



the Word was made flesh

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Contents

2-3	editorial
3	Letters. Promoter's corner
4	Adoration of the Magi <i>Wendy Beckett</i>
5	poetry: In the stable <i>Jacquie Lambert</i>
6-7	Born one of us <i>Mike Riddell</i>
8-9	The real Christmas <i>Ron Sharp</i>
9	Cover icon: <i>Flis Bridle</i>
10-11	Faith and the financial crisis <i>Jim Consedine</i>
12-14	Life on the road in Afghanistan <i>Major Syd Dewes</i>
14-15	The giver <i>Joy Cowley</i>
16-17	Pooh's Prayer <i>Clay Nelson</i>
18-20	Wanted. . . Santa Claus! <i>Andrew Nugent</i>
21	Benedictus <i>Paul Andrews</i>
22-23	Remember the 9th of November <i>Paul Oestreicher</i>
24	poetry: O Wise Ones <i>Ruth Mather</i>
25-29	Christmas Books <i>Sandra Winton, Tom Cloher, Jim Elliston, Kathleen Doherty</i>
30	Crosscurrents <i>John Honoré</i>
31	You are living stones <i>Humphrey O'Leary</i>
32	Postscript: Mother's Journal <i>Kaaren Mathias</i>

Cover icon — by Flis Bridle, after the 16th Century Russian icon painter Vladimir Skaya (see page 9)



ISSN 1174 – 8931

to all Tui Motu readers
we wish a Happy and Holy Christmas

the word was made flesh

To most of us Christmas means celebration, family gatherings, presents, meeting friends. Christmas, we hope, is all of these things – but it is so much more. It recalls that unique moment in time when the God who made us and loved us into being, became one with us.

Sometimes our *Tui Motu* Christmas issue has focused on peace, or family, or praying at the Crib, or refugees, or some other aspect of the Christmas message. This year we have gone for the essence of that message: the *Word of God Made Flesh*. Our cover depicts a beautiful Russian icon, reproduced by New Zealand artist Flis Bridle, showing Mother and Child in classic style, capturing in colour and form the transcendence of the moment when the Son of God became human.

Some of our regular writers echo this mystery, each in their own unique way. For Ron Sharp (pp 8-9), within the myths of the traditional story lie centuries of yearning by the Jewish people – their hopes of a Messiah to come. *The Word became flesh*. For Mike Riddell (pp 6-7), it is the answer to a cynical world: God identifying totally with our fragility, being laid open to the world's cruelty, a victim of its selfishness. *The Word made flesh*. For Joy Cowley, the tale is retold in a simple story of a farming couple (pp 14-15) offering hospitality to two

young strangers – welcoming into their home and hearth *the Word made flesh*. Finally, a true story by an Army officer (pp 12-14) of an action in Afghanistan to save the lives of a mother and her new-born child – reincarnating the Christmas miracle.

Hospitality is a feature of the way Christians – and post-Christians – celebrate this feast. The Epiphany, in particular, emphasises this aspect, showing the Holy Family opening its circle to those Gentile visitors. Epiphany is a time for giving presents as well as welcoming strangers. Two articles develop this aspect – one humorous by a Benedictine monk (pp 18-20), the other the commemoration of a terrible historical event. November 9 was the 70th anniversary of Kristallnacht, a night of shame for the German people – the start of the Holocaust. Paul Oestreicher (pp 22-23) recalls some fearful memories.

The genocide of the Jews by the Nazis is regarded as the most terrible crime in recent history. Yet it was but one of many genocides in recent times. Its horror is a warning to every one of us: the stranger in our midst is there to be welcomed and made at home, not shunned and persecuted. *When you welcome one of these little ones in my name you welcome me*. May your Christmas be a time of hospitality.

M.H.

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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from The Chair of Tui Motu Board

Season's Greetings to all our Readers

Christmas is just about upon us and it is easy to miss the sacredness of the birth of our Lord in the busy madness of the race to get everything done before 25th December.

This year many are looking for creative ways of giving as a way of celebrating Christmas. I'd like to suggest that if you are looking for a gift nourishing for the soul, you might give your friends or family a *Tui Motu* sub. Recognising the economic situation, we have decided to offer a **Special Christmas Option - 5 months of Tui Motu for \$20.00**: as a good way as any to introduce a friend or family member to the magazine. (details on page 31).

I can't sign off without giving three cheers to our wonderful band of volunteers, writers and illustrators who make our little cottage industry in *Union St* work each month: selling, promoting, writing or helping in numerous ways – we couldn't do it without you.

Finally to our editorial team: Francie & Michael, who work tirelessly to deadlines producing *Tui Motu*. I know the Board and our readers will join me in wanting to thank you both for the work you do in giving us a quality read month after month.

To you all, have a sacred and a safe Christmas.

Blessings

Katie O'Connor

TM in colour

We like the 'new look' of *Tui Motu*. Great *November* cover! Thank you.

Srs of St Joseph, Hastings

Unity in the New Testament

The Word of God is sacred and holy, and care in its use is paramount. I am less than satisfied that this has happened in an article titled *Lazareth At Lambeth*, by Glynn Cardy (*TM Sept*).

Speaking of unity, the author said this was a theme which Jesus said little about. I would beg to differ on this point. Jesus' farewell discourse to his Apostles is heavily steeped in the theme of unity (*John ch.13-17, especially 17*). There are other references in other parts of the Gospels.

To say that the good Lord paid scant attention to this issue is very much wide of the mark! Unity is highlighted in other parts of the New Testament too, particularly *St Paul*.

John Vincent, Dunedin

Lay movements in NZ – 1

The Secular Franciscan Order, the branch of the Franciscan family for lay people, has a rule approved by Pope Paul VI in 1978, entitled *From Gospel to Life and from Life to Gospel*. Our formation programmes encourage us to live a life based on the Gospel. Eucharist, family life,

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 one page) are also welcome, but please by negotiation

work, recreation and ecology are some aspects. It has been called 'the Gospel in a nutshell'. The updated rule includes praying *Morning and Evening Prayer of the Church*.

Secular Franciscans are involved in local parishes and a variety of apostolates within the wider community. Our sign is the *tau* cross – an arm of Jesus and an arm of St Francis.

Shirley McGinley SFO, Orewa

Lay movements - 2

We were sorry to see your series *Lay Movements in the Catholic Church* close after only two issues without a mention of *Pax Christi*, even more when we saw in the same issue (*TM Oct*) mention of NZ's lead in the banning of cluster munitions. *Pax Christi* was a prominent member of both the international and New Zealand Coalitions working for that result and one of two Catholic-based groups at the Wellington *Conference on Cluster Munitions* last February.

In New Zealand, members study

issues ranging from disarmament to restorative justice, from anti-violence to interfaith dialogue. We hold study days and retreats, make submissions to government and churches, add a Catholic social teaching dimension to many solidarity issues and support other peace-making organisations. Currently, we are involved in a partnership with the *Land of Peace* movement in West Papua and Indonesia.

(abridged)

Kevin McBride, Nat Coordinator, Auckland

Tribute to Jim Consedine

I credit Jim Consedine for initiating my passion for restorative justice and being my mentor. It led me to apply for a Fulbright scholarship so I could come to New Zealand in 2004.

It is most appropriate that the final issue of *Tui Motu* I will be reading before returning to the US (*TM Nov*) has an editorial written by Jim on a subject dear to his heart and mine, the *common good*.

Just as Jim helped me understand how the common good can be the underlying philosophy for restorative justice, in the latest editorial he explained with his usual great clarity why I voted for Barack Obama in the latest American election.

Tom Cavanagh PhD, Senior Research Fellow, Te Kotahitanga, School of Education, University of Waikato



Adoration of the Magi

From the Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary's Book of Hours, Turin, late 15th Century.

*This illustration was part of the **Bimillenary of Christ** Exhibition staged by the Vatican Library to celebrate 2000 years since the birth of Jesus.*

Many religious themes are here expressed – Christ revealed to the Gentiles; the contrast between the golden gifts and the poverty of the stable; the welcome given to strangers who become a part of the family circle.

Sr Wendy Becket comments:

If the shepherds are dramatically convincing, since they are the very people who would have been out that winter night in the fields, the presence of the Magi or kings seems fantastical. The arrival of these fairy-tale strangers from the East – ‘wise men’ or ‘Magi’ – journeying to meet Jesus because of a star they had observed in their homeland, is an unprecedented event.

For *St Matthew*, the only evangelist to write about these exotic visitors, they are the palpable embodiment of the mysterious prophecy of Isaiah centuries before, that “kings will come... to your light... camels in throngs... dromedaries of Midian and Ephah... bringing gold and incense”. Of course these kings came, reasoned St Matthew, though he called them only “wise men” and gives us little detail apart from the nature of their gifts: gold, of course, incense, and precious myrrh.

Christian imagination has played happily with these ideas, giving the kings names (*Balthasar, Caspar* and *Melchior*) and arranging them in meaningful patterns.

One is old, one middle-aged, one youthful; one is from the East, one from the distant West, and one, the most romantic of all, is a dark man from Africa.

The point of the story is that the wise men saw nothing exceptional to force their faith. They saw Mary and the child, poorly housed in their open stable, with a suspicious Joseph glowering at them from beneath his cap; well-dressed foreigners with expensive presents, seem to a home-keeping Joseph to need careful watching.

Mary is simply astonished, and even the little Jesus seems taken aback, as if this human life is hard to get to grips with. The kings stand silent in adoration – their noble gifts their only credentials. Each seems bemused by how much greater the event is than they could have expected.

Their furs and satins, their golden crowns and exotic turban seem mere tinsel in the presence of this naked child and his mouse of a mother. Low on his knees, the senior king acts out the overthrow of human certainties and the arrival of a new order. ■

in the stable

Messenger,
where are you now?
How easy to arrive one starry night
let loose the force of God
and simply vanish.
Did need begin and end
with just one touch,
all upon your terms?

My body bruised and torn
to meet your gift,
my sweat runs full
into the earth,
my pain in circles.

No angel now to lift him out, I notice.
A midwife metaphor is fine for you,
birth sanitized and holy,
but useless in this flesh
where pain is ground
in hips and soul.
Could you not have spared me this,
a small reprieve of gratitude.

I know, I know.
I am the one who answered yes,
but it is not meek reply
that births a child you know,
not quiet faith and silence.
It is instead the force of passion gathered,
sinew and muscle taut against the strain,
a woman's courage raw and stretched to snap,
blessings blurred in sweat and hope.

I sink within,
every depth of hidden night
brought forth and focused,
cries of soul as bodies part
and woman births another piece of history.

Messenger,
where are you now?

Jacquie Lambert

“**T**he essence of Christianity is the appeal to the life of Christ as a revelation of the nature of God and of God’s agency in the world. The record is fragmentary, inconsistent, and uncertain. . . But there can be no doubt as to what elements in the record have evoked a response from all that is best in human nature.

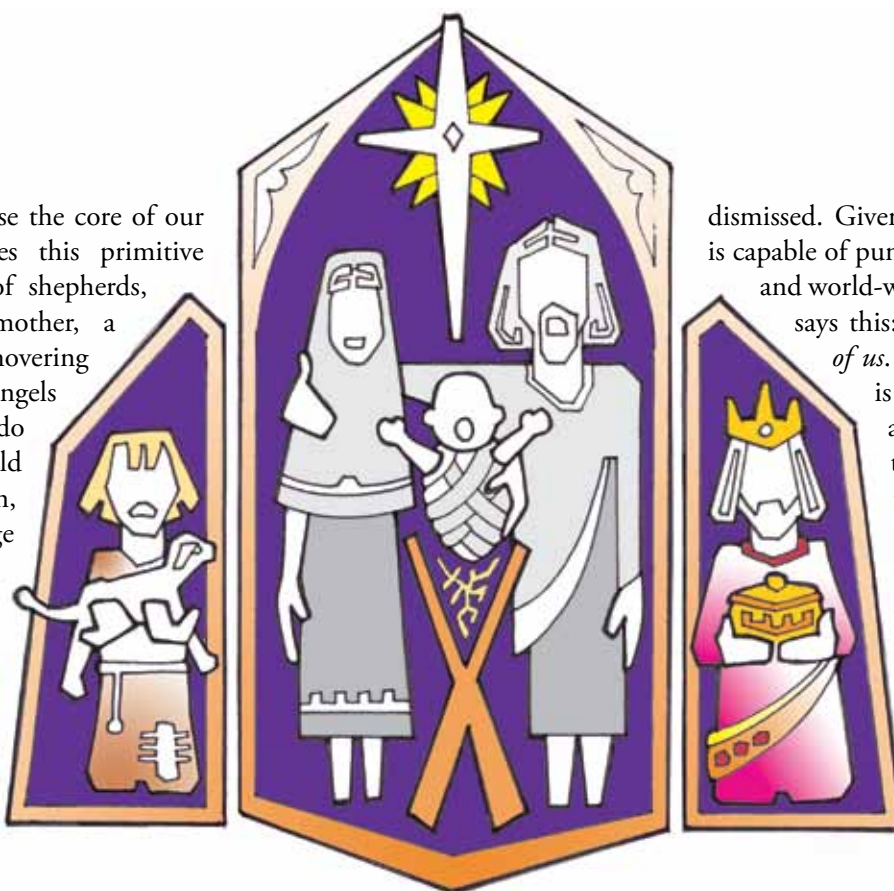
The Mother, the Child, and the bare manger: the lowly man, homeless and self-forgetful, with his message of peace, love, and sympathy: the suffering, the agony, the tender words as life ebbed, the final despair: and the whole with the authority of supreme victory.”

Alfred North Whitehead

born one of us

Mike Riddell

It is easy to despise the core of our faith. What does this primitive Christmas tale – of shepherds, magi, a young mother, a manger, a birth, a hovering star, choirs of angels – what has this to do with a complex world of internet porn, prime mortgage collapse and early-onset Alzheimers? A charming tale for children, perhaps; a marketing ploy for retailers; a magical episode of escapism from the pain of existence.



dismissed. Given a small opening, it is capable of puncturing our cynicism and world-weariness. In essence it says this: *God has become one of us*. The surprising thing is that so few words are able to express all that is necessary to the navigation of our human existence. It is to the eternal benefit of our faith that what lies at the heart of it is not so much a doctrine as a story. And that it is one of wonder and illumination.

We are quite grown up – cosmopolitan people of the world, sophisticated and savvy citizens of the Third Millennium, stitching together meaning from the frayed rags which critical minds have left us. Much as we might admire the naïve faith of earlier generations, it seems there is no road back to a simplistic security based on primitive notions of how the world operates. Many people will look to a seasonal Lotto win as a more likely source of salvation than to the story of Bethlehem.

As we all must learn to our bitter disillusionment, there is no road back

in life. We move forward, carrying with us the bruises, disappointments and disfigurements of experience; never quite able to recapture our lost innocence. A commitment to honesty in practical as well as spiritual life leads us into territory where there are no familiar landmarks. There may be moments of clarity, but they come amid a more persistent fog of uncertainty and fragility.

And yet... the recounting of the Christmas story contains within it a devastating simplicity, not easily

The retelling of this story is still capable of creating awe. It tells us these things about our lives: we are not alone; even in darkness there comes a light; the lowly is precious; the strange is not to be feared; the divine is fragile; humanity is blessed; life is a gift; and that the life of God and our lives are inextricably bound. These basic insights are enough to lead us through the best and worst of times.

Through listening attentively we may know certain truths which are still of relevance to this era in which we find our way. That how we treat others

is of significance; that God moves among the poor and the immigrant; that the earth and all life in it is gifted to us to care for; that no person is to be despised; that darkness cannot extinguish light; that every moment of every life is charged with potential; that nothing is lost; that God is as close as your own flesh; that peace is not the absence of conflict; that none of us is ever abandoned.

Many around the world have celebrated the election of Barack Obama. His acceptance speech following the result was one which lit up the face of the crowd and brought the shining light of hope to them. It seemed to many who listened that he represented the end of

a dark night. Whatever will become of him is yet to be revealed, but we do know that such a resurrection of belief in the future is a faint analogy to that story we hold so dear – the hope which springs from an unlikely quarter and is able to change the way that people act.

The ground zero of our faith has always been Bethlehem. It has been sullied by commercialism and crassness. But we followers of Christ will return again and again until the bare events become part of the story out of which we live and see the world. We will teach our children and marvel at their response. We will find our own doubts and misgivings overcome by a mature sense of wonder. God is among us.

To light a candle in a dark space is an act of base simplicity. To share the light with those standing near us requires no great courage. To sing ancient hymns in the midst of children asks only humility. To see faces of strangers lit by the light demands little but the opening of our eyes. To recognise our own flowering hope in the blooming of pohutukawas is the beginning of understanding.

The birth of our Christ, the Christmas story, is profoundly simple. ■

Christian author Mike Riddell is based in Cambridge, Waikato. His principal present focus is writing screenplays for upcoming films

If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible, who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time, who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer.

It's the answer told by lines that stretched around schools and churches in numbers this nation has never seen, by people who waited three hours and four hours, many for the first time in their lives, because they believed that this time must be different, that their voices could be that difference.

It's the answer spoken by young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Hispanic, Asian,

Native American, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled – Americans who sent a message to the world that we have never been just a collection of individuals or a collection of red states and blue states.

It's the answer that led those who've been told for so long by so many to be cynical and fearful and doubtful about what we can achieve to put their hands on the arc of history and bend it once more toward the hope of a better day.

It's been a long time coming, but tonight, because of what we did on this date in this election at this defining moment, change has come to America.

Barack Obama

Here's an Ideal Christmas gift

from doting Nanas and Grandpas to their favourite grandchildren . . .

. . . an A3 full colour poster of

Pooh's Prayer

(as displayed on pp 16-17)

Price: \$2 each. **Package** (cardboard cylinder) & **postage:** \$5 within NZ. *Each cylinder holds up to 10 posters.*

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the real christmas

Ron Sharp

Among the many conversions, changes of heart and redirectings of my faith journey, there is one I clearly recall. It came when many of my student friends would challenge me with: “But you don’t really believe that angels appeared and spoke to Mary, shepherds and Joseph, the virgin birth and stars resting over a manger, do you?”

Fortunately, my inability to respond didn’t destroy my faith but stimulated me to investigate the issues. So I took up studies of the Bible. There I began to discover that the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament are not history or non-fiction books. They are theology books. They describe God’s entering the story of human life as the Israelite people experienced it, up to and including the early Jewish Christians.

Their writers were very limited in the ways they could express their relationship with God, because God’s ‘glorious’ existence is more profound than any human imagination, words, pictures or stories can portray. The only way to express what they felt was by describing in story their experience of God being with them throughout their history.

They felt that in the beginning God’s Spirit hovered over the unfolding creation; that the world and humans were unfolding towards the Oneness of a beautiful garden in harmony; that their fulfilment would come through taking the risk of journeying like their father Abraham; that humans cannot achieve fulfilment by themselves, only with God’s help – as when barren women like Abraham’s Sarah, Israel’s Rachel, Samson’s mother and

Joseph’s Mary give birth. The children of Israel felt God’s power, when they were saved from famine by Joseph in Egypt; when Moses was saved from Pharaoh butchering Hebrew children; when Moses led them in their journey of escape for 40 years in the desert and when he fed them with food and drink; when Samson saved them from Philistine oppression; when Samuel “grew in stature before the Lord and men”; when David brought peace and unity to Israel and Judah; when Sheba’s queen journeyed from the East to present Solomon with “gifts of gold and great quantities of spices”; and when they returned home to Jerusalem from the domination of exile in Assyria.

All these images helped *Matthew* and *Luke* put together the stories of Jesus’ birth. Here we must remember that it is only after the early disciples experienced the Resurrection that they recognised that Jesus was the closest God had ever come to humanity. He was how humans should be – how God meant them to be.

No one knew anything about the facts surrounding Jesus’ birth. Mary would have been dead when they were written. So what are *Matthew* and *Luke* telling us? They have obviously been meditating on all the stories of the Hebrew Bible and are telling us that Jesus is the Christ, the very same Saviour expected throughout Israelite history. He is the new Creation, the new Adam, the new Healer of human divisions, the new Joseph saving Israel from famine, the new Moses freeing Israel from slavery, the new Food in the desert, the new Promised Land and Kingdom, the new Samson saving

Israel from Philistine oppression, the new Samuel and John the Baptist “growing in stature before God and men”, the new Solomon, to whom queens and kings from the East bring gold and spices and the New Jerusalem, to which the people will return after Babylonian exile.

Matthew and *Luke* would throw up their arms in horror if we were to ask: “Did your stories really happen like that?” “Did Mary, Zachariah, Joseph, the shepherds and wise men see and hear angels?” “Did the Magi really come from the East following a star?” “How did the star lead them?” “Did the holy Family really flee to Egypt?” These are the wrong questions. The Christmas stories are poetic theology. They are not history, to be taken literally. They are expressions of the mystery of God’s presence among us.

What about Pharaoh, Philistines, Assyrians, Herod and Romans? They are the symbols of human power thinking it can control the world. They play ‘god’, depicting him to be a dominator wanting order in the world. They think they have the right to kill Abel; they won’t risk change like Abraham; they enslave others like Pharaoh. They conquer the weak and believe that technological capacity, economic monopoly and military mastery can keep the world as it is, forever. They tell the story of despair, believing that oppressive interpersonal relationships will last, because a heavy dose of authoritarianism maintains equilibrium and yields no change. They leave us with shopping malls and instant entertainment in a world that is closed and fixed – unchanging without the need for hope.

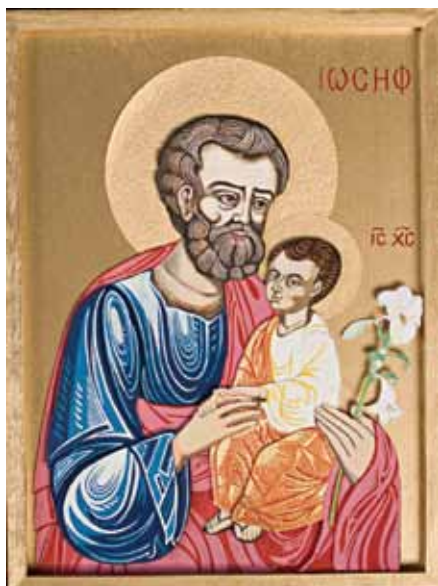
And what about Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the Magi? They are God's poor, broken, defenceless and weak, who cringe before the powerful oppressor and see the need for God. They come humbly to find and worship Him in the manger, hear and join the angels singing, and feel the reality of God's incomparable compassion and power breaking through as a new world is built. They are the little ones, who subvert the world around us, to expose its dominating power as inadequate and false, and empower the community to re-engage itself with the reality of the Christ child.

Where in the Year of the Lord 2008 do *we* find God and the Christ child, as the sacred writers did? In the solo mum – or in the birth of a celebrity? In the mystically hidden Father – or those who can afford to plan? In the sleep-out or in the palatial residence? On the back of a donkey or in the two car household? In the drummer boy or the Magi gold? In the angelic sounds of the whales or the blaring TV advert? In the minimum-waged, long-houred shepherds or the managers in their city suits? In the risky venture of the Magi or the security of staying at home clinging to things as they are?

In the vulnerability of the Innocents or the murderous power of mighty Herod? In welcoming the refugee fleeing to safety or putting out the red carpet for the well-heeled tourist? In my neighbour's rowdy barbecue or my own middle class, Chardonnay sipping party? God and the Christ child appear when human control is seen as false and the hope of a hidden new Lordship reigns, here and now, and forever more. ■

Ron Sharp is from of St Peter Chanel parish, Motueka, and an environmentalist

the cover icon



Cover (right): Madonna and Child
Vladimir Skaya, Moscow 16th Century.

The Madonna has a look of sorrow. The baby clings to her with his arm wrapped round her neck – a child seeking protection from its mother. He is showing affection to her. It all foreshadows the tragic destiny of both Jesus and Mary. Fr Peter Prendergast asked Flis Bridle to reproduce this *Madonna and Child* for him when he was at Howick parish in Auckland. It has become her favourite.

(left) St Joseph and the Child Jesus.
A Melchite icon from the 18th Century.

The faces of Jesus and Joseph appear to be smiling. It has a special attractiveness. Note the beautiful flow of the draped garments.



These icons are painted by Katikati artist Flis Bridle.

Flis comments further: I do not myself pray before icons. My prayer is simply to talk to God – I'm constantly aware of God's presence. God is there with me to chat to.

Nevertheless, I fully appreciate what an icon is: it is a channel for us, a window into eternity. God looks out at our world, and through the icon we seem to look into God's world! Ordinary 'holy pictures' don't have that quality.

I am attracted by the sacredness of the subjects, especially the Virgin and Christ. I am very fond of the Rublev Trinity icon. Doing the Abel Course gave me a love of Scripture and brought me to incidents like that of the angels visiting Abraham. Icons for Orthodox Christians were the poor person's Bible (like stained glass in Western Europe).

I was first attracted to painting icons by reading an article in the *Marist Messenger*, by Fr Craig Larkin. I started looking at icons, seeing them as almost three dimensional. So I decided to make them that way – building them up as layers of balsa, sometimes up to seven layers. The hands or the face will be the top layer. I use gilded seeds for beads. This is a technique which I developed for myself. I use a photocopy of the original as a template.

Each icon may take over a week to make, more than 30 hours of work and you cannot work at it continuously. I do not use egg tempera as the old painters would use, nor gold leaf which is very costly. I use acrylic paints with water. I found that PVA glue dulled the adjacent colour so I now use a modelling glue put on in spots. The icons seem to hold together all right.

faith and the financial crisis

*Jim Consedine takes a look at the economic meltdown,
points to its basic cause in the light of the gospel,
and suggests some answers*

There is no easy way to write about the financial crisis which has hit global economy these past months. In New Zealand, more than 20 financial institutions have gone to the wall. The pain of people who have lost their life's savings is intense and real. Many carry a sense of betrayal. They feel they have been duped by financial institutions. To a large degree they are right.

Unbeknown to the average Joe and Betty investors was the fact that they were sinking their money into sand castles. Even Alan Greenspan, former chairman of the US Federal Reserve (1987-2006) admitted as much. For years he held that 'markets worked best, so let them'. He argued that government intervention would be a problem, not a solution. How wrong he was.

On 23 October 2008, before the US Government Oversight and Reform committee, Greenspan finally admitted a 'flaw' in his ideology of market forces. He confessed his faith in deregulation was shaken and said he was in a "state of shocked disbelief". What went wrong, he suggested, was "securitising home mortgages. Excess demand for them. And failure to properly price them". He failed to mention unbridled greed, huge fraud and no oversight.

The market heresy

Greenspan's thinking, which reflects the ideology of global capitalism, is fatally flawed. The real evil of this collapse lies at the feet of the most educated and privileged people on the planet, who were trusted with other's investments and cold-bloodedly used the system for their own gain. The common good was simply ignored.

Finally, Greenspan has accepted that 'the market' doesn't have a soul. It doesn't respond to the need for compassion, mercy, healing, forgiveness, tolerance, generosity, social justice. These are the core values which give meaning to life. The market sees only the need for continually increased profit.

At the heart of the philosophy of market values lies the sin of usury – increasing wealth through non-productive means. We have created a global system built on usury. It's a monster and will never be just, because its foundation stone is greed. For 19 centuries the church recognised this evil, and usury was condemned as a mortal sin. Relying on the market to regularise itself in the interests of the common good and justice is a false premise. It was always a lie, will always be a lie. It never did regularise itself. It never can. The Kiwi version, Rogernomics, is a lie for the same reasons.

Theological Basis

Some of the underlying reasons for the crisis are theological. At the heart of the issue lies the flawed nature of humanity, as expressed in the church's concept of original sin. Underpinning the whole idea of redemption is the notion of a new elevated status of humanity, redeemed in Christ. Good Friday and the Empty Tomb have a lot to say about future social relations of a redeemed humanity and speak directly to this crisis. 'Market forces', however, take no notice of these things and rely on prevailing systems to work things out for the common good. All the evidence is – these systems can't and don't. They are social systems driven by avarice.

*we have created a global system
built on usury – a monster and will never be
just ... its foundation stone is greed*

Look for instance at the gap between rich and poor nations. Hear the cries of the 30,000 children who, in a world full of resources, die from hunger every day. Look at the lack of human rights denied through prejudice to billions in the world. Look at the ongoing wars for resources with thousands of fresh victims every year. As long as we continue to act as if we are not redeemed, these catastrophes will continue.

Such issues, huge as they are, are all solvable. But only a humanity which recognises its need of redemption and changes the way it operates can do it. Here the role of the teaching church is critical. She supplies the heartbeat and the vision. But only if she engages, believes and practises what she preaches herself. In the past 20 years we have generally reverted to being a devotional church, and social justice issues have been largely ignored.

*the teaching church supplies the
heartbeat and the vision ... but only if she
engages, believes and practises
what she preaches herself*

To take one example, Wal Mart, one of the world's largest corporations, pays its workers in Bangladesh between 13-17 cents per hour for working seven days a week, 16 hour days. No unions. No overtime pay. The cheap imports made by such corporations come to Western countries. Could we not simply refuse to buy these imports? Dorothy Day noted such practices "constituted a sack from which blood is oozing".

Christian Options

Jesus addressed some of these issues in his teachings. He unequivocally condemned exploitative systems and provoked the wrath of the political and religious power brokers of his day. "No healthy tree bears bad fruit", he said, "no poor tree bears good fruit. Each tree is known by the fruit it bears" (Luke 6). He warned against avarice and greed. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt 6).

The 'heart' of capitalism lies in making money. It worships wealth. John Paul II gave a severe warning against it in his encyclical On Social Concerns (March 1988), calling such a system "structurally sinful". In effect, the Pope was saying the capitalist emperor had no clothes and that so called market forces were a fraud. But who took that warning seriously? Catholics are just as dominated by capitalist ideology as the next person.

What therefore can we do? There are many notions which have appealed to thinking Christians for centuries: financial co-operatives, microcredit banking and a range of mutual benefit societies. One Biblical idea is the Jubilee Year, whereby all debts still outstanding after 50 years are pardoned.

Voluntary poverty

Is it such a radical idea that voluntary poverty should be promoted by Christians? Peter Maurin, cofounder of the Catholic Worker in the midst of the Great Depression, sought to feed, house and clothe victims by challenging

Christians to accept personal responsibility for their needy neighbours and share their resources with the poor. This was nearer the Gospel ideal of the early church.

Such an option for voluntary (or evangelical) poverty is praised in the Gospels (Matt 5, Luke 6). However, we must be careful never to romanticise poverty. Severe material poverty leads to malnutrition, violence and premature death. Voluntary poverty however doesn't mean destitution, which is sinful and an enslavement rather than a free state. Jesus came to free us. No one should be destitute.

In simple terms, voluntary poverty recognises we are all part of one another and "what we own over and above what we need does not belong to us but to the poor who have nothing" (St Basil, 4th century). It involves acting justly and with generosity with our money and resources "because our neighbour is in need". As the Second Vatican Council pointed out: "It was the ancient custom of the church to give generously, not merely out of what was superfluous but even out of what was necessary" (LG, No 89).

Voluntary poverty insists that usury is sinful and shouldn't be tolerated because it steals from the neighbour. The primary reason why poverty exists at such scandalous levels in so many countries today is that international banks charge usurious interest rates on loans that the countries can never repay. They can't repay even the interest, much less the capital.

*if one billion Catholics took a stand
for economic justice, the world would
change overnight*

Sixty years ago Dorothy Day wrote: "The present vast possessions of the robber barons need to be overthrown, cast down, appropriated, decentralised, distributed etc. A vast reform is needed. The power of the great corporations... the great banks, will all be overthrown. And that is something to look forward to" (Dairies, Duty of Delight, 1948).

Just imagine if one billion Catholics took a stand together for economic justice in their lives and in society. It's a pipe dream – but the world would change overnight and economic justice would be seen in every street.

Sadly, ideology rather than faith remains the predominant force in so many lives, Catholics included. Some continue playing financial games in what Dorothy Day called "that filthy rotten system". The contemporary financial crash reminds us once again us that we do so at our peril. ■

*Christchurch priest Fr Jim Consedine is an author, editor
and world authority on Restorative Justice*



Major Syd Dewes

life on the road in afghanistan

On a snow-blanketed Afghan mountain, the lives of a day-old baby and his mother are at serious risk. What is a man to do?

Whatever it takes, explains Major Syd Dewes of the New Zealand Army.

We are so consumed by the contrasts of the morning: the warmth of a rejoicing ANA soldier's family at seeing their boy come home, the purity of fresh blanket snow, the toil being played out by the coal miners bent to their labour – and all bathed in bright warm mountain morning sunshine. We are only distracted by our security guys when they catch sight of a lone man making haste towards us through foot deep snow. Oh no, I think to myself, another local fella with a wish list. So common is this occurrence, I ready myself and reach for my notebook without further contemplation.

As he closed with us I notice something odd – it is not so much the drawn, exhausted face but the fearful, last ditch pleading look in his eyes. Despite all this, he offers a slowly delivered deliberate courtesy of wishing us *Salaam Alaikom* (Afghan for 'hello' and 'peace be with you'). I am puzzled. My Afghan interpreter Moshen quickly establishes this small, rubber-shoed, weather-beaten man dressed in man-jamies standing in foot deep snow, is asking if we can help him.

Help? I am now guarded. I am expecting an avalanche of humanitarian aid requests; can we build a water well?; why do they have to walk four to six

hours to get to a hospital? He needs food because he only managed to plant one crop this year because there was not enough water; school for the children is three hours walk away, etc.

To cut to the chase, it turns out his wife has been haemorrhaging since she gave birth a day earlier. For a nanosecond there is an avalanche all right – an avalanche of emotions: guilt at being guarded in my reception of him; realising you have the power to help; fear – crikey, how sick is she? Medic? I don't have one with me. Now I *am* scared; and all he wants is someone to help save his family. I can see my dear mother, God bless her, looking down on me, pointing her finger, saying: "if I told you once Syd, I told you a hundred times ... don't judge a book by its cover".

So, in a time faster than it takes Superman to change his tights, I issue quick orders over the radio. "Team, we are on a mercy mission... mother haemorrhaging... one-day-old baby... husband in my truck... follow me to his house. More info to follow. Sarge, security... when we stop". All our training kicks in with little fuss or need for detail, and I am thrilled.

The adrenalin is pumping and you think quickly of options, 'what ifs', and realise time is of the essence. Outside

their mud brick house people have gathered, all eager to help in some way and yet looking and no doubt feeling hopeless... perhaps as good a time as any to ask Allah and the good Lord to look out for mother and son.

Then this extraordinary thing happens, people bring us hot choi (tea) in glass mugs on silver trays with bowls of sugar, and sweets... the scene was unreal. Up at the house a group is struggling down the steep, snow-covered path carrying the woman in a blanket hammock, and here's another group dispensing choi, like a scene from a movie of some British Army unit in old-time India.

The blanket hammock of pain

The decision is made. Lady and baby travel in my truck. That's when I see her for the first time... she is so pale I think she had crossed over to the other side or is near to making a reservation. My concern mounts with every passing minute it is taking to try and make her comfortable on the back seat of my Barry Crump truck. There now being no room inside, my security man, a young soldier called Bailey, just turned 20, suits up with all the cold weather clothing he can lay his hands on and climbs onto the open rear of our truck for the journey back down the hill. Now let me tell

you, we don't ever ride on the back of our trucks, Inuits might, but us Kiwis don't fare well.

Loaded as best we can, we set off – Moshen cradling the new-born bundle wrapped in his blanket, mother hairpinned across the back seat, and my man Bailey perched on the back. My attention then turns to the road we had driven up only a couple of hours earlier; that bumpy, snow-covered mountain track, the rock-strewn mountain river bed, and then that river crossing. Oh my goodness! How on earth am I going to make this a comfortable journey for this lady. You brace and tense every muscle in some vain hope you will absorb all the bumps and jolts before they reach her. Steering, gear changes and braking are now all executed in a deliberate, synchronised manner to try and ensure the smoothest possible ride. Needless to say, it's hopeless, but we continue to try.

Inching our way down the valley

The journey seems to take forever, and there are moments enough to reflect on your own good fortune – family (whom you suddenly miss even more), ready access to the best of services, and the fortunate timing of our presence in this valley. And then there's the whimper only a day-old baby can make: a mixture of sweet innocence, an occasional struggle, and 'feed me' sounds. 'Feed me'. Crikey! It then dawns on me, it's possible baby has not been fed if mother had been haemorrhaging since giving birth.

I struggle with thoughts of what to do. I look at Moshen the interpreter and he looks at me with mute expression. "You're the boss, you should know!" At a total loss, I ask the father if his son has a name and find he is still without one. So, in a desperate attempt to try to keep on top of the situation, I give the baby the name *Saeed*, and both Moshen and I start talking to him (as if he could understand a damn thing we're saying). We tell him he has to

be a tough fella for his mother and make his dad proud by helping out in the fields, and we will come back to see him.

As we bounce our way down the mountain continually talking to both baby Saeed and his mother, Moshen also interprets this for his father, when there's a light tap on my shoulder from behind. I look to the back seat to see a struggle of a smile on his dad's face, but it's his glassy eyes that catch me unprepared – and suddenly there's a lump in my throat and I have to look away lest I get glassy eyes too!



We finally reach the river. This is not going to be good because now we have to go against the flow, and it was deep enough crossing with the water flow earlier. If this vehicle stalls midstream we are in trouble. Too late. We have to get to the hospital fast, so the truck lines up with the opposite bank and noses into the river. Accelerator down and good high revs, the truck momentarily loses traction midstream.

"Don't panic Mr Mannering, keep going". The tyres catch riverbed boulders, spin, and catch, and the

truck gradually veers off line forced by the river flow. "Don't panic Mr Mannering - yeah right!" I am sure a couple of superguys were watching over us then. Relief came with the bounce and bumps of reaching the other side. Safely over, the other vehicle follows, and they have the same moments of panic, but, in a way that young people sometimes use to veil their fear, they start hooting, hollering and yahooping, and claim to want to do it again!

The hospital is not far and we soon have our two treasures in expert hands. It then occurs to me for the

whole way we have never once heard the lady moan or say a word. And yet when we managed to extract her from the truck, her face is chiselled with pain. Amazing!

Just before we leave, her husband comes over to us. It is a very touching moment, this small, rubber-shoed, weather-beaten man speaking Dari and trying to convey his thanks. It matters not that we don't understand the spoken word: his face and eyes cocoon us with warmth and kindness that leaves you knowing you have



“I was a stranger and you took me in”.

Joy Cowley puts the Christmas story into a contemporary context. Hospitality is contagious

the giver

Well, he would, wouldn't he, that man of mine, heart soft as butter in the sun. Told them they could camp in the road paddock and then, when it rained, wanted them to come up to the house.

“Not on your life,” I say. “A couple of stray hippies, turned up out of the blue, all rags and tatters, and you want them up here for Christmas?”

“Just until their tent dries out,” he argues. “They're nice kids, Meg.”

“Sure they are, Albie, like everyone is nice – that garage fellow, and the nice contractor who sheared more than sheep. Albie, we're not doing this. It's two days to Christmas, I've got the rooms set up for the children coming home”.

“I was thinking... more the sleepout,” he says.

“Sleepout?” I flap the tea towel at him. “Albie! That's where we've stored all the Christmas presents!”

“There'd be enough space.” He twists his hands, soft beggar, and I know he's already told the campers they can move in with us.

“They can sleep in the woolshed, Albie. Plenty of space there, and it's dry.”

“We got rats in the woolshed.”

“You mean they've been living in a rat-proof tent? Oh, come on! The woolshed will be fine.”

He picks up the extra tea towel and helps me dry the dishes. I have to say

this for him, he might be soft but he doesn't give in easy. “Meg, I was thinking more of her, the girl, she's young and she's...”

“Obviously old enough.”

“The baby's due in February. They're going to her parents' place in Rangiora.”

“For Christmas?”

“No,” he says. “New Year.”

“So where do they plan to spend Christmas?”

He doesn't answer, but I can hear his thoughts clear as a bell. I fold my arms. “Woolshed, Albie. You run the farm. I run the house. This is your problem, so you solve it.”

He goes quiet, walks out the door to put on his gumboots and next thing I see him ankle deep in spring grass, hiking off to the road paddock and the woolshed. The storm has swollen the creek, I can hear it roaring, and the steamy air is rising to lumps of cloud that promise more rain.

They'll be okay in the woolshed, their tent hung over the pens to dry, their sleeping bags spread on the floor. There's even a kettle and a microwave in the smoko room, sheer luxury compared with a tent not much bigger than a wool sack.

Anyway, they've been living at the Shoal Bay commune, so they're used to roughing it. He's what, 18, maybe 20, skinny kid with not much to say



(continued from page 13)

been given all this man can give. A tender manhug with a whisper in the ear (even though I did not understand Dari, I knew what he said) is one of those special moments you remember always because you know then without doubt you have made a difference.

As we drive away, there is no chatter over the radio – we are all reflecting on this experience and too busy sending silent best wishes and private prayers to baby Saeed and his mother. It has been a good day

on the road (and in the river) in this remote corner of Afghanistan.

Major Dewes revisited the hospital two weeks later, and he and his troops were relieved to hear both mother and baby had recovered. And not only that, in typical no-frills Afghan fashion, they had returned to their village on the back of a donkey. ■

This story first appeared in *Army News*. Reproduced by kind favour. Major Dewes, of Ngati Porou, is currently in charge of the *NZ Army Territorial Force* in Auckland.

except “Cool man!” and “Way to go!” She’s younger, long hair, naively cheerful, a tight shirt, tight skirt. “Happy Christmas,” were her first words, and I realised she had more than a turkey in the oven.

Albie comes back for a bucket and mop to clean the woolshed floor. “They’re going to scrub it,” he says. “We’ll need some detergent. Disinfectant.” He waits, hoping I’ll back down.

“You know where it is.” I point to the laundry. “Make sure you bring it back.”

By the time he’s put it all together, the new batch of date scones is ready and I put a few in a bag in the bucket.

“They’ll love those,” he says, and away he goes. I wonder if he’s fed the dogs and shifted the lambs to the top paddock, or is he expecting me to do that.

After that he must have gone off to his farm chores because it’s the young couple who return the bucket and mop. “Thanks for the breads,” the girl says.

“Scones,” I tell her. “Date scones.”

“Whatever,” says the boy. “Cool stuff. Big change from baked beans.”

I turn to the girl. “Surely you’re eating more than baked beans. You need a healthy balanced diet for – for your condition.”

The boy shrugs, “Oh yeah, man. We do all that health stuff.”

“Fruit and yoghurt,” she says. “Bananas. I got a craving for bananas, but we’ve run out. Thanks for the lend of the cleaning gear.”

“You’re all set up in the woolshed?”

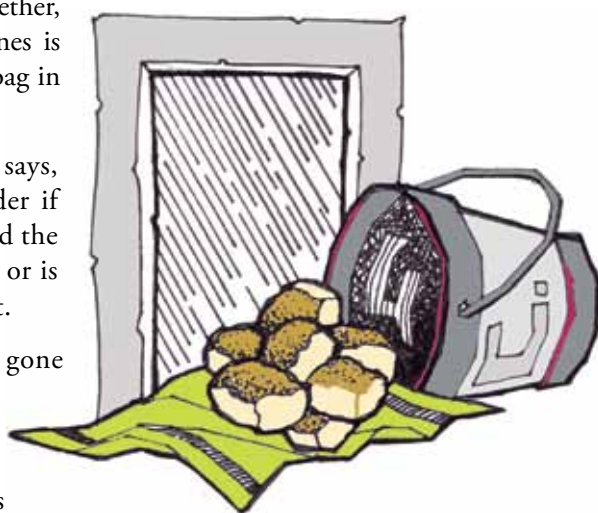
“Oh yeah, cool man,” he says. “Tent’s drying. Nice of you guys. See you.”

They walk away, holding hands like children – and I feel despair for them and others like them who are

so careless about commitment and new life. You’d think Nature would know better than to have kittens bearing kittens. The thought of them spooning baked beans out of a can, turns me cold.

I look through the pantry loaded up for Christmas, and fill a wine box with the kind of stuff she should be eating: muesli, milk powder, dates and raisins and nuts, a couple of tins of ham, a spare cake, a bag of dried banana chips and some fresh stuff from the garden.

Albie’s not around so I walk down there myself, through the sheep



gate and up the ramp to the top floor of the woolshed. Well, I know I’m not carrying a winning Lotto ticket, but they could say more. They go casually through the box, saying “Cool” and “Thanks”, and then the boy said out of the blue, “Got any rat bait?”

“What?”

And she says, “Rats freak me out.”

“I don’t know. Albie might have some. I think there might be traps. In the garden shed. I’ll have a look.”

“Don’t want you to go to any trouble,” she says.

I notice that they’ve set themselves up in the corner near the smoko room, and they’ve spread the tent and sleeping bags on the rails of the sheep pen. “Your sleeping bags got wet too?” I ask.

“They’ll be dry by tonight,” the boy says.

I get the impression they’re kids not used to much conversation because their words are as scarce as summer rain, just a few spots here and there. But they do talk a bit about her parents in Rangiora and how her dad is going to get him a job on a building site. It’s a relief to know she’s been to a doctor and had a scan.

“Boy or girl, it’s going to be called *River*,” she says. “We were camping by a river when we got pregnant. Have you got any children?”

“Four”, I tell her. “Two boys and a two girls, all grown up.”

The boy grins. “Cool man!” he says. “Way to go!”

Back at the house, I rummage through the shed: no rat traps, no bait, although we’ve known since we lost the cat, there’s been a big infestation of rats in the woolshed, so bad they chewed through the bottom of the metal coffee pot in the smoko room.

When Albie comes in for lunch, I talk to him about it.

He says, “I meant to get more rat bait last trip to town.”

“Did you know their sleeping bags are still damp?”

He nods over corned beef and salad.

“If it were just those two – but there’s the baby. Albie, I think they’ll have to come up to the house.”

He looks up, his eyes going soft, daft beggar. “I’ll fix up the beds in the sleepout,” he says.

“Don’t worry,” I tell him. “I’ve got it worked out. We’ll go in the sleepout and they can have our room.” I reach for the salad dressing. “Remember when I was pregnant, how I always needed a good night’s sleep?” ■

*Author and spiritual director
Joy Cowley lives and works in Wellington*

Dear God



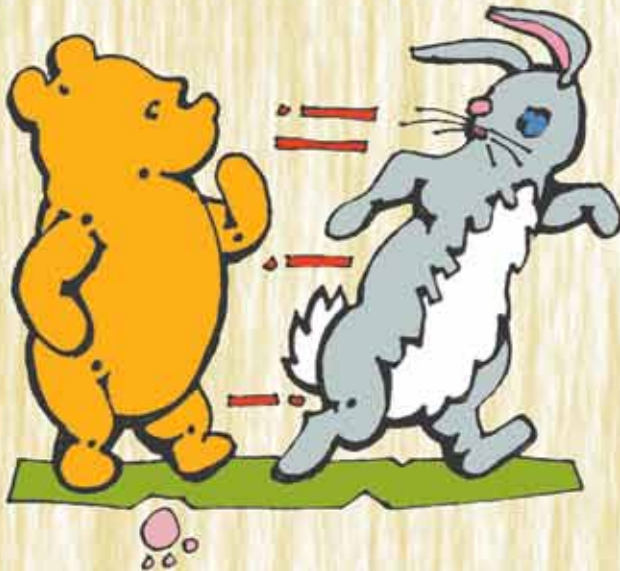
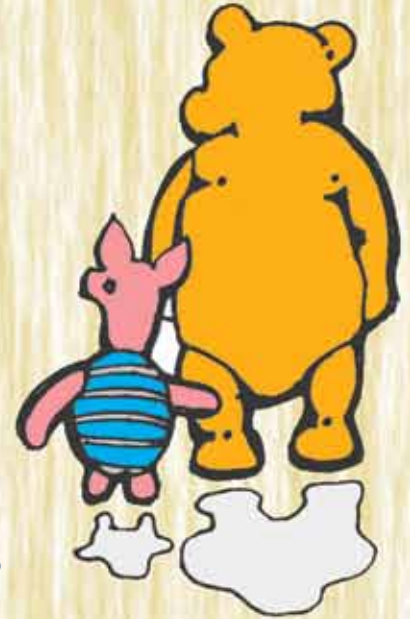
Pooh's

As you know I'm a bear with very little brains. Since I'm stuffed with fluff, I'm not sure I know how to pray to you. So I asked my friends for help.

Piglet was very concerned that I not pray wrong. He wouldn't want me to make you mad. But I told him it was OK.

A God who gave us the *Hundred Acre Wood* to play in and heaps of bees to make honey had to be very nice.

So I thought to myself we should thank you for the wonderful world you have given us full of so many good things.



Next I asked to help.

He said he was the very best person to ask to do something so important, but he didn't have time because all of his friends and relations were coming for dinner and he hadn't done the shopping yet.

And I thought that maybe caring for those we love is a prayer. So we want to thank you for our family and friends and ask that you help us always to be loving and kind to them.

As I thought about kind things parents, teachers, and friends like Christopher Robin do for us, I bumped into **Eeyore**. I said, "Good morning." He asked, "Is it?" I said, "Yes, I've been asked to write a prayer". "That's nice, I guess," he said. "Can you pray for lost things." I said, "I guess so, what have you lost?" "My tail," he said sadly. "My thistle breakfast doesn't taste very good without it."

"Oh, poor Eeyore," I said, "I will help you look for it."

Perhaps prayer is doing something to make things right. If so, you answered our prayer.



Prayer

Clay Nelson



Since we were there I thought I would ask **Owl** how to pray. I told him I wasn't very sure if I was praying with the right words because I didn't know any long ones yet. He told me I was right to come to him because prayer is very important. He told me using the right words is difficult and spelling them correctly is even harder, but the best prayers don't use words at all. That answer made my brains hurt.

I wondered if humming a little hum would be a good prayer? He thought, "Maybe." I remembered hums I hummed about going on an explore to find the north pole or looking for heffalumps or pretending to be a cloud. Owl thought humming about being curious, doing new things, and using my imagination sounded like pretty good prayers to him.

If so, maybe I'm a pretty good prayer hummer for a bear with very little brains. God, I'm glad you like hums.

Just as I was wondering how long a prayer should be because I was getting a little hungry, **Tigger** bounced by so I asked him. He just kept bouncing with a big smile on his face. "Oh, bother," I said, but then I just had to laugh at how much fun he was having just being himself.

I thought to myself is loving and being myself a prayer? I think maybe it is, so I'm going to finish this prayer so I can start a new one by having a smackerel of honey.

Praying sure makes my tummy rumble. Eating honey is what I do best and what I enjoy most.

I asked **Christopher Robin** if it is OK to thank you God that my honey pot is full? He just hugged me tight and said, "Silly old bear."

Amen



Wanted: Santa Claus

*For a London apartment store
the calibre of Santa Claus poses a serious economic challenge.
Andrew Nugent's hero rises to the occasion*

That is what the notice in the shop window said. It was still saying it four days later. After the weekend, the notice was still there. I was almost sorry for them. "WOT NO SANTA!" as they would have said during the war. Not that I was around during the war – not by a long chalk – but I had read about it at school in one of those jolly folders that try to recreate atmosphere. Such-fun-as-we-had-during-the-Second-World-War! sort of thing.

So why the dearth of Santa Claus aspirants? The money that the store was offering was probably insufficient. Whatever the kiddies think of Santa Claus, he is likely to be little esteemed in commercial circles as a provider of goods and services. Hence his meagre emoluments. Another disincentive could be the need to dress up in a red tracksuit, pixiepointed slippers and white whiskers. In recent times people have grown more sensitive about their image. It's the If-the-lads-saw-me-now syndrome kicking in. I am told that dockers are demanding embarrassment money for having to unload lavatory bowls from ships at Southampton.

I reconnoitred. They did actually have a stopgap Santa Claus, but he was clearly a *pis aller*, as the French say vulgarly, and how! He was about 108 in the shade. I reasoned that, if they still had the notice in the window begging for a Santa – any Santa – they must have been doubtful of the present incumbent's chances of surviving until Christmas Eve. Think of the damper, if he fell down dead amongst all the tinsel and goblins and reindeers and things. Not to speak of the children, because he was fat too. If he collapsed suddenly in a heap, he might have crushed three or four kids on his way to Toyland, or wherever deceased Santas go.

Mind you, I am not indulging in crude ageism here. The fact is that this particular man was not at all right for the part of Santa Claus. He had huge, horn-rimmed, bifocal glasses on the tip of his nose, which had a permanent drip like a leaky tap. It was also bulbous, bright scarlet and criss-crossed with spidery black veins – as in whiskey at all seasons of the year, and not as in Christmas cheer only at Christmas time.

Besides, this Santa was not, emphatically not, sweet-talking the children. In my hearing, he called one little boy with freckles and a bad stammer a "stupid moron". He called another a "little brat", and he hit a third youngster a resounding smack on the backside. Besides, again, his fingernails were filthy, and he was giving the children indiscriminately pink and blue parcels, although everyone knows that the pink parcels are meant for little girls and the blue parcels for little boys.

The last straw was when a fond mamma

pointed out to him his mistake about the parcels and he called her a "stupid cow". Stupid seemed to be a favourite word with him. The fond mamma complained to the management. Management, who had obviously heard more and even worse things in the past against this particular Santa Claus, decided, at last, that they had heard enough. This time, he had really been a bridge too far.

To the consternation of great numbers of children, who seemed to have spontaneously generated just in time to be consternated, Santa was unceremoniously stood down. He did not go quietly. A sustained flow of coarse language emanated from the lips of this Santa, so recently declared *emeritus*. A surprising number of these expletives were clearly familiar, if not perhaps fully understood, by the clever little darlings. Half of them laughed delightedly, and half of them wept. More little boys wept, and more little girls laughed; which may show that little girls mature earlier than little boys. Personally, I wouldn't know anything about that.

When the burly commissioner, who normally stood at the front door of the store doing nothing in particular except looking impressive, had been summoned urgently to do something about Santa Claus, Santa Claus himself evidently decided that the time had come to fold his tent. In a final flurry of imprecations, he stomped off indignantly, discarding his robes of office as he went in a most unseemly fashion.

His beard came off as he rounded *handbags*, his bobble hat was jettisoned as he breasted *ladies' underwear*. By *fur*

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coats, he was completely undressed, at least in so far as he had dressed up for the part in the first place. The pixie-pointed slippers alone remained incongruously as his only footwear until he got to wherever he was going.

Sede vacante, as they say in the Vatican. So, what next? The tear was really in the eye now. The time had come for me to make my move. Guessing, rightly, that the manager's office was on the top floor, I ran up the stairs, walked right in, and applied for Santa's job. Whatever the money was like, and – as already remarked – it certainly could not be princely or pensionable, I could use it. Besides, I love children. It would be fun.

They stared at me in blank amazement. "What did you say?"

I repeated what I had already said loud and clear: that I was applying for a job as Santa. I added 'Claus' and even a collateral 'Father Christmas', to make my meaning unmistakable. There must be no wiggle room left. I was throwing down the gauntlet. With just nine shopping days to go before it was all over for another year, the big store found itself without a Father Christmas. Its management were bereft. Then into their office came the answer, but would they be daring enough to take it?

They looked at each other, back at me, at each other again – they being two: a man and a woman. "You can't be serious," they both said in harmony.

I said, "I am. Why not?" The man said, "Because..." – and then seemed to run out of ideas.

"You're too tall," the woman said. "I mean small," she amended hastily.

They were grasping at straws. I maintained a dignified silence. That got on their nerves because they were so blatantly not giving me their real reasons.

The man tried again. "You're too young. Santa has got to be at least middle-aged. I mean what age are

you? You look about 15. It just won't do. I'm sorry."

"I am 23," I said sternly. "I am currently doing research for a doctorate at the university."

"What university?" the woman asked.

"London," I replied curtly.

"What are you studying?" That was the woman again. She was like a footballer trying to waste time until the end of the half.

"Physics," I answered. The man uttered the holy name in castrato tones, which, in the context of our present discussion, was a bit of a *non sequitur*. Perhaps he was afraid that, thanks to London University, I had acquired enough physics to launch a nuclear attack if I didn't get the job. I decided, therefore, to make a first strike, in the shape of a smart bomb.

"It's because I'm a woman, isn't it?"

There was an awkward silence while they meditated unhappily about equal opportunity, gay rights, racial discrimination, women who needed to wear headscarves, and all the other landmines where employers could run the risk of losing an arm or a leg.

"Well, yes," the fellow said, coming clean. "Santa Claus is a male part – like Hamlet or Jack and the Beanstalk," he added, giving examples helpfully.

"Loads of male parts in pantomime are played by girls," I said. "Prince Charming, Buttons, even Jack and the Beanstalk."

He seemed shaken by this argument, but he rallied. "Those are all pretty-boy parts. Santa Claus is all male, wall to wall. He is fat, middle-aged, red in the face – and you've got to wear a beard, for crying out loud!"

"I can wear a beard too," I shot back, "and a beard covers a multitude of whatever. The children would never know the difference."

"And what about the parents?" the woman asked.

"If the kids are happy, the parents will be happy, and I guarantee that I'll make the kids far happier than that gorgon you were employing until half-an-hour ago."

The man nodded. "Well, you couldn't do worse than him; that's true!" But they had not emptied out the bottom of their sack even yet, and I knew it. It was almost amusing to watch



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▷▷ them desperately avoiding saying the obvious. But truth will out sooner or later and the woman could contain herself no longer.

"It is also because you are..."

She faltered on the awful word. I put her out of her pain. "It's because I'm black, isn't it? Well, so what?"

I am, in fact, the blackest person I know. In a different, less provincial culture that could be taken for a mark of beauty. Not on Thameside or, certainly, not commonly. I actually felt sorry for them. They both looked like they were about to cry. I spoke to them soothing and encouraging words.

"People will get used to it, and the children couldn't care less." I added as an afterthought, "You know, the next Pope will probably be black."

They looked at each other, as if they each expected the other to be sick. They both began to say that Santa Claus was not at all the same thing as the Pope. I brushed their objections aside.

"The Pope and Santa Claus are exactly the same thing – or it's the same difference anyhow."

I don't know what the second part of my proposition was meant to mean, but it sounded good. And I had a point. Santa Claus and the Pope both provide a service. A benefaction or a benediction. What is the difference? They continued to argue, but weakly. The point was that they had nobody down there now. Santa's Castle was locked, and the shop was losing several hundred pounds an hour. Besides, quite frankly, they were impressed by

my word-power, my dialectical skills, London University and the mere prospect of a doctorate in physics. Snobbery is still alive and well, and living in London Town – and, at least sometimes, it is a real force for good.

For the nine shopping days that were left until Christmas, I could imagine them positioning the commissionaire strategically to whisper in parents'

black and beautiful!" That produced blank faces. I added: "You know, *Amo, Amas, Amat*. Yo! Is there anyone in there?" There wasn't.

I took my place in the early afternoon, wearing the red bonnet and cloak, the furry bootees and the white beard of my predecessor in office, and not enjoying the pong he had left me as souvenir and inheritance. The children

loved me. One little girl put her arms around my neck and said, "I know who you are; you are Melchior's wife." I said, "Who is Melchior?"

"He is one of the three wise kings who came to visit Baby Jesus. And he was black, and you are his wife." I don't know how it would grab Melchior to have a wife with a beard, but the story stuck in the oral tradition of the shop, and is even now being written down for the first time.

The parents thought the whole thing was a hoot. Word spread like wildfire.

I was interviewed by the BBC. My store made an average of £1,000 more a day on Santa's Castle than it had ever made before and nearly £2,000 more

per day than under the reign

of my bad-tempered predecessor in office. To be fair to management, they were delighted, and they gave me a handsome bonus.

I bet you that, next year, at least six London stores will have young black girls for their Santa Clauses. And I bet you, too, that the next Pope will be a woman. ■

Andrew Nugent OSB is a monk of Glenstal Abbey, Co Limerick, Ireland, and a crime writer



ears: "Actually the black bird has a doctorate in physics." The deterrent would be sufficient, "She'll nuke you all if you're not nice!"

They tried to make me paint or powder my face white. I said, "Where I come from white is the colour of mourning. Besides, *Nigra sum et formosa*, as it aptly says in the *Song of Songs* – I am

Benedictus

Paul Andrews

A blessing is not something objective that can be learned like a poem or handed on like paper money. It is personal. If I bless somebody, part of me goes out in the blessing. If it is real; it is not easily given.

In the first book of the Bible (Gen.32,27), Jacob wrestles all night with God, and as dawn is breaking, he cries: I will not let you go unless you bless me. God responds with a blessing, changing Jacob's name to Israel. This was an important event, as were God's blessing of the patriarch Abraham, and Isaac's blessing of his son Jacob. You remember the powerful poetry of Isaac blessing Jacob:

Then his father Isaac said to Jacob, *Come near and kiss me, my son*. So he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his garments, and blessed him, and said,

Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the LORD has blessed.

May God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine.

Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you.

Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you.

Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you!

Old and young

When Jacob spoke this blessing, he was an old man, within sight of death. We old people know the feeling of impotence that comes with the failing of physical powers and the slowing down of mind and memory. We are tempted to criticize and disparage, and point out what is wrong with the world. That is too easy a role to play. Giving out about the state of things is not a Christian occupation.

But blessing is. We still have the power to approve and bless, and it carries more weight than we might imagine. Children who hear constant rebuke and criticism from their parents, gravitate to grandparents who are happy to bless and approve of them.

That sort of approval is meat and drink to a child. It is not blinkered. Granny does not imagine that young Bill is an angel in all his behaviour. She knows that he, like his parents, is fallible. But her blessing tells him that despite that behaviour he is precious, treasured, good to have around.

Approval

There are times when blessing carries particular weight. I knew a father who sent his sons to boarding school. At the end of holidays, as they went off to catch the train, they came individually to their dad and he solemnly laid his hands on them and blessed them. They went off knowing that he approved of them, treasured them. You could see it in the sons. They took themselves seriously; their self-esteem was high and solid.

The Bible tends to point to fathers' blessing. Clearly mothers bless too, maybe less in words than in caresses and care. When a girl is married, it is often her father who walks her up the aisle and entrusts her to her new husband. But I have known girls who insisted that they walk up the aisle between their two parents, who have both had such a part in bringing her to this day, and whose approval remains important as they start a new life.

It is not only parents or grandparents whose blessing counts. When I bless a person I am saying: I approve of you, I wish you well. That can carry weight when it comes from a friend, a teacher, a poor person (Blessed are the poor), or a child. The blessing need not be in words. A touch, a kiss, a smile, can convey as much.

Blessing oneself

What do we mean by blessing ourselves? We do it with a gesture, with holy water, or with words; and it is always asking God to be with us, and approve of us.

Ten years ago at the funeral of Princess Diana, there was one unrehearsed gesture that all the cameras caught and replayed again and again. As the gun-carriage with Diana's body passed the five princes, Charles Spencer, Diana's brother, solemnly and reverently blessed himself with the sign of the cross.

Only he and God really knew what that meant. It was certainly a prayer, an invocation, a visible act of faith, something intensely personal in the middle of the splendid public liturgy. It was a reminder of how precious and universal that gesture is: to bless yourself in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Crisis and emotion

You spot people blessing themselves in all sorts of situations: absent-mindedly on the way into church; solemnly at the end of Mass; in delighted gratitude, as when a footballer scores a goal or a runner wins a race; poignantly, in the case of Charles Spencer or mourners at a grave.

In extreme sickness, when the brain can no longer form words, the only way we can turn to God may be with our feeble fingers, forming a cross. This sign can grow hurried and thoughtless through custom, but in moments of crisis and deep emotion, there are few gestures as rich in meaning as blessing ourselves.

But bless others too. Fellow-ancients, we may feel there is not much more we can do in this world. But let our mark on the people around us be benign. We can still bless, and it makes a difference. ■

Paul Andrews is a Jesuit priest and psychotherapist semi-retired in Dublin

remember remember the ninth of november

Kristallnacht

Paul Oestreicher

Berliners went wild that day, 19 years ago. The impossible had happened. The Wall had come down. It was 9 November 1989. I wasn't there. But I was there on that same date in 1938, 70 years ago. Germans went wild on that day too, but that time it was not with joy. They let loose an orgy of destruction. The synagogues were set ablaze. Jewish shops were smashed up and pillaged. Jewish men were rounded up, beaten up, some to death, many sent to concentration camps.

What eventually followed was unthinkable. The streets that night were strewn with broken glass. The Germans called it *Kristallnacht*, the night of broken, not glass but crystal, to symbolise the 'ill-gotten Jewish riches' Germans would now take from them. Never mind the many Jewish poor. Never mind that Jews like my grandparents were Germans as deeply patriotic as any of their neighbours.

My Christian father, born to Jewish parents, was in 1938 forbidden, as all Jews were, to continue working as a doctor. From a small provincial town we fled to Berlin with one aim, common now to thousands of Jews, to find asylum anywhere beyond the reach of Hitler. An only child, six years old, I was given refuge by kindly non-Jewish friends. Life in their basement flat bore no horrors for me. I simply wondered why I was not allowed to go to school.

My parents had gone underground. My non-Jewish mother had resisted the pressure to divorce her husband and so to get out of a marriage defined by the Nazis as *Rassenschande*, 'racial disgrace'. My father, hoping not to be picked up on the street as many were, trudged from consulate to consulate, wearing the miniatures of his two iron crosses won in the First World War. Ruefully he said: "In 1918, as a German officer, I fled from the French. Twenty years later, I am fleeing from the Germans".

Now, a visa was priceless. The state had confiscated our bank account. We could not bribe our way to safety. With that

visa, Nazi Germany would be able to say good riddance. If *Kristallnacht* had a definable purpose beyond a pure explosion of hate it was to make the Jews go away. But, except for the few who had somehow rescued great wealth, the world did not want them.

The day of destruction

The day of the great pogrom started much like any other. But a rare treat was in store. My mother came to take me for a walk. As a non-Jew she was not directly threatened. Berlin was bathed in autumn sunshine. We walked to the

Taentzienstrasse, Berlin's Regent Street. For me, the big city was full of wonder – until terror struck.

Trucks pulled up at exact intervals. Black jack-booted men wielding wooden clubs scattered up and down the street and began to smash the windows of the Jewish-owned department stores. My mother grabbed hold of me. We fled. I was soon back in a safe place. My parents left Berlin before the day was out

and were hidden in Leipzig by a sympathetic member of the Nazi Party. In times of crisis, people are not always what they seem to be.

The search for asylum now became more desperate. It took us another three months. Many others were not so lucky. The nations met at Evian on the Lake of Geneva to discuss the plight of Germany's Jews but shrank from their responsibility. No effective policy emerged. At least the Australian delegate was frank: "We have no race problem and we don't want to import one". He and many others around the world bought into Hitler's fanciful racial doctrine. Anti-semitism was not just a German aberration. "Why should we import a problem the Germans are so keen to get rid of?" By early 1939 Britain felt 'we have done our bit'. President Roosevelt firmly refused to increase the American quota.

Our choice narrowed down to Venezuela and New Zealand. The New Zealand Government's attitude was like that of



its large neighbour. Jewish applicants were told explicitly: “We do not think you will integrate into our society. If you insist on applying, expect a refusal”. My father did insist. The barriers were high. Either you had a job to come to, at a time of high unemployment, or you had to produce two wealthy guarantors and in addition bring with you, at today’s values, £2000 per head. We were only able to take that hurdle thanks to the generosity of a remarkable Frenchman, a friend of a distant relative. This was the sort of money most refugees could not possibly raise.

At a total of one thousand German, Austrian and Czech Jews, the New Zealand Government drew the line. We were lucky. My grandmother, who hoped to follow us was not. It was too late. She did not survive the Holocaust. Like many others, she chose suicide rather than the cattle-truck journey to Auschwitz. Britain, thanks to a group of persistent lobbyists, at the last moment agreed to take a substantial number of Jewish children. Most of them were never to see their parents again. Their ultimate contribution to British life was significant, now that the stories of the *kindertransport* are being told.

The lesson today

I tell my story on this anniversary not just for its historic and personal interest, but because it brings into sharp focus the far from humane attitude of Britain, the European Community and many other rich countries to the asylum seekers of today. True, there are now international conventions that did not exist in 1938, but they are seldom obeyed in spirit or in letter. The German sentiment ‘send them away’, has given way in Britain and in many other parts of Europe to ‘send them back’, sometimes to more persecution and even death. Lessons from history are seldom learned.

Dr Peter Selby, President of the *National Council of Independent Monitoring Boards*, has written with justifiable anger of his experience of our immigration removal centres at ports and airports which are prisons in all but name. We lock up children, separated from their parents, hold detainees for indefinite periods, many made ill by the experience. Those who advocate tougher immigration policies are accountable, writes Dr Selby, for the coercive instruments – destitution and detention – that are already being used and will be used even more to enforce it. This is not quite our 1938, but the parallels are deeply disquieting.

An even sadder consequence of this story of anti-Jewish inhumanity is that many of the survivors who fled to Palestine did so at the expense of the local people, the Palestinians, half of whom were driven into exile and their villages destroyed. Their children and children’s children live in the refugee camps that now constitute one aspect of the Israeli-Palestinian impasse that embitters Islam and threatens world peace: all that, a consequence of Nazi terror and indirectly of the Christian world’s persecution of the Jewish people over many centuries.

With fear bred into every Jewish bone, it is tragic that today many Israelis say of the Palestinians, as once the

Germans said of them: “the only solution is to send them away”. However understandable this reaction may be, to do that, even to think it, is a denial of all that is good in Judaism. To create another victim people is to sow the seeds of another Holocaust. When, in the ’30s, Bishop Bell of Chichester pleaded in vain for active British support for the German opposition to Hitler, many accused him of being anti-German. The opposite was true. He did not tar all Germans with the Nazi brush. Today those of us who offer our solidarity to the minority of Israelis working – in great isolation – for justice for the Palestinian people, are often accused of being anti-semitic. The opposite is true. It is a tragic parallel.

The ninth of November is deeply etched into German history. On that day in 1918 the Kaiser abdicated. Germany had lost the First World War. Five years later to the day Hitler’s followers were shot down in the streets of Munich. The Nazis year by year celebrated their martyrs. Then came 1938: *Kristallnacht*. Berlin’s Holocaust Memorial and others in many German towns and villages where once the synagogue stood, are mute reminders of what began that day. But as I have tried to show, the significance and the shame of that day stretches far beyond those who set the synagogues alight. Who, we need to ask, are the victims now, both near and far, and what is our response? ■

Canon Dr Paul Oestreicher, former chair of Amnesty International UK was born in Germany and raised in New Zealand. This article first appeared in The Guardian, London

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O wise Ones

O wise Ones,
 What would have led you in this land?
 Perhaps the pohutukawa, painted red,
 Gnarled knots of roots alongside golden sand,
 Shade on the journey, from the relentless sun.
 Or was it the tī tree, in early flower,
 Herald of a long hot summer and incarnated hour,
 Lonely sentinel among browning hillsides,
 Spotted with sheep to be shepherd to you.
 Encouraging your journey, dancing before you,
 Around flowering flax, reddish arms waving greeting,
 The fantail twitters, the tui hoot:
 Karanga mai, karanga mai,
 This land greets your greatness little and least,
 Haere mai ki te whare o te ao,
 haere mai, haere mai, karanga mai.

And what gifts did you bring, taonga to honour,
 Greenstone to gladden and three baskets of wisdom:
 Knowledge, understanding and perseverance in life.
 And along with these riches some bitterness too,
 Perhaps a copy of Te Tiriti for you.
 For we people know suffering, sorrow and shame,
 Wrongs performed sometimes in ignorance,
 and others to blame
 The hope that this carries of peoples different yet one
 Of a peace that can reign when true listening is done.
 And in this we will see, God, here among us,
 Revealed in the other and revealed in me too:
 Karanga mai, karanga mai
 My being greets your greatness, little and least
 Haere mai ki te whare o te ao,
 Haere mai, haere mai, karanga mai.

Ruth Mather

a community of equal disciples – what the church could be

Mary, the First Disciple: A Guide for Transforming Today's Church

Marie Azzarello CND

Published by Novalis

Price: \$49.90, pp200

Review: Sandra Winton

Over the past year I have been involved in processes of self-reflection and restructuring by church communities both as parishioner and facilitator. The need to reorganise is driven in this country by the shortage of priests and this motivation exerts considerable pressure on the discussions. I find myself thinking that were it not for the prospect of a greatly reduced number of clergy this would not be happening. I am reminded of the senior sister who shocked my youthful enthusiasm for the changes of Vatican II by stating her belief that “one day this period of experimentation will be over and we will all go back to the way we have always lived”. If in the next two years there were to be an influx into our seminaries, many, I suspect, would sigh with relief that we did not have to make all these changes.

But as I participate in these discussions, I hear other voices too. These voices, both lay and clerical, are eager for a new kind of church structure, one in which ministry is shared in a new way and participation is not just allowed “in order to take the burden off father” but through a belief that the Christian community might be renewed in a more inclusive vision. This book addresses such a vision. The writer does this through considering the role of Mary, which is inseparable from that of the earliest communities of believers.

Marie Azzarello begins by considering Pentecost, the birth of the church. She looks at the different versions of how and to whom this happened as they enshrine understandings about the place of the twelve, of Mary, of women and of the wider body of disciples. She points out that while there is clear evidence in the early texts of the equal involvement of men and women in decision making and in receiving the spirit and mission, “throughout the centuries, iconography and art, liturgy, church documents, and church practice have largely ignored or downplayed that the Spirit at Pentecost was given to the community of women and men gathered, not to the twelve alone”. These claims are very carefully backed by scholarship, biblical, historical and archaeological, well footnoted and annotated for those who might want to use this book for serious study.

Acknowledging that Mary as the model of perfect discipleship “has been an unattractive, unattainable model for many Christians, especially women”, this author explores anew the biblical memory of Mary. Focusing on the Annunciation and Visitation she draws out a new vision of faith and discipleship. Her central thesis is that “this image of discipleship, not constrained by titles or clerical office, would also facilitate the transformation of the Church into a community of equal disciples” She makes a convincing case that this is not only a

useful way of thinking about church communities today but is also strongly aligned with the theology and practice of the early church.

Exploring the practice of the early communities Marie Azzarello presents to us a group of people having to make important decisions and steps in the dark as they adjusted to an evolving membership and an evolving context. She then relates this to the challenges and choices of our times.

This book offers a theology of church and a spirituality of church that could enrich and deepen the current reflections. The author asserts the value of creating an ‘upper room’ in our lives and in our communities in which we may discern the challenges before us, the value of small communities of prayer and action, the equal honour of all vocations and a ‘round’ rather than hierarchical church structure.

Marie Azzarello is an adult educator in Montreal, a writer as well as giver of retreats and workshops. She currently works with associate members of her religious congregation ‘in eight countries on four continents’. Her book is both inspirational and spiritual as well as academic and educational. I recommend it for any reader and for group study in church communities where men and women, lay and clergy sit together to seek a way ahead. ■

Educate a girl, and you educate a whole village!



Our Jesuits have told us that they have seen the following slogan written on the houses by the women of the village: “Educate a boy and you educate one man, educate a girl and you change a whole village”. It is true! A girl who has been to school is transformed into a woman who changes her family and even her village.

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*CARDINAL: the life and work of
Reginald John Delargey*

by Nicholas Reid

Catholic Diocese of Auckland 2008

Review: Tom Cloher

This reviewer must confess to having read this book twice. First, curiosity swept me along as the cast of real life characters and their observers made for fascinating reading. Nicholas Reid presents the situations confronting Cardinal Delargey and his associates, then calls in witnesses (more than 60 priests and lay people) to comment on them. It is adroitly done. Understandably, some witnesses seem more pertinent than others but that will doubtless vary according to the perception of the particular reader.

Cardinal Delargey had a long-standing national profile on account of initiatives in the field of Catholic Action, but most of his life was centred upon the Auckland diocese and there are some rich insights into its workings; frank, too – all you might have wished to know but were too polite to ask.

While the biography proceeds generally in linear fashion, Reid does not hesitate to connect particular events with later developments for completeness sake. This works well. There are five sections of well reproduced and identified photographs that illuminate the record.

Reid acknowledges Bishop Patrick Dunn for his financial support. Readers could do the same, as this is a contribution to New Zealand Catholic history of some consequence. It is thorough, balanced, and perceptive. (A minor quibble – that Bishop Snedden's panegyric at Cardinal Delargey's funeral was not reproduced in its entirety.)

My second reading of the book was more reflective. In terms of direct episcopal authority there were just four years as Bishop of Auckland, followed by four and a half as Cardinal Archbishop of Wellington. What were the alternative sources of influence

that established him as an eminent churchman? Achievements there are in plenty but in sum they beg the same question. What enabled him to accomplish so much when his time of episcopal power was so limited?

One notable source had to be his almost unique relationship with Bishop James Michael Liston. An astute priest observed that a few Auckland clergy (like Ted Forsman and John Flanagan) could make Bishop Liston smile, but Reg Delargey could make him laugh!

Their relationship was variously formed. The 20-year-old student had hardly arrived in Rome to commence his studies than began a stream of correspondence. Bishop Liston was a veteran correspondent; he loved letters and reports. Reg became his protégé. When Reg completed his doctorate the Bishop unusually agreed that he should spend three months doing a study tour of Europe during which he met Canon Cardijn, founder of the Young Christian Workers, an encounter that deeply impressed him. When he finally arrived back in Auckland the Bishop met him at the boat.

They delighted in each other's company. Reg had a profound respect for his bishop. As the years sped by in Auckland (there was never any likelihood that Reg would finish up in some isolated post) some clergy, especially the seniors, became critical of his ease of access. It gave them an additional reason to resent the Catholic Youth Movement with which he was becoming increasingly identified. Paradoxically it was the total support of Delargey from his Bishop that was CYM's best insurance against its opponents within and beyond Auckland.

The closest to a falling out between them was the issue of Fr Ernest Simmons' continuance as editor of the weekly paper *Zealandia*. Bishop Liston considered that Simmons' views were too liberal and he was putting the paper

at risk. He obviously wrote to Delargey seeking his opinion. Delargey replied at some length including the rather blunt statement "my information and my observations do not match yours". Notwithstanding his eloquent defence of a talented and highly regarded editor, Simmons' dismissal proceeded amidst considerable controversy. Delargey said no more, but when he finally succeeded Bishop Liston he promptly replaced the rather conservative editor who had succeeded Simmons.

There must have been many issues that Delargey resolved by submission. It was an indispensable key to their success of their relationship over time. It demanded complete loyalty, which in turn assumed a discipline and spirituality equal to the task. You do not have to join a monastery to graduate in the school of obedience. When the Apostolic Delegate invited recommendations for future bishops, Liston responded with an enthusiastic endorsement of Delargey. But when later the Delegate forwarded a list of imperfections that some diocesan clergy had identified in Reg, Liston rather testily replied labelling such criticisms as "unbalanced and without substance."

The other source that distinguished Delargey was his personal sanctity. Not that that was obvious, but the evidence is striking when you look closely. Again, the first instance involves Bishop Liston, who informed him that he was to be Director of the *Catholic Youth Movement*, responsible for all of its programmes, but there was no budget for it! It would have to be self-sustaining, including salaries, cars and office expenses.

Enter the *Lightning Raffle*, run each week from a 100 hotels and retail outlets, most of which had been visited by Reg personally. "The energy of the man was boundless" commented one participant. A lesser being might well have pondered whether he needed a doctorate from Rome to do this kind of thing.

Delargey and his staff were working literally for their lives, and apparently the wages were always paid on time. In the midst of this staff members were being formed as lay apostles as Delargey listened to their concerns, encouraged them, delegated jobs to them to develop their confidence, ready to work with them as occasion arose. Jim Moran recalls that he and Delargey used to clean up the hall after the CYM dance; "he would come out with a couple of brooms, toss one to me and declare, 'it looks like you and me again', and we'd sweep the hall".

In many such ways he forged influential relationships with the youth of Auckland and beyond. At one time it was estimated that he knew 200 young people well, and he remained faithful to them, visiting them in important moments in their lives, keeping touch with them in other parts of the country or even overseas as opportunities arose. Demanding though this must have been, he did not set boundaries.

When he became aware of the needs of the Polish refugees, he voluntarily became their chaplain, thus involving himself in another chain of demands. The fruits are revealed in the recorded comments of a young Polish man: "we knew very little English at the time... He held dances at the Pitt St place... always smiling... took a personal and individual interest in everybody and knew all the names".

The other field of personal apostolate was his family. Having lost his beloved mother when he was 15, Reg remained devoted to his father and his five younger sisters including the extended families of the three sisters who married. It is evident that he never missed an opportunity to call in on them. Frequently, it would be unheralded, and after a raft of engagements.

Typical enough would be a call he made in the country where his sister and her husband owned a farm. Arriving, he exclaimed: "I would like two poached

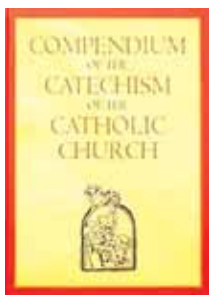
eggs on toast and three hours sleep." After which his brother-in-law adds: "then we would really be ready to talk". It sounds simple, but in practice not so, as family can easily be overlooked in the face of busy schedules unless there is a strong will to ensure it won't be.

Loyalties to the relationships he formed were lifelong, and indicate a level of faith and service well beyond the ordinary. A few weeks before he died he took a train in New York to visit an associate and his wife. They later marvelled that he should have done so, realising that he had really come to say 'good-bye'. In its own simple way this incident reveals the other and fundamental source of Cardinal Delargey's influence: others before self.

He wore his spirituality lightly, always had time for others, and no one ever heard him complain or criticise anyone, no matter what the provocation.

That's an epitaph good enough to justify a biography in any language. ■

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a fine biography and some splendid novels – for 2008

Kathleen Doherty

This year's reading has been a bit like a river – a trickle at the start, a sluggish featureless period in the middle, and an almost overwhelming flood at the end. And in the flood came four books which have to take their place right near the top of my list of significant reads.

After almost 500 years and dozens of histories and biographies, one could be forgiven for thinking that every aspect of Sir Thomas More's life had been explored. But whereas previous works have concentrated on the author of *Utopia* and on the trusted Lord Chancellor who went to the block rather than swear the oath of allegiance accepting the Act of Succession and thereby the validity of Henry VIII's marriage to Anne Boleyn, *A Daughter's Love* by John Guy (Fourth Estate) tells a more intimate, domestic story and brings into prominence the relationship of Thomas More and his favourite daughter, Margaret.

From her earliest days Margaret was schooled in Latin, showing a skill which delighted her father and won the admiration of his great friend, Erasmus, who called her the "ornament of Britain". Along with More's other children she wrote to him almost daily while he was absent from the home on the King's business, and these early letters forged the bond which culminated in "dearest Meg" being his confidante and only regular family visitor during his imprisonment in the Tower. It was Meg who prayed with him, talked seriously and "merrily" with him for hours, and when visits were forbidden managed to have letters smuggled in to him, and his smuggled out to her, letters which reveal the depth of their faith and trust in God, and their great understanding of each other.

On the day he was condemned to death Meg saw him for the last

time, breaking through the guards surrounding him to embrace him and receive the consolation of his last words to her "...do not torment yourself any more. This is God's will. You alone have long known the secrets of my heart."

This loving and loyal daughter had one more honourable duty to perform for her father: four weeks after Thomas More's execution she recovered his skull from Tower Bridge, bribing the bridge-master, and took it home. It was buried with her when she died nine years later, aged only 39.

A Daughter's Love illuminates with great scholarship a significant story in the harsh reality of Tudor England. It is an absorbing and rewarding work.

It is rarely that a novel is both wise and very funny – and when one considers that the alternating narrators of *The Elegance of the Hedgehog* (Gallic Press) are a 54 year-old concierge in an apartment building in Paris and a 12 year-old girl living in one of the apartments who has decided to suicide on her 13th birthday because she has no wish to join the adults in the rat race, it would be reasonable to expect that this one will not be that rare thing. But Muriel Barbery, a Paris-born former teacher of philosophy, now living in Japan, has written what *Le Figaro* has called "the publishing phenomenon of the decade", one of the most whimsical novels one could wish for, and a sympathetic translation from the French is now ensuring that English readers can share in the wisdom this unlikely pair reveal.

Madame Michael has worked hard for 27 years presenting herself as the stereotype of an unlovable concierge. She is dull, dresses dowdily, her television murmurs constantly, playing soap operas. In fact she is immensely cultured, listens to Mozart and Mahler

in the privacy of her behind-the-office apartment, reads Kant and Tolstoy (her cat is named Leo) and thinks that the aria "When I am laid in earth" from Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* is the most beautiful music ever written for the human voice. In addition – and this really appealed – she is an astute and unforgiving critic of grammar: her two-page diatribe on the subject when one of the tenants leaves her a note with a misplaced comma, is a delight.

Upstairs in one of the apartments lives Paloma, disenchanted with the world, precocious, and planning her own death. She keeps a notebook of *Profound Thoughts*, and another *Journal of the Movement of the World*, which reveal her to be startlingly similar to Madame Michael. It is Paloma who sees through the older woman's façade and writes that she has "the elegance of the hedgehog: on the outside, she's covered in quills, a real fortress, but ... on the inside, she has the same simple refinement as the hedgehog: a deceptively indolent little creature, fiercely solitary – and terribly elegant."

The development of these characters, and their interaction with a new-comer to the apartments result in a marvellous novel full of wry observations and insights which bear re-reading and pondering, not least the final *Profound Thought* of Paloma – that often in life "there's a lot of despair, but also the odd moment of beauty, where time is no longer the same... an *always* within *never*".

Reconciliation is the basic theme of two fine novels, one from Ireland, one from the USA, each with an astute understanding of the human condition.

Home, by Marilynne Robinson (Virago Press) is a companion piece

to *Gilead* published four years ago, involving the same people in the same fictional town in Iowa, but concentrating on the Reverend Robert Boughton and the return of his black-sheep son, Jack, after an absence of 20 years. It is a prodigal son story, but with Marilynne Robinson's unique slant on the world and fresh way of seeing everyday things and events. She writes lingeringly and delicately about misunderstanding, regrets, forgiveness, faith, joy in the "dear ordinary". In a slowly-paced and thoughtful novel Jack's spiritual homelessness and rebellion – he was a stranger to his family even when he was young and living with them – takes centre stage. And even though reconciliation with

his father was Jack's intention in coming home, it is the reconciliation with his long-suffering sister, Glory, who has returned before him to care for their dying father, which provides the richness and satisfaction the reader so wishes for them. Jack's leaving again and the arrival shortly of the wife and child he has abandoned, provide Glory with bittersweet thoughts which one senses will be her comfort as she is left to complete the unfinished family business.

In *The Secret Scripture* (faber and faber) Sebastian Barry has given Irish literature a memorable character. Roseanne McNulty is nearing – probably, no-one really knows – her 100th birthday. She lives

in the Roscommon Regional Mental Hospital which is about to close, precipitating the crisis of what is to happen to her.

There are in fact two "secret scriptures" involved, one Roseanne's reminiscences, scribbled in notebooks and hidden under the floorboards in her room, of haunting and traumatic events, and the other the commonplace book of her psychiatrist, whose investigations into his patient's past reveal an answer he was not expecting. Both narrators are united in a disquieting experience, one readers can share and long remember, in a novel of dark events written in often startlingly beautiful and poetic prose. ■

the pathology of terrorism

Blood and Rage: A cultural history of terrorism

by Michael Burleigh

Harper Press 2008, 517 pp.

Review: Jim Elliston

This is a work about terrorism as a career, a culture and a way of life. English historian Michael Burleigh gives a detailed account that spans the past 100-odd years and focuses on life histories and actions rather than the theories which validate them. He traces an increasing cross-infection from one group to another, leading to growing sophistication in planning and execution.

Burleigh defines terrorism as "a tactic primarily used by non-state actors, to create a psychological climate of fear in order to compensate for legitimate political power they do not possess." It can be distinguished from, say, guerrilla warfare, political assassination or economic sabotage, although organisations that practice terror have resorted to these. The 'actors' can be an independent group as well as a hierarchical organisation.

Terrorists come from a variety of backgrounds, ranging from

psychopaths and political or religious zealots to those from privileged backgrounds seeking meaning in life. Ideology is not the prime motivator; it is "a detonator that enables a pre-existing chemical mix to explode." Time and again the stupidity of many of those involved emerges, including the forces of law and order, whose ill-advised reactions frequently gave encouragement to terrorists.

The most pressing contemporary problem is that of Islamic terrorists. The term 'fundamentalist' does not accurately describe them, for Muslims can be likened to Christians in their range of adherence – from the lax, through the moderate and tolerant, to the austere fundamentalist. Some are Islamists, that is, people who want their states to introduce Islamic law, a goal they usually pursue through guns and the ballot box. Within that group are *Salafists*, or followers of the wise founders who surrounded Mohammed, who want to establish Islamic states of an extremely puritanical kind. Among these are *Jihadists*, people who seek to bring about the violent transformation of societies into Islamic states. Most

Jihadists are Salafists, but not all Salafists are Jihadists.

Burleigh offers some insights on how (and how not) to counter terrorism. To use the word 'war' – whether "war on terror" (which is meaningless) or "on terrorism" (which is a sop to populist demands for shows of force) – is to obscure reality. An appropriate analogy would be the containment of a contagious disease that can never be entirely eliminated, any more than governments can destroy international organised crime. A properly funded police, intelligence and military response is essential; but so are undercover operations, informers, propaganda initiatives and so forth, which do not yield instant victories. Also proven effective have been some efforts to de-radicalise potential terrorists.

Burleigh has written a very detailed history of a complex phenomenon now looming as a growing threat to humanity. He is scathing in his analysis of soft-headed liberals whose sentimentality provides support for terrorists. He is equally scathing of thick-headed conservatives who adopt populist and one-size-fits-all approaches. ■

in america a new dawn – but for whom?

*All changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.*
(W.B. Yeats)

As predicted at the beginning of this year, American politics has dominated all other world events culminating in the election of Barack Obama as the next President of the United States. A result with such resonance as to prompt a quote from one of the great poems in the English language. Obama has been universally accepted as the new face of America and rightly applauded for his promise of fundamental and radical change. But what kind of change? Which social class does he represent?

Obama could be viewed as supporting the corporate-élite. After all, he endorsed the Republicans' Wall Street bailout and appointed Warren Buffet as his economic adviser. He agrees with an increase of troops in Afghanistan and remains uncommitted about withdrawing troops from Iraq which relies on an enormous US military budget. Supporting Henry Paulson's plan for rescuing the banks and maintaining the defence budget is printing money at the expense of social reform. Inflation and the current economic collapse are wreaking havoc on the poor, always the first victims of a system that favours the rich.

Obama promised to spend less and save more and in the process to "restore the middle class". In other words, his goal is to narrow the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor. There is, therefore, a need to spend less on rescuing corporations and more on social services, healthcare and education. A more just tax system, in levying the burden of social development on the rich and distributing to the poor, encapsulates the problem for the next President. Would Obama ever be able to bridge this gap, taking into consideration that his electoral campaign was financed by big business?

Crosscurrents

John Honoré

In America's political system, the task of achieving more equality appears daunting for Obama. It is almost too much to expect him to aspire to the policies of Roosevelt and the New Deal. Nevertheless, his cry "Yes, we can!" gives fresh hope for America's working class.

meanwhile in godzone...

John Key, the newly elected Prime Minister of New Zealand, was very quickly off the mark to cobble together a coalition deal that assures his government 70 votes for Confidence and Supply. Helen Clark and the Labour Party were trounced, and the man Clark backed to the end, Winston Peters, lost representation altogether. John Key reigns for three years but faces a dilemma of identity. He must juggle the right wing demands of the Act Party with the aspirations of the Maori Party, which has its own particular agenda for joining National. These two supporters are not compatible, whatever Rodney Hide, Turiana Turia and Pita Sharples may say.

The Act Party feels confident enough even to seek an executive role for Sir Roger Douglas, a man whom the writer Joe Bageant would describe as "so far right, he wouldn't eat the left wing of a chicken". Hide is positively glowing with self-confidence. He expounds his hopes for radical change in local government, less bureaucracy, more free market thinking and regulatory reform. This is right wing *par excellence*, not necessarily the wishes of the thousands of voters who changed their allegiance from Labour.

Despite the co-leaders of the Maori Party assuring the nation that all the

hui they held over a long weekend endorsed their coalition with National, it is not a given. The Maori Party received 28 percent of the party vote in the Maori electorates, Labour 49.7 percent and National 7.3 percent. It is true that Labour has done little for Maori over the last three years in office. Under National, Maori hope to be able to revisit the *Foreshore and Seabed* issue and confirm the legitimacy of the Maori seats in Parliament – an ambitious agenda.

John Key rests in the middle of these two factions. If it came to a contentious issue, from the point of view of votes the Maori Party would be expendable. If he cannot placate the demands of Act, Key would be vulnerable to the right-wing faction of his party. The Prime Minister, like Barack Obama, wants change – but then so does everybody. The problem is that all the roads leading to the Beehive are diametrically opposed and some of them might be dead ends.

christmas gift

If all we hear about the impending recession is true, Christmas this year will be a more subdued celebration. Perhaps this is not such a bad thing. To appreciate Christmas for its intrinsic value, the Birth of the Redeemer, this extraordinary event must be given precedence over the banality of commercial exploitation and become an occasion of joy, hope and goodwill to all.

Birthdays are for celebration. Christmas is accepted world-wide as the occasion for family gatherings and the season for practising a generosity of spirit to those less fortunate than us. Be positive and give the perfect gift for Christmas. Forget the gold, frankincense and myrrh, and give a gift subscription to *Tui Motu*. That's what the Three Wise Men would have done in these hard times.

This columnist extends the wish that Christmas be a holy and a happy occasion for you all. ■

you are living stones

News that is already a month old is no longer news. The elections are now a month behind us. In general terms the shape our government will take was determined four weeks ago. But the direction that government will take is only now beginning to become a reality. The recent elections will be news for months and even years ahead.

Our Saturday election was followed the next day in Catholic worship by the celebration of the dedication of the basilica of St John Lateran in Rome. This replaced the normal Sunday celebration. St John Lateran is the Pope's cathedral, from which he ministers as Bishop of Rome. St Peter's is larger and better known. But it is really only the quite commodious chapel attached to his residence at the Vatican. St John Lateran is the true centre of Catholic Rome.

As a cathedral, St John Lateran is much more than just a building. It is an expression of a living entity, namely, the faithful and their ministers who make up the body of the diocese of Rome. That living entity is comprised of believers joined together by the Holy Spirit, struggling as best they can to be the expression to the world and to one another of the power and love of the Redeeming Christ. As such the church of the city of Rome is a model of what Christian community is to be everywhere in the world.

Those secular and ecclesiastical events, the elections and the celebration of the dedication of the Lateran basilica, might seem to belong to two quite different worlds. In fact they have more in common than would at first appear.

We heard at Mass that Sunday the reminder of St Paul to his readers: "You are God's building". Elsewhere in the epistles the faithful are seen as "living stones" out of which God's

house, his people, is built. In our day and age we do not set large and carefully shaped stones together to produce the building we want. We need to give ourselves a moment of reflection to get the message about the church, and the units that make it up, being composed of living stones. Each of these stones has its own character and all have their own contribution to make. Without them, the building simply would not exist.

You may well ask, what has this to do with election day and the government that emerged from it. The church is made up of living stones. So is the human society in which we live. Without its citizens, its living stones, it simply would not exist. Each has a right to be respected in their individuality and each has an obligation to contribute in their own fashion to the healthy functioning of the body.

On election day, we were a divided people, supporters of this party and that party. A month later, we can reflect on a deeper truth. We are one nation, inhabiting the one land. It would be wrong if the often conflicting convictions that we continue to hold prevented us from pulling together to do the best we can for the benefit of the others with whom we share this land and indeed this planet.

Election time is behind us. New Zealanders could at this time profitably reflect on the challenge John F Kennedy, following his own election, issued to Americans in words such as these, "Think not of what your country can do for you, but of what you can do for your country". ■

Humphrey O'Leary

Humphrey O'Leary is a canon lawyer and Rector of the Redemptorist community in Auckland

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A Mother's Journal

Writing a journal is a time to reflect on what has been happening and who I have been in response. It is a time to be mindful. It is a good discipline for me with my base tendency to action and doing. This *Mother's Journal* each month is also an invitation to take the pulse of my interior life. Look forward or look back.

As December approaches I am thinking about Advent – the season of waiting and preparing for the coming of Christ. It is a season to have my eyes open like the shepherds in *Luke's Gospel* – to look for Jesus as he comes in 2008, in New Zealand. It is a different world, feels almost a different planet than first century Palestine. This December is a tangle of imported food that has traveled from every continent to my kitchen shelves, extreme global inequalities, parenting manuals for the sleep-deprived mother, a financial crisis that is somehow distant from my life although I'm sure it matters, and snazzy information technology – it makes my life surely incomprehensible to a Middle Eastern prophet thousands of years ago. How will I recognize the Christ child?

Waiting and pregnancy have been big themes for me this year. This December we are in our own house with craft materials, and I can even choose to make time for some family liturgies to prepare for Christmas. I have found some great resources online as I search for Advent/children/worship – particularly

I like the Australian site *The Billabong* as a place for pausing and reflection: <http://thebillabong.info>. It has ideas for making an Advent wreath – and a simple thoughtful weekly family gathering to light each Advent candle. It uses a theme of drought and water scarcity in line with experiences for many Australian communities – as well as others in the world. I think I'll have a go at re-writing some of the prayers to suit our family and our focus on friends in India as well as life in Christchurch at the moment.

Maybe Advent and other special times in the church calendar, act as a journal in a way – an intentional pausing to look back and look forward – with an openness to the God wind/spirit/breath wafting through the words and thoughts.

*God who comes to us
As no other god would dare or dream of
Small and suckling,
Floppy necked and eyes only half open, half aware
Absurdly dependent and powerless – as a baby
As the Southern skies fill with growing light
As our lives swirl with end of year barbeques, celebrations and task lists
As friends in Asia tally the family money to have enough for lentils and rice
As we light this first Advent candle, we look forward to the fuller brightness that is to come.
May we see, know, feel the light of Jesus*

Amen

Kaaren Mathias



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