprived of this nourishment, it is deplorable that a group of Roman Curia officials, who seem to have no understanding of the difficulties that genuinely pastoral bishops are facing, should dominate an international Synod and prevent serious discussion about possible new paths which the Spirit might be indicating.

I suspect Pope Benedict was disappointed with this Synod, which was arranged before his election. Some commentators are predicting that his follow-up Apostolic Exhortation will contain Biblical and theological insights, along with a sensitivity to urgent pastoral questions that were lacking at the meeting. That *would* be a welcome gift for Christmas!

Jim Neilan

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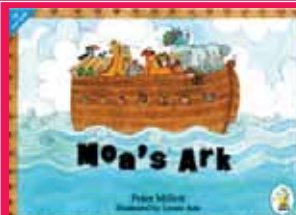
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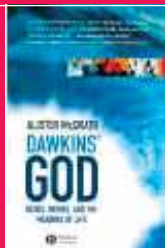
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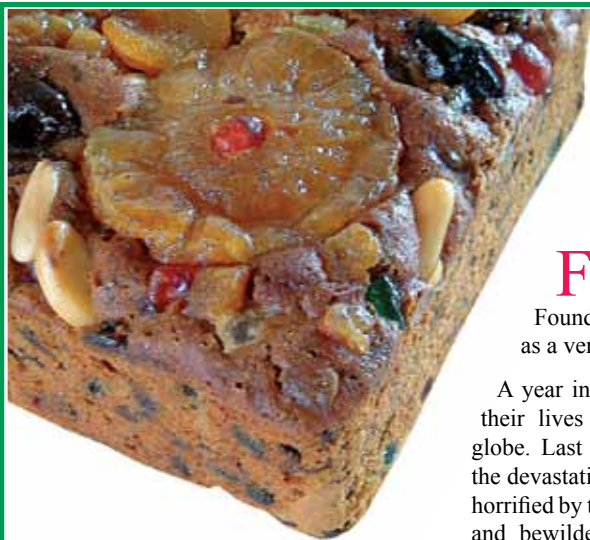


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The Catholic Caring Foundation

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