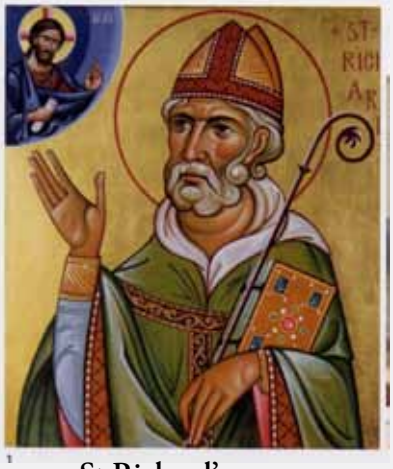
Tui Motu

InterIslands

December 2007 $5

The nave of Chichester Cathedral, looking towards the main altar. St Richard's tomb is at the far end behind the great screen

St Richard, Bishop of Chichester 1245-53



St Richard's prayer

Day by day – three things I pray:
to know you more clearly
love you more dearly
follow you more nearly
day by day.
(version as used in Godspell)

Chichester Cathedral

The beautiful Romanesque cathedral (*pictured above*) was built by the Normans in the 12th Century. Chichester was a Roman settlement – hence the name. It is now a small market town situated on the south coast of England, some 60 miles from London.

Its most famous mediaeval bishop was St Richard (*icon above right*) who ruled the diocese from 1245 to 1253. His reputation for holiness spread quickly and he was canonised in 1262. For the next 300 years his tomb in the Cathedral was a centre for pilgrimage. The shrine was destroyed at the Reformation, but in recent times it has been restored and is situated in the retroquire at the east end of the Cathedral behind the high altar.

This area also commemorates another famous bishop, George Bell, whose term of office was from 1929 to 1958. Bell was celebrated for his friendship towards the German people – but not to Nazism – which continued in spite of World War 2. He was a personal friend of the Lutheran Dietrich Boenhoffer, put to death by the Nazis. He actively helped German refugees from Nazism. His protests against the pattern bombing of German cities towards the end of the war was fiercely criticised by many, not least by Winston Churchill.

The retroquire is graced by a colourful tapestry, woven by a German woman to celebrate reconciliation between the British and German peoples. The icon of St Richard also hangs there. To the north side is the magnificent Chagall window (*pictured right*) – a reflection on the 150th Psalm.
The window is the crown of this sacred space.

Greetings Tui Motu Readers

I've been thinking about abundance this past week and what it means in my life. I think I'm extraordinarily blessed to have abundance in many ways: great family, good friends; I live in a beautiful place and have absolutely everything I need – much more than so many in the world do.

I was just talking to a couple of friends who have decided that instead of buying Christmas presents for each other they are going to support the Child Fund. It's come up with a really good initiative called "Gifts that Grow", where you can buy anything from life-saving medication to a cow for a family in a third world country. What a great way to share abundance!

At this time of year, as we celebrate the abundance of God in the gift of Jesus, I've been reflecting on how we pass on spiritual abundance to others.

• It seems incredibly appropriate to take the time to thank all the people in our parishes throughout Aotearoa for giving so generously of their time to promote and sell Tui Motu this past year.

• Thanks to the Tui Motu Board members, Foundation Trust members and all those who support us in so many ways.

• And a special thank you to Francie and Michael who work so hard each month to give us food for the soul in abundance. We are truly grateful for your efforts.

I wish you and your family Christmas blessings and abundance.

Katie O'Connor
Chair

PS ...and I couldn't possibly pass on the opportunity to suggest that you might think of someone for whom a Gift Subscription for *Tui Motu* might just be that perfect spiritual gift of abundance! We have a great deal again – just $40 for a year's subscription for a new reader.

The Chagall window

This window in Chichester Cathedral is a clarion call to joy. The artist, Marc Chagall (1887-1985), learned his first skills at St. Petersburg. On coming to Paris he was briefly interested in expressionism and cubism, but although the term surrealism was first used to describe his work he was never committed. He referred to himself as a poet who used paints and brushes.

In his window, exuberant chaos prevails in marked contrast to the magnificent orderliness of the traditional windows. The words of Psalm 150, *let everything that has breath praise the Lord,* are interpreted by Chagall through music and dance in a swirling kaleidoscope of symbols and colours.

The triumphant use of red unifies the whole window. His employment of that red with blues, greens and yellows had become his signature, and they provide the setting for the Jewish *menorah* and the tablets of the Ten Commandments.

Also set in this colour feast are traditional Jewish elements of celebration: musicians with violins, trumpets, cymbals and harps; dancers and mummers. All are led by King David playing the harp whilst mounted on his donkey (one of Chagall's favourite animals). These and the insects, fish, birds and vegetation praise God with immense happy energy.

Christians and Jews alike can celebrate Chagall's artistic life founded so deeply in religion. For him, the Bible was Nature itself. He also prayed that "God or someone give me the power to breathe my sigh into my canvasses… the prayer of salvation, of rebirth." Again: "In our life there is a single colour… it is the colour of love."

Much Old Testament writing foreshadows the New Testament. Could King David here also point us to the new King David, Jesus Christ, entering Jerusalem to a First Century equivalent of a 'ticker tape' parade?

(Neil Howard, abetted by his wife Margaret Ann)

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Cover

In Qawawis in the hills of South Hebron, a woman sits and rocks her baby. Acknowledgment to ***Christian Peacemaker Teams*** for permission to use this photograph.

The least of these little ones...

Picture postcard impressions of Madonna and Child will grace our walls and mantelpieces again this Christmas, often feeding our imaginations with a sanitised version of how Christ was born. Our Christmas cover is much closer to the real thing – an Arab mother living in a cave close to Bethlehem. She too has been displaced by the imperious demands of a callous occupying power.

The plight of children – and young mothers – in a so-called civilised world casts a dark shadow over our enjoyment of the Christmas feast. Some statistics from a recent *Guardian Weekly* provide sobering reading. In the conflicts of the past decade, approximately 20 million children have had to flee their homes (like our cover baby – like Jesus son of Mary).

Over two million have died prematurely (today's 'holy innocents'). More than a million have been orphaned or separated from their families. Most cruel of all, some 300,000 have been recruited as child soldiers in some 30 armed conflicts.

In Rwanda, following the 1994 genocide, more than 60,000 young girls have grown up as head of their families because both parents were murdered. Social dislocation has led to a rise in gender violence and in HIV/Aids. All over Africa the curse of the AIDS pandemic afflicts children, who become innocent victims of adult sexual vice.

In some Asian countries, economic growth is often fuelled by the use of child slaves, producing cheap goods to delight Christmas shoppers across the world. None of these victims cry out to heaven for vengeance more than girls being sold into sex slavery in many Asian cities or smuggled into the red light districts of Paris or Amsterdam. The *Guardian* cites the Bacchara and Bedia communities in India, where low caste girls as young as 14 are trafficked in the brothels and bars to provide a miserable income for their impoverished families.

In her *Carol of the Least Child* (*opposite*) Shirley Murray makes a poignant appeal for these innocents – and for their betterment. When we visit the church crib, our first thoughts should be for our immediate families, yes – but perhaps we might extend our heart's cry to embrace these, least fortunate of our fellow humans.

A rich variety of Christmas pieces are on offer this year (*pp 5-13*), from the pens of Glynn Cardy, Joy Cowley, Daniel O'Leary as well as a rich reminiscence from Pauline O'Regan. One chord struck more than once is the Biblical character of Joseph. So often Joseph is pushed into the background in the crib scene. In this respect he foreshadows the absent father in many contemporary families. Our writers, however, underline the unique and privileged vocation of the protective and caring d+ad (as shown in Murillo's picture, *page 7*).

The Christian message in Advent and Christmastide is one of hope. Whatever their circumstances, no one is ever beyond the reach of God's love. Through the message of Christmas, the Christ-child reaches out to rich (Magi) and the poor (shepherds) as well as to the natural world (ox and ass). None is untouched. That is why Christmas is everyone's favourite feast.

A final thought. As you contemplate the plight of the young mother on our cover this year, pledge to give a dollar to some worthy charity for each dollar you spend on presents for your nearest and dearest. God will surely bless you for that.

A happy and joyous Christmas to all.

M.H.

Christmas 2007

The Board and editorial team of Tui Motu wish all our readers a happy and blessed Christmas – and good reading for 2008. We also wish to thank especially all those who have generously supported the Tui Motu Foundation

There is no child so small

(Carol of the least child)

There is no child so small,
no scrap of life so precious
who is not born like Jesus,
whose cry is like us all.

There is no child unfed,
left hungry now at Christmas
but God will ask for justice,
for shelter and for bread.

There is no child so lost,
no refugee so nameless
that God will leave us blameless,
who share no care or cost.

There is no child so cheap,
in warfare or destruction
that love cannot take action
when God is made to weep.

There is not one of us
who could not be more giving,
and in the gift more loving,
to light a star for peace.

Shirley Erena Murray
– © NZ, Australia

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

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letters to the editor ✍

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

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

Susan Smith's article

I must say how much I enjoyed Susan Smith's article, *Gardening and our spiritual life*, (*Tui Motu Nov.*) – except for the first paragraph, which I take issue with. I find it quite astonishing that a garden could be favourably compared to the Blessed Sacrament in the local church. There can be no greater life-giving than God in the Blessed Sacrament.

As for her reference to the Magisterium not being needed to interpret Nature, one can only ask who would have thought otherwise. Certainly not me! It makes me wonder how much certain people are influenced directly or indirectly these days by the lack of positive response from the Vatican to strongly held views on Women Priests, Married Priests, Contraception etc.

J Vincent, Dunedin

The church and women's rights

Few issues cause polarisation in the church more than the voices, thoughts and writings on women's issues. The rights of women have always dragged woefully behind the rights of the male.

Yet it was not so in early civilisations. The ancient Egyptians and the Greeks were egalitarian. It is because most of us have a narrow mindset, tunnel vision and a peculiar perception of God that we cannot or do not want to understand that God loves all regardless of gender and treats all humans the same.

Thank goodness in a world of challenging change for Thomas Moore's ringing endorsement of Sr Joan Chittester's *Scarred by struggle; Transformed by Hope*.

D Power, Christchurch

Virgin Birth

Glynn Cardy has written that many Anglicans have difficulty with the Virgin Birth. Bishop Patrick Dunn says this applies to many Catholics as well.

The difficulty arises because we try to limit the intelligence of God to the level of human thinking.

Unless we are prepared to transcend through prayer this level of thinking we will continue to have difficulty with the mysteries of our Christian faith. The alliance between the Holy Spirit and the Blessed Virgin Mary is as operative today as it was at the Incarnation.

S McNeil, Hamilton

The sin of Onan

M White (*TM Oct 07*) suggests that I had a naive interpretation of Scripture attributing Onan's killing to his act of coitus interruptus. I disagree.

Dr H Davis SJ wrote, in his book *Moral and Pastoral Theology (p 163):* "Onan was punished with death because he was guilty of sexual defilement... Onan did agree to have intercourse with Tamar, his sister-in-law, to raise up children for his dead brother but withdrew before the climax..." He wanted the pleasure of the act but not the consequences – i.e.contraception. (*abridged*)

D Blackburn, Pakuranga

I know it when I see it

In an editorial in the *NZ Catholic* (*November 18*) Justice Stewart, a US Supreme Court judge, is quoted with approval. The judge refrained from defining 'hard-core pornography; nevertheless "I know it when I see it", he stated.

After expressing grave concerns about shows like *Californication,* the editorial went on: "People know what's decent and indecent when they see it. Except, it seems, the broadcasters. And those overseeing the broadcasting industry and its standards."

But 'people' – and arguably reasonable and decent people – can be expected to differ on what is decent and indecent. Would Justice Stewart and the Editor of *NZ Catholic* 'know' what I know and what you know when we 'see' it. I believe not.

What is the most we can hope for when there are rival claims about obscenity? One purpose of a statute is to provide a beginning with which rival parties can define their disagreement. A good statute arguably can set up a good conversation.

Much of the talk centring on *Broadcasting Standards* sounds to me to be dominated by "I know it when I see it." This authoritarian voice, I suggest, is not one that will do justice to anyone.

R Dawson, Christchurch

Dr Dawson's letter above is abstracted from a much longer piece which we have no room to print. However, we thank him for his comments and invite readers' opinion on media censorship. Ed.

Tui Motu illustrator honoured

In this year's *Australasian Religious Press Association* awards held in Auckland in September, *Tui Motu* won two awards (from 345 entries in 21 categories):–

- Donald Moorhead's magazine cover – *Blood Spilt* – (***June 2006)*** won a silver award – "highly commended".
- *Blokes in Garage,* by Mike Marshall and the late Case Genefaas (***Tui Motu August '06***), won a gold award for Best Devotional Article applying Faith to Life, in magazines and newspapers.

Congratulations to Donald and to Mike.

Donald also recently received the *Macalisters Award*, given annually at the Anderson Park Spring Exhibition, a prize open to all New Zealand artists.

Dwelling with uncertainty and commitment

a response

I have just read two articles in the August issue of *Tui Motu*. I enjoyed them: they made me think. While there were aspects of both viewpoints with which I agreed, they kindled an unease in me that spurred this short response.

In the first, ***Hot Winter Broth***, Glynn Cardy writes about the God of Hospitality and the God of Authority. For him, one is the true, good God of 'the centre' and the other is not. I wonder why this must be so. Why is God not big enough for both? I agree that these God(s) seem to be in contradiction but, again, surely God is big enough for that?

I wonder if living consciously in such a state of contradiction could mark something valuable in what it means to be a Christian in our contemporary pluralistic world: that is the capacity to dwell with uncertainty as well as commitment. In this viewpoint, it seems to me that Glynn is talking about what pleases and displeases him. In honour of the ineffability of God, I think we need to think and talk about Her/Him differently.

In particular I want to avoid setting up such a stark either/or, which then functions to include and exclude people with different desires and beliefs. It sets up a 'them and us', the deluded and the enlightened. On the previous page of this issue of TM, we read of Gandhi's 'seven deadly sins': one of them is *worship without sacrifice*. Might not one version of this very sin be the one of making God into a being who is in accord with our deepest desires rather that one who interrupts them incessantly?

The Latin Mass

My unease continued as I read Jim Neilan's commentary (*August TM, p.24*) on the recent decision by Benedict XVI to restore the propriety of the Tridentine Mass. Now, like Jim, I am suspicious of Benedict's political motives for such a decision and I wonder what difficulties it will set in motion. Unlike Jim, however, I don't agree that active participation in the Mass is impossible because the priest is facing away from the people and the language is Latin.

I do recognise, though, that it might be a different kind of active participation than those forms we have normalised in Western democracies and that we now so often proclaim as superior. (This issue is relevant in my workplace – a university – where the traditional practice of teaching through lectures is roundly condemned by many as producing passive students whereas other so-called 'interactive' modes are said to be much better.)

The Latin Mass was the liturgy of my childhood, and I sometimes loved it. In many ways, this Mass formed me (as it did many of my contemporaries) and I will never forget the sense of mystery and awe – and the fantasy of the continuity of the Catholic faith – that it generated. It was implicated in an active engagement with my faith – though, to be sure, Vatican II came along at the right time to assist that!

Dialogue

Beyond this argument (that the Latin Mass is not simply an absence of 'active participation'), one of the crucial problems of the Latin Mass for me was the mode of the priest's sermon, which even then was delivered face to face and in English! A monologic mode, the sermon was vulnerable to a paternalistic enactment of priestly authority over the people. But this mode never really died with the new Mass and may even now be strengthening anew (according to Neil Darragh, in ***The priest and the collaborative ministry*** in the same TM).

Yet, imagine a Latin Mass that opens with all the friendliness that Jim describes as characteristic of his parish. Imagine within such a Mass a sermon delivered by a priest (man or woman!) who speaks from a place among and alongside the people, who engages the people in dialogue. Imagine the speaking place being shared with other women and men. To me, it does not seem impossible that the Latin Mass could be reformed, or maybe subverted, to support an actively collaborative relationship between priest and people.

Participating in such a relationship – of engaged dialogue with space for disagreement – has been essential for my life in the faith and I am lucky to have found a Catholic community which values this. Through our exchanges I am continually confronted with the recognition that different God(s) haunt our individual desires and our faltering efforts to live as Christians in a world of great injustice. I celebrate this lack of consensus: it begets the demanding, sometimes painful, interplay of uncertainty and commitment which, for me, is the ground of Christian being. ■

(Barbara Grant is Head of Academic Practice Group, Centre for Academic Development, University of Auckland)

The fatherhood of Joseph

The Biblical portrait of Joseph recalls the marginalised Dad of too many families today.

Glynn Cardy makes a plea for taking a new, healthier look at the contemporary work ethic – restoring 'Joseph' to a more hands-on family role

Our little Nativity scene at home has a rather vacant Joseph. He's holding his little china staff and staring out into the lounge seemingly oblivious of the pantomime happening around him. Everyone else of course is focused on the smiling babe in the beatific mother's arms. Joseph is also missing half his foot – the result of exuberant children. I think that happened the year the toy ninjas took on the shepherds, and Joseph was collateral damage.

The Joseph of the Bible is also rather vacant. *Matthew* gives him the biggest write up. In Chapter 1 we are told that he has an important genealogy, a pregnant fiancée and an angelic visitation. We are also told that being a just and decent man, without the angelic intervention he would have dumped Mary. 'Just and decent' meant something else back then.

In Chapter 2 we don't hear about Joseph until there is trouble. Bethlehem is getting too hot for a babe who scares Herod. So Joseph gets another angelic visitation and a trip to Egypt, mode of transport unknown. Some time later in Egypt the angel came calling and Joseph led them home – home being Nazareth. In Chapter 3 onwards Joseph doesn't feature. ...Oh, save that there's one reference to Jesus as the "carpenter's son".

Luke's Joseph doesn't appear until Chapter 2. Joseph doesn't get any private interviews with angels in this book. He is again portrayed however as a travelling man.

Starting in Nazareth he takes the pregnant Mary to Bethlehem. Joseph is a bystander as the baby is born; shepherds visit, Simeon and Anna sing their praises and Jesus the teenager gets lost downtown. Apart from Joseph's name being in the genealogy in Chapter 3 he again disappears without trace from the rest of another Gospel.

the Biblical portrayal of Joseph is remarkably similar to the sad, child-father experience of many

For *Mark*, *John*, *Paul* and all the other New Testament writers Joseph doesn't feature at all. He is the absent father, totally usurped by the one Jesus calls ***'abba'*** – 'daddy', God.

The Nativity accounts generally are not known for their historicity. Biblical scholars tell us that Joseph is probably a fiction, a literary device. The genealogies are about aligning the man Jesus with past characters and events. The travels are likewise about aligning Jesus with King David (Bethlehem) and Moses (Egypt). The key drama of the Nativity is the scandal of an unmarried pregnant woman in an age that presumed her sexual infidelity or violation or both. Joseph sits on the sideline, reluctant to do anything until angelically prodded.

The Joseph in my family's little Nativity scene is similar to the Biblical depiction. He doesn't quite get what's going on. He's brought into the picture when something needs doing – usually taking someone somewhere. He's around at the beginning but then gets written out of the family as the story progresses. Nobody seems to care whether he's happy, sad, or lost half his foot. He says nothing that anyone takes notice of. The portrayal of Joseph is also remarkably similar to the sad, child-father experience of many.

The painting by Murillo of the *Holy Family* in 17th century Spain is attractive for its depiction of a Joseph playing with his young son. Here is the fathering we would like. Dad's not at the office, on the computer or busy cooking dinner. Instead he's engaging, smiling and enjoying himself and us. Dad doesn't look worried about money, success or the lack of it. Here is 'the playful Dad.'

As a parent of four children I know something of the tensions surrounding fatherhood. Work and parenting collide. Household chores and playing with kids collide. Supervising homework and reading bedtime stories collide. Church

Bartolomeo Esteban Murillo: *The Holy Family* (1650)

meetings and children's needs collide. A social life outside of children or work is pretty much non-existent. Time is the thing we wish we had more of and that we see slipping away as the children grow older.

Although these tensions are ones that individual fathers have to wrestle with and find their own way through, there are things that workplaces and churches should consider. Given that the critical time for school-age children to be with their fathers is between 3.30 and 8 pm on weekdays, how can places of work assist?

The council that oversees the Auckland Diocese, for example, in order to allow for those who travel from afar, meets each month on a Thursday from 4 pm to 7 pm. It's not 'father friendly'. Or 'mother friendly', for that matter. Most downtown legal practices have a work culture that frequently sees parents come home around 8 pm. They are not father or mother friendly either. All the Anglican bishops I know work horrendous hours. When will we start creating jobs that are nurturing of those who are in them and their families, and model nurturing to the community?

I think churches and businesses need to take a long-term approach to their employees and work practices. If we are serious about supporting families and raising children who know both parents, then we need to make flexible work schedules and lower our expectations. The world won't come to an end if we work less and play with children more. God might even smile.

Parenting is good training for the workplace and needs to be recognised as such. Parenting is like running a small business, with all the associated demands. You have to be a self-starter. You have to be considerate of your 'clients', otherwise they will smear that vegemite sandwich all over the couch. You have to find the right gentle words when all you really want to do is scream. You have to manage time well. It's no wonder that some Christians call their priest "Father" or "Mother".

It's difficult to find positive examples of fathering in the Bible and the Christian tradition. Dads who put their kids before their calling are non-existent in the Bible, as are those who see their kids as their calling. The patriarchs and kings are shining examples of how not to parent. The prophets and disciples don't seem to have kids. I can't name one saint who is revered because of the way he loved his children. Like it or not, the church is not programmed to be affirming of intimate loving relationships between fathers and their children.

Yet there are many of us who work and hope for a different future. We try hard to give our children not only financial and physical support, but our love and a glimpse into our souls. We try to walk with them, repelling the incessant demands of our workplaces. We try to find time. We try to believe the church supports us in this, when like any institution what it says is different from what it does.

This Christmas, the broken-footed vacant Joseph will once again come out of his box and take his place by the crib. I will look at him and remember the sad stories of many men who wished for intimate relationships with their children but couldn't have them. I will pray for the fathers I know and for myself. But this year I'll also put Murillo's picture there, a sign of hope and a commitment to making it happen. ■

Her House

The butterfly spreads
her shimmering silks and
the thornbush
becomes her tent;
resplendent with dyes,
tinctured with light,
perfumed by
the fanning of her wings.
The thornbush dreamed
and bore a rose.

Beatrice Hoffmann

Who is Mary?

Deep within us there is always that virgin space,
the innermost cave of being that was made for God alone. Nothing else fills it.

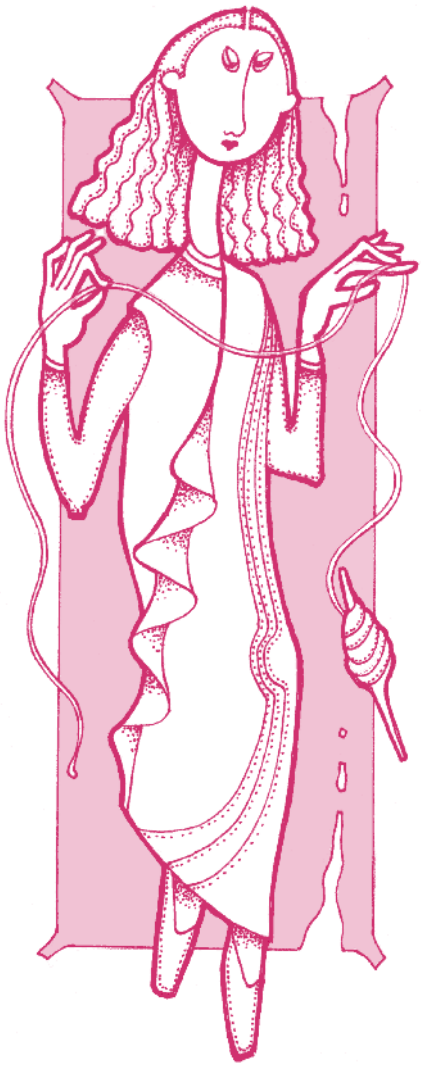
Joy Cowley uses some of the early non-canonical writings about Mary to interpret the meaning of this profound spiritual insight

In the Synoptic Gospels, the Mother of Jesus appears as a glimpse here, a glimpse there, a naïve young girl growing into the strong woman at the Cross and at Pentecost. Outside Catholic tradition, this is the usual view of Mary, and non-Catholics can be a little bewildered or cautious about the way Catholics revere Mary. So why is it that Catholics seem to have extra knowledge of the mother of our Lord?

Most of the information about Mary comes from the non-canonical gospels, apocryphal writings like the *Proto-evangelium of James the Just*, who claimed to be a son of Joseph by a previous marriage; the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*; the *Gospel of Thomas* and others, including Arabic texts. Many of these writings are visionary, and speak in fanciful parables, but they do offer an understanding of Mary that is much fuller than that in the canonical writings.

This Christmas, as we celebrate the coming of God made flesh, these writings might help us reflect on how the world was prepared for Jesus coming and the part that Mary's parents played in this preparation.

The tradition goes like this:
Joachim of the royal house of David was not a poor man in a material sense. He had large flocks of sheep. But he and his wife Anna were childless, and Joachim keenly felt the lack.



When he went to the Temple to present his offering, someone mocked him because he had no offspring, and he was deeply offended. He left Jerusalem and followed his flocks out into the wilderness, staying away from home for many months. In the wilderness, he received a message from God to go home, that a child would be born to him. Greatly heartened he returned to his wife Anna in Bethesda, and she became pregnant.

No doubt Joachim had his hopes pinned on a boy, but their child was a girl whom they called Miriam or Mary. In their rejoicing, Joachim and Anna saw themselves similar to the Old Testament couple, Hannah and Elkinah, who'd had Samuel late in life (1 Sam. 27-28***) and had dedicated him to the Lord. Mary, too, was a special child born for a special purpose, and they dedicated their daughter in the Temple when she was four years old.*** There is a description of this dedication in the Proto-evangelium of James the Just.

At that time, it was usual for young girls to learn to do weaving and sewing for the Temple in return for a thorough education in the Torah. So Mary was probably better instructed in Scripture and Law than most boys of her age.

But when the girls in the Temple reached pubescence, they had to leave and go to their homes where they still did their handiwork. Thus, Mary was at home when she was visited by the angel Gabriel, and it is said that she was weaving purple thread for the veil of the Temple at the time of the Annunciation.

We are not sure if it was the priests of the Temple or the ageing Joachim and Anna who looked for a man to take care of Mary, one who would respect her Temple vows. From the *History of Joseph* we have this description: ***There was a man whose name was Joseph,***

sprung from a family in Bethlehem, a town of Judah and the city of David. This same man, being well furnished with wisdom and learning, was made a priest in the Temple of the Lord.

He was, besides, skilful in his trade, which was that of a carpenter; and after the manner of all men, he married a wife. Moreover, he begot for himself sons and daughters, four sons, namely, and two daughters. Now these are their names – Judas, Justus, James and Simon. The names of the two daughters were Assia and Lydia. At length the wife of righteous Joseph, a woman intent on the divine glory of all her works, departed this life…

Although a vow of celibacy was almost unheard of amongst the Pharisees and Sadducees, it was not unusual amongst the third largest group, the Essenes who lived in communities that were both celibate and married. In the museum of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Israel, there are Essene documents that state if a man agreed to protect the chastity of his wife, he could not violate it. While we are not sure if Mary and Joseph were part of an Essene community, we are told that Joseph had agreed to protect the chastity of Mary his betrothed.

And she was in her sixth month: and behold, Joseph came back from his building, and, entering the house, he discovered that she was big with child. And he smote his face, and threw himself on the ground upon sackcloth, and wept bitterly saying, "With what face shall I look upon the Lord my God? And what prayer shall I make about this maiden? Because I received her a virgin out of the Temple of the Lord, and I have not watched over her." *(History of Joseph)*

We know then that the angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, telling him that Mary was pregnant with the Holy Spirit and the child would be called the Son of the Most High. What we are not told in *Matthew* and *Luke*, is that Annas the scribe saw that Mary was pregnant. Joseph, and then Mary, were brought to the Tribunal and accused of defilement.

And the priest said: Give up the virgin whom thou did'st receive out of the Temple of the Lord. And Joseph burst into tears. (History of Joseph). That last sentence tells us a lot about Joseph and his love for Mary. The story goes on with Mary and Joseph being put to a test and found innocent of deceit. Then comes the census.

And there was an order from the Emperor Augustus, that all in Bethlehem of Judea should be enrolled. And Joseph said: I shall enrol my sons, but what shall I do with this maiden? How shall I enrol her? As my wife? I am ashamed. As my daughter then? But all the sons of Israel know that she is not my daughter. The day of the Lord shall itself bring it to pass as the Lord will. (History of Joseph)

Thus we come to the Incarnation, the event that lies at the heart of our faith and is celebrated with great thanksgiving around the world.

how do these speak to our hearts? what do they tell us about Mary?

But how do we know that these stories about Mary hold historical truth? The *Protoevangelium*, for example, is supposed to be written by one of the sons of Joseph by his first marriage. Early in church history, scholars determined that it was actually written in the 2nd Century.

Recent findings suggest that it was a 2nd Century rewrite of an earlier document. But this is not the only record. Similar stories about Mary feature in other early Christian writings and also in Arabic texts so they obviously belong to a firmly established tradition.

I believe that while scholarship is important, if we concern ourselves only with historical detail, we can miss spiritual truth. ***How do these stories speak to our hearts? What do they tell us about the Mother of our Lord?***

Understanding that Mary was chosen before her birth to be the vehicle of the Christ, helps us all to appreciate the way God works in our lives. As Anthony de Mello points out, we need to understand that our parents were who they were, for us to be who we are.

Mary was prepared in mind and body. She was educated in the Temple to be her Son's teacher, and because those early teachings came with a mother's love, Jesus' attitude to women was always one of tenderness. ***As parents, do we teach our children with the kind of love that shapes the future of the world?***

God became flesh, receiving his humanity from a woman without male intervention. This suggests that Jesus held the male and female in perfect balance. ***Do we seek that wholeness in the church?***

Joseph and Mary were rejected by their society and they knew in a real way, the poverty of the Beatitudes. ***How do we understand our own poverty? How do we react to the poverty of others?***

Perhaps the most important spiritual teaching lies in an understanding of ***Mary's consecrated virginity***. If we are in argument about the physical details of the Virgin Birth, then we are missing the metaphysical truth.

Deep within us there is always that virgin space, the innermost cave of being that was made for God alone. Nothing else fills it. A bright star marks its place in our lives. Angel song guides us to it. And Mary's teaches us that this inmost sanctuary is where we conceive of the Holy Spirit and give birth to Christ in the world. ■

One of New Zealand's best known writers, Joy Cowley is also renowned as spiritual director and retreat giver

Moments of epiphany

A song, a dance, a prayer – occasions when the circumstances of our daily lives are transcended. These are tiny incarnations of heaven's promise, says author Daniel O'Leary

The film *The Shawshank Redemption* is often to be seen on television at Christmas. It is a marvellous film, with a particularly memorable scene. Andy Dufresne is in prison for allegedly killing his wife, and because of his striking personality and presence he earns the respect of the warden who puts him in charge of the library. One day, while sorting out some books, Andy comes across an old 78 recording of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*. While the guard is distracted, the prisoner locks the door, puts the record on the player, flicks on the prison sound system and the beautiful duettino *Sull'aria* flows out and fills the whole compound – a compound of grey shadows and hard noises.

All over the prison yard the empty faces of men are lifted up to the speakers as the music surges across the bleak spaces of institutional harshness and starving human hearts. Who knows what powerful images and emotions surfaced in their souls during those four timeless minutes of transformation? Maybe some ached at the memory of a lost heaven – of a loving family, a promising job, a real respect lost because of one careless risk. The eyes of others may have grown moist at the mistakes made, in desperation perhaps, to acquire money to impress a demanding lover. Yet others may have been remembering a golden childhood moment, or their mother.

"Those two voices", the narrator explains, "were singing about something so beautiful that it cannot be expressed in words, higher than anybody in this dead place dares to dream. It was like some beautiful bird descended into our drab little cage making those hard, black walls dissolve away – and for the briefest moment every last man at Shawshank felt free." Andy himself said, "You need music so you don't forget that there is something deep within you that they cannot get to, that they cannot touch, something that is always truly yours – I'm talking about possibility."

There are times in our own imperfect lives when the veil parts between the two worlds we contain – our inner desire for a more divine destiny and the hard reality of our present circumstances. Like the music over the prison plant, something unforeseen hijacks our unfocused spirit. In *Postscript,* Seamus Heaney writes about the sideways breeze off the ocean that catches us off guard and blows our heart wide open. Such sacramental glimpses have a baptismal edge to them, marking us forever.

Brian Friel's play *Dancing at Lughnasa* features five unfulfilled sisters in their County Donegal cottage in 1936. It is the time of the annual Celtic harvest festival named after the pagan god Lugh. Things are not good. Disgrace and penury are killing their stifled souls. But dancing is the key metaphor of the play. In a most extraordinary burst of ecstasy, the five women release their emotional and sexual suppression by dancing to a reel issuing from their new-fangled wireless. It is a glimpse of the unquenchable passions that come from far beyond words, far beyond the sisters' kitchen. Some kind of sacramental shutter was thrown open for a moment, and in swept the uncontrollable but necessary wildness that lies just below the surface of our barely civilised souls.

Teilhard de Chardin offers us a superb example of what is meant by the Catholic imagination. "*O Lord, since I have neither bread nor wine nor altar here on the Asian steppes, I lift myself far above symbols, to the pure majesty of the Real; and I, your priest, offer to you on the altar of the entire earth, the travail and suffering of the world.*

"Yonder breaks the sun, to light the uttermost east, and then to send its sheets of fire over the living surface of the earth, which wakens, shudders and resumes its relentless struggle. My paten and my chalice are the depths of a soul laid widely open to all the forces which in a moment will rise up from every corner of the earth and converge upon the Spirit."

There are smaller epiphanies, too, of the underlying reality of our lives. I

like to think of the *Angelus* prayer as a small Christmas, a revelation of the colour at the heart of our monochrome world. The bell rings and we are called to place our hearts where our hands are busy. As at Eucharist-time, we are not invited to move into a sacred place, removed from the distractions of the daily grind, but, with holy imagination, to experience the deeper graces lying within what we may call menial or routine. Beyond a passing celebration of Christmas, this way of being is a daily participation in Incarnation; it is called eucharistic living.

There is a Teilhard in everyone – waiting for, and recognising, the beyond in our midst. This is Advent time – and it is forever. We are perennially called to be God's mystics as we search for God's traces everywhere; diviners who detect the holy water of life in the soil of our being; persistent beachcombers seeking the glimmer of God's gold on the shores of our souls.

These almost subliminal but breathtaking glimpses are all tiny incarnations of heaven's promise. Without them we forget and lose the way – the way of truly seeing. "We could dream the world," wrote Daniel Berrigan, "we could dream the eye. But who can imagine the act of seeing? We will never have enough of this; we will never have done with it." And why? Because each such moment of insight is, in the words of R.S. Thomas, the small, bright field with the buried treasure. These unrepeatable, vagrant moments hold the memory and the hope of our source and destiny:

It is the turning
aside like Moses to the miracle
of the lit bush, to a brightness
that seemed as transitory as your youth
once, but is the eternity that awaits you.

Whether it be the redemption at Shawshank, the *Angelus* in the kitchen, the wild dance across the fields of Ballybeg, the Eucharist over the world, or any of the countless daily graces that enable us to see into, and beyond, the immediate reality, transcending and transforming it into a new creation, they are all sustained and intensified by those two greatest sacraments of the heart – that first morning when the huge heart of the Creator spun the earth lovingly into being; and then, that enduring night when God's astonishing desire for us was revealed in the small heart of a starry-eyed and mystified child whom Christians call Jesus. ■

Daniel O'Leary, a priest of the Leeds diocese in England, is based at Our Lady of Grace Presbytery, Pontefract, West Yorkshire.
By kind permission of the Tablet

The Ghost of Christmas Past

"The experience of Christmas as we had in those days helped lift my spirit to a new height". In this interview Pauline O'Regan reflects on her experience of Christmas, as child and as adult.

"In my heart Christmas was the great feast – and it still is!"

As a child I lived in the Inangahua Valley near Reefton and we had Mass only twice a month, but we always had a morning Mass on Christmas Day. So the religious aspect of Christmas didn't have quite the impact on us as children as it would have done if we had lived in the town and had been able to get to midnight Mass.

There were no local shops – but each year before Christmas *Farmer's Catalogue* would arrive, a huge tome ranging in contents from tractors and farm machinery of every kind at one end to children's toys at the other. Our parents took note of what we as children were keen on.

I remember being captivated by a small blackboard and easel. Of course I had no idea how much such a thing would cost. In the late '20s things at home were sufficiently tight that we would not receive gifts that cost very much. The blackboard and easel was a 'pipe dream'. However, on Christmas morning there it was set up in the fireplace: my destiny to become a teacher was foreordained!

For Christmas dinner we would alternate – one year we would have a goose, the next a turkey. The day after Christmas my father held a 'bone-picking party' for all the local menfolk. The remnants of the Christmas turkey were set out and there was plenty of liquid refreshment. We children were packed off to bed early.

But we tried to stay awake to hear the singing. At a certain moment Jack O'Malley would strike up. He was a local character. He had one leg shorter than the other and hopped along on a sort of stirrup attached to his shoe. He was a figure of curiosity to us – but at the bone-picking party Jack always shone, because he had a fine voice. That was a highlight of Christmas back home.

A four-year-old girl once had a part in the school Nativity play. After Midnight Mass the whole of her family visited the crib. The little girl stood there quite transfixed by what she saw. She was looking and searching, then she turned round and with eyes flashing she said: "*Where* is Caesar Augustus?"
In the play she had been Caesar Augustus – and she couldn't find him in the parish crib! The kindergartens do these Nativity plays and I think they are educating their children well.

At the local school I have no recollection of Christmas celebrations. Perhaps that was a remnant of the 'secular' nature of New Zealand education. I remember we had an end-of-year party where we all dressed up. Aged five, I was set on being a fairy. My mother explained to me that I was *not* a fairy, not like Olive Smith who had fair, curly hair. Mine was short and straight and black! I was to be a cupid, equipped with a bow and a box of red arrows on my back. So I learned early that with my stocky figure and black hair, I was not destined to be a fairy. It was an early 'reality check' for me. However, Mr O'Malley, who was the local capitalist, rewarded us with a prize of half a crown each – fairies and cupids alike!

In the convent

Christmas in the convent was quite different. For someone like myself who had never experienced either the sense of expectation during the season of Advent or even been to Midnight Mass, Christmas took on a much richer meaning. It was a 'magical' time and I was quite captivated by it.

The old Timaru convent originally had belonged to the Sacré Coeur Sisters and was a beautiful monastic edifice, modelled, so we were told, on a Sacré Coeur convent somewhere in Europe. The chapel itself was a fine building. The entire back wall was painted with angels swinging censers. It had been done by one of the Sacré Coeur nuns, Mother Crotty, who also had many paintings on the convent walls. It was such a gift to have artwork of that calibre all around us.

The oak stalls had come from France. The golden tone of the polished woodwork matched the local kauri. During Advent the whole place was cleaned until it was spotless and shining. There was a special red carpet – for Christmas and Easter. The place was filled with flowers, and the scent of the Christmas lilies was specially distinctive.

More than anything else I remember the music. Mother Mercedes was a brilliant musician, and she drew music out of us. In her choir, we all sang and were delighted

to raise our voices for the praise of God. We were a community of some 30 professed Sisters, plus the 15 or so novices. We filled the chapel. We had our own pipe organ. On the dot of twelve we sang Silent Night. And at the end we sang Adeste Fideles.

Such a magnificent experience of Christmas as we had in those days helped lift my spirit to a new height. It seemed to bring 'heaven' closer. Even though Easter – as we were taught, quite correctly – was the 'feast of feasts', I only accept that from the neck up. Christ rising on Easter Day I accept as wonderful too. But the Resurrection is an event of faith and appeals more at the adult level.

Especially in my early years it was the *birth* of the Saviour that really made an impact on me. In my heart, Christmas was the great feast and it still is. I think it has to do with a baby. There is a suspension of credulity – that God could become a baby. The birth of a baby is an everyday event, a natural event. Yet it is also part of the experience of the Son of God. It is something which attracts us even when we are quite young. At Christmas, every Christian home will have crib: even some who are not practising Christians will have one.

The Christmas music too raises my heart. Some people complain because we hear carols continuously in supermarkets and city malls. Personally I never tire of them; I can't have enough of it! I love to hear the words ***Christ is Born!*** being proclaimed in public for all to hear. I rejoice whenever I hear the Christmas message – even in November.

Where else is the story being told to the children and to people who receive no teaching? It's a great event that matters in our lives. There is no other time when these realities are expressed. What a desert people live in if they haven't got a story of faith, something to give meaning to what can be quite hard and difficult lives.

The Crib and the holy family

The crib, I believe, is very important and our crib in the Timaru convent was quite splendid. Even the animals were present, and this helps people see also the caring presence of God for the beasts as well, at the moment of redemption. The sight of the new-born babe in the midst of animals and nature gives dignity to all those present, including the donkey.

Joseph was very much in the background of my early religious experience. I was once with a Sister who was troubled by a family problem. I had a holy picture with the words on it: "Go to Joseph". It fell out of my bag while I was talking. I said: *there's the answer*. And since that time I have often prayed to St Joseph in his protective role.

God trusted Joseph to protect the mother and the babe. I think we have boxed Joseph up by pushing him into the

role of being simply the patron of a happy death. Yet he is so much more. After all he was the male role model of Jesus as a young man growing up.

There is a picture I love – of Mary lying resting after the birth and Joseph holding the baby. I pray for a true devotion to Mary. I struggle with the way she has been traditionally presented to us. I think a lot of humanity has been diminished by trying to put her up so high that she loses her intimacy.

I like to pray the Rosary and dwell on the mysteries of Jesus' life and Mary's life. I'm sure Jesus would have danced at the marriage feast of Cana! And Mary had a profound message for us: "Do whatever he tells you". She was a typical mother and was not going to be put off by her son's reluctance to do what she asked!

Paul VI wrote a beautiful piece on Mary which has always appealed to me. He was anxious about extremes and distortions in devotion to Mary. The Pope laid out four guidelines:

- Devotion must be based on Mary as she is found in the Scriptures;
- it must the kind of practice that is at home in good liturgy;
- it must show sensitivity to our relationship with other churches;
- it must be appropriate for the times we live in.

Making Mary into a 'Queen' takes her right out of normality. It is the woman Mary I wish to honour – Mary as a human being, not as a remote, regal figure. The church tells us that any true devotion to our blessed Mother must first and foremost be based on the sacred Scriptures, not on private revelations however attractive they may be. ■

My hands in chains – but not my will

Paul Oestreicher

On 26 October, at the behest of a German Pope, an Austrian peasant was beatified in Linz Cathedral. Franz Jägerstätter, born in 1907 in the village of St Radegund to an unmarried farm hand, defied Hitler and refused to fight in an unjust war. He knew that the penalty was death.

Thanks largely to the English Jesuit, Archbishop Roberts, the 2nd Vatican Council put on record some 40 years ago that refusal to take up arms was a valid expression of Catholic faith. Nevertheless, it was then – and still is – far from the norm.

Germany's Catholic bishops patriotically supported Hitler's aggressive war. Military chaplains dutifully swore allegiance to the Führer. Christians fought with a quiet conscience – on both sides. In a historic volte-face the church has acknowledged that this conscientious objector was a true martyr. There is no modern precedent. Only during the first two centuries of church history did Christians refuse to fight – for a pagan emperor.

Hitler's annexation of Austria had massive support. Cardinal Innitzer was there to greet the Führer. In the referendum that sealed the *Anschluss,* Franz was the only villager to vote *no*. The mayor of the village nevertheless reported a 100 percent *yes* vote.

Who was Franz Jägerstätter?

As a young man he had been quite a tearaway, had made a village girl pregnant and was a worry to his parents. Yet he read assiduously, and he married Franziska who was deeply devout. He turned into a dedicated father of four daughters. As sacristan of the village church, the life and teaching of Jesus increasingly determined his priorities. The priests he respected were those who confronted the new paganism and went to prison.

Once war had started, he went through a brief period of military training but was allowed to return to his farm. That experience ripened in him the conviction that he would not fight. He rejected the lie that this was a war to free Europe from atheistic Communism. "No", he wrote, "it is a war to dominate and exploit the Russian people". When called up again, he simply declared: "I cannot serve both Hitler and Jesus".

Every conceivable pressure was brought on him to change his mind, pressure from family and friends and compelling pressure from the church. Franziska stood by him. She knew him too well. Even challenged by his bishop, he stood firm. *Who was he, a simple farmer, to decide the rights and wrongs of war?* An intelligent Christian who knew his Bible. *Surely his first duty was to his family who would be left without husband and father.* He argued back – was the answer to kill other husbands and fathers? He held the line. "My hands in chains," he wrote "but not my will."

From the local prison they took him to Berlin. The supreme military court also made every effort to change his mind. He did offer to serve as a medical orderly, saving life, not taking it. That was rejected. The judge had no choice but to sentence him to death like countless deserters. Conscience was no defence. Franz was given a final 20 minutes with Franziska and his parish priest. Shortly after the trial, as if in some classical tragedy, the judge committed suicide.

Franz was beheaded in Brandenburg prison with 16 others on August 9 1943. After the war, a group of nuns brought his ashes to his home village. An embarrassed silence

Franziska and John Paul II

In 1996 Franz Jägerstätter's widow, Franziska, was presented to Pope John Paul II in Rome. The bishop announced who she was, and as she stepped forward, she smiled broadlyand proceeded to make the sign of the cross on the Pope's forehead.

Her companion said: "I froze. I had visions of everyone closing in on us as she raised her right arm... As we returned to our seats she whispered: 'I think the Holy Father liked that. People should do it more often'".

Franziska was in Linz for her husband's beatification on 26 October.

ensued for many years. Neither the community nor the church wanted to know. The bishop who had tried to change his mind now forbade any public recognition. It might shame those who had fought. He was not to be honoured as the war dead were honoured.

That only began to change when Gordon Zahn, an American sociologist, published his story, *In Solitary Witness,* in 1964. Pilgrims began to make their way to his grave. New times, a new Bishop, a growing sense of pride. Austria issued a postage stamp in his memory.

Last month Franziska, steadfast in old age, was present when Franz was held up as a model for today by a church that is slow to learn. Unjust wars are not past history.
Where are the Jägerstätters now? ■

Canon Paul Oestreicher is a counsellor of the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship

The Belfast Chuckles Brothers

Martin McGuinness and Ian Paisley have not exchanged an angry word in the eight months they have led the Stormont executive. McGuinness said his "cordial and civilised" working relationship with the Democratic Unionist leader had confounded critics. In fact they appear in public smiling and laughing together, and have been nicknamed by the press the "Chuckles Brothers".

The Sinn Fein MP said: "I've always believed throughout the course of my political life that Ian Paisley was a very bitter, very harsh person and was really only interested in his political opinion holding sway. I am not offering up what he thought about me. Obviously he probably had as poor an opinion of me as I had of him."

Radiating goodwill and an unanticipated talent for give-and-take, Paisley, formerly known as "Dr No" has been saying an unreserved "yes" to a whole host of people and places that he would once have roundly denounced, extending the hand of friendship to Irish nationalists and senior Catholic figures alike.

He is now a regular, and willing, visitor to Dublin, which he once avoided. He has met the Irish President, Mary McAleese, and is in regular contact with the Irish Prime Minister, Bertie Ahern. He has even had cordial discussions with the head of the Catholic church.

People have been waiting to see whether an old-style eruption of Mount Paisley might occur. But no: he now revels in agreement and reconciliation, proudly boasting that the multi-party executive he chairs has considered 105 items of business, and failed to attain full consensus on only three occasions. The Chuckles Brothers are a true symbol of peace. ■

PIONEER

The Pioneer Total Abstinence Association of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was founded by Fr James A Cullen, SJ in Dublin on 28 December 1898

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The spread of the christian virtue of temperance throughout Ireland and abroad

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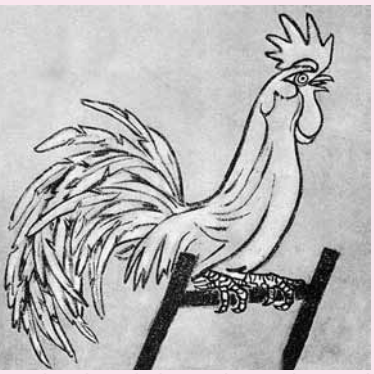
Ph: 09 522 1728 after 7pm
Father Leo Doyle, 97 Galway St, Onehunga, Auckland,
Ph: 09 636 4647

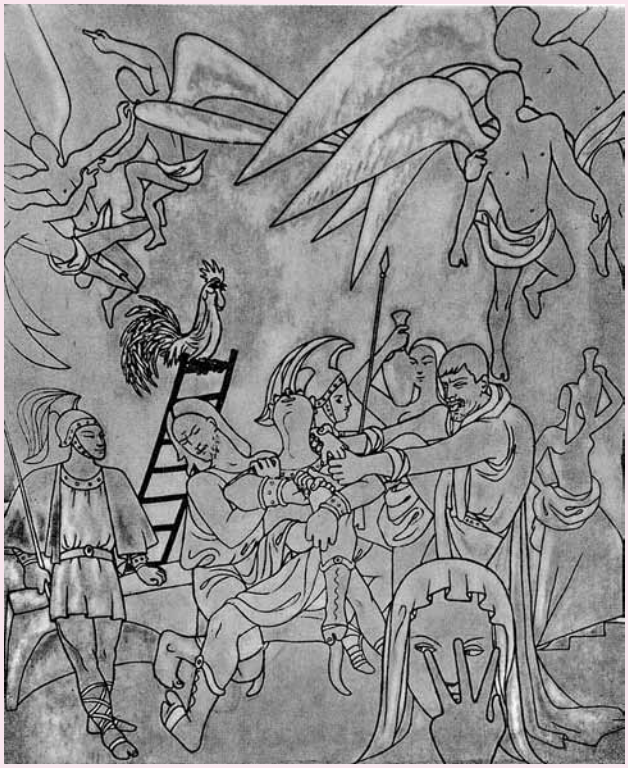
The Chapel o

Jean Cocteau the painter

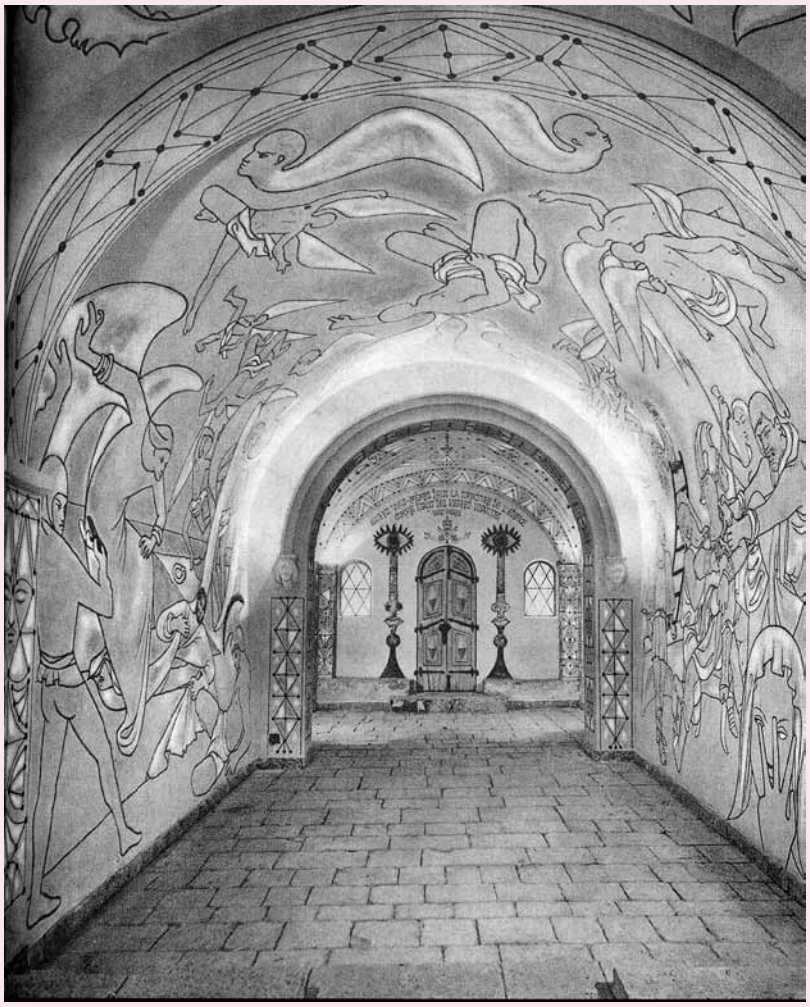
The artist at work. Jean Cocteau creating the new frescoes for the chapel of St peter



(*detail: see below*) The Cock – traditional symbol of Peter's denial



Denial of Peter: Peter is being roughed up by Pilate's soldiers, while the serving maid flees



View looking back towards the entrance. The barrel-like aisle of the chapel of St Peter. Above the door is written: "set yourselves close to him, that you too may be living stones making a spiritual house" (*1 Peter 2,5*)

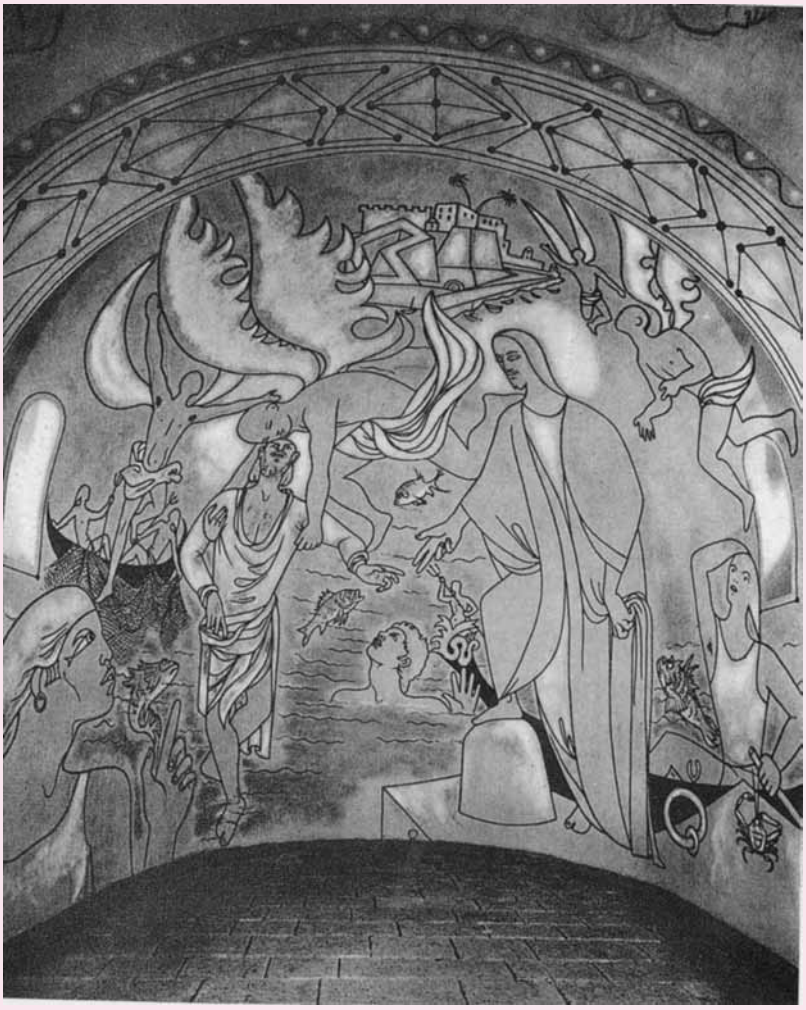
Jean Cocteau (1889-1963), poet, dramatist, artist and film-maker, was a leading light of avant-garde movements in pre-war France. He would often visit Villefranche, a little fishing village on the French Riviera, to write. There by the sea was a tiny, half-ruined chapel of St Pierre dating back to the Middle Ages. The fishermen used it for mending their nets.

Cocteau, who in spite of a somewhat Bohemian lifestyle always remained a loyal Catholic, determined to restore the chapel. Eventually the fishermen were persuaded to give it up, and in 1957 Cocteau, with some assistance, spent several months restoring the fabric and decorating the interior walls with frescoes. It stands today as a memorial to Peter, the first 'sainted' fisherman – but also to the artist who covered its walls with gospel stories as well as depicting the villagers.

Art teacher Margaret Ann Howard comments: "Jean Cocteau saw himself as a loving poet, with a devotion to St Peter and to the restoration of the Villefranche chapel as a 'Star of the Sea', thus honouring him as well as local fishermen and women. Cocteau's frescoes bring together the past and the present – key

# of Saint Peter

in Villefranche-sur-mer



view looking towards the sanctuary. The apse fresco shows Peter walking on the water, being held up by an angel. Christ looks on compassionately. Swimmers and fish gaze on the scene with astonishment

A tribute to the women of the village, painted on a side wall near the door

(*detail: see left*) The hand of Christ stretches out towards Peter's hand

An angel comes to rouse Peter asleep in prison (*Acts 12, 6-7*) while the guard to the right lies undisturbed

scenes from St Peter's life and of the Villefranche that he knew; it is a warming message.

"He saw his art as figurative poetry where one episode flows into another. His use of line drawings is simple, elegant and confident. However, Peter's face is honoured with more detail and Christ's face shows serenity and tender amusement. The ceiling's geometric networks conjure up Christ inviting Peter to be a fisher of men – and that includes modern visitors. Fishing nets appear three times in the frescoes.

"The panels also are rich in symbolism. Angels abound, indicative of divine interest and intervention e.g. in St Peter's escape from prison. When he walks uncertainly on water and is given angelic support, a supplicant hand still reaches to Christ's blessing hand (*see above right*). This recalls Michelangelo's portrayal of the hands of God and Adam. The servant girl's hand (*middle left*) tells of Peter's three denials and her betrayal of him to the guards.

"The style is deceptively simple, yet the scope for viewer involvement is immense."

Theology and the environment – bridging the gap

Summary of a paper given by Fr Neil Vaney to the recent ACPA Conference in Auckland. Neil examines the significance of place in our experience of God. He notes precisely where we are situated in our Universe

Numinous experiences

In Genesis there is a wonderful story about Jacob who was bracing himself to go and see Esau, his brother whom he had defrauded and who wanted to kill him. On the way he slept out in the open and had a dream (*Gen.28: 10-17*). he dreamt he had an encounter with God, and when he woke Jacob said: "Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it."

Moments of transcendence which happen during our lives, when the Divine impacts on us directly, occur much more commonly than most of us think. Alistair Hardy, an English marine biologist in the 1970s, set up an Institute to investigate such moments. He himself had had a transcendent experience as a ten-year-old and wondered how common they were.

He surveyed schools all over Britain asking children the question: "Have you ever been aware of, or influenced by, a presence or power – whether you call it God or not – which is different from your everyday self". The results, published in a book called *The Spiritual Nature of Man* (1979), were quite contrary to the 'received wisdom' of the times, especially among psychologists: that children are basically pagans and only become religious as a result of being brainwashed. From a sample of 6,500 British teenagers, Hardy found that more than 80 percent admitted to having had some sort of mystical experience: a sense of the Other within oneself, of being drawn out of oneself, of becoming one with the Cosmos or with other people.

Later David Hay, a disciple of Hardy, did a series of interviews with adults in Australia and Canada. He too discovered that nearly half of them also recalled a similarly evocative happening – an occurrence in nature like a sunset in a special place, a near experience of death, or a deep personal trial. Often it was the first time they had ever shared this event with another human being. Their reticence was partly because it was so 'beyond words' they had no language to speak about it. Or it was because of a society taboo; "you never see things like that on TV or read about them in the media or in novels". People simply lack a framework for readily describing these transcendental happenings.

Why this tradition of reticence about something so important? Possibly, thinks Vaney, because since the Reformation religious people have become so absorbed with sin and justification and with moral and ethical issues they have become lost to the deeper realities. Yet the very first phrase of our Creed is about God the Creator. Our relation with the one who made us, you would think, would be paramount.

Significance of place

Usually, these numinous experiences are strongly associated with *a particular place*. In the Bible we think of Sinai or Mt Tabor or the Mount of Olives – or even 'the Upper Room'. Suddenly, a place which you know well becomes somewhere "you see for the first time". C.S.Lewis describes it fictionally in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* – the Narnia experience.

Many mystics associate a meeting with the transcendent with a particular place. Thomas Merton for instance describes his first vision of Kanchenjunga in Nepal. He was on his final overseas journey. He says: "The full beauty of the mountain is not seen until you can consent to the impossible paradox – *it is and it is not*; when nothing more needs to be seen, the smoke of ideas clears, the mountain is there".

We are talking here about the holiest of places. There is, suggests Vaney, a sacramentality of place. You suddenly come to realise that a certain place encompasses God in a unique way. That is one reason why people go on pilgrimage – to visit and spend time in a sacred spot, where something extraordinary once happened.

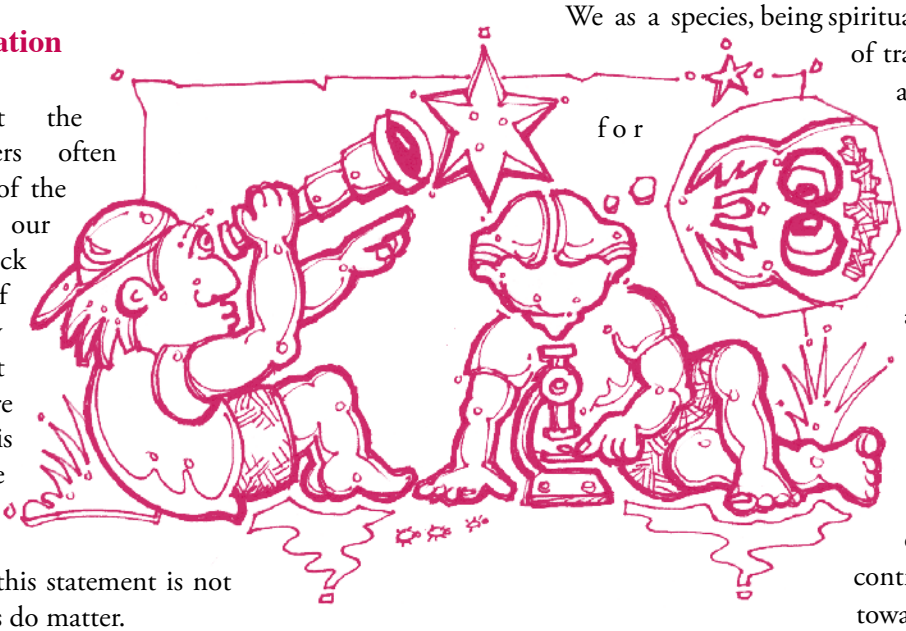
Because of the Enlightenment and its particular way of expressing science and philosophy – reinforced in our own age by reductionist economics, modern people have become increasingly rootless. This causes a deep unhappiness and disturbance of spirit in contemporary society. Simone Weil said that to be rooted is perhaps the most important need of the human soul. Maori have a word *turangawaewae,* meaning *the place where I stand*. It is a place I call my own. It roots me. I belong here. It is MY place.

Lacking such a place, having no roots, is a disease of our time. We have ceased to be connected, especially to our past. *What happened in the Middle Ages? What happened at Gallipoli?* Many New Zealanders are totally ignorant of their common past. They have lost their roots and, with it, their sense of meaning. Many of them have no real memories. So much of our lives today can be taken up in supermarkets, shopping malls, airports, hotel rooms, motorways – in anonymous, faceless spaces, having transient, shallow experiences.

The theologian Walter Breuggeman wrote about 'the land' and describes 'place' as a *particular type of space*. Places we remember give us a sense of continuity across generations, recalling words, arguments, incidents. They enable us to belong on this earth.

Humanity in relation to the Cosmos

So what about the earth? Astronomers often remind us bleakly of the insignificance of our planet, a mere speck in the vastness of the universe. Why do we worry about our planet's future if our life on it is so transient, if we ourselves are of so little importance? The answer is that this statement is not true. Human beings do matter.



Our location in the Cosmos, in fact, is amazingly significant. In terms of size and scale we lie almost exactly halfway between the smallest thing in the known Universe – subatomic entities called 'quarks' – and the biggest thing which is the diameter of the whole known Universe. We live in a privileged place. If we were smaller than we are, we would be unable to observe atoms, analyse our DNA, let alone detects quarks. If we were larger we would find it difficult to move around. Think of the elephant.

We can make telescopes, and being on a planet with a clear atmosphere we can actually see out and view the whole Universe around us. This planet of ours is unique in allowing life as we know it, intelligent life, to flourish on it. There are lots of other planets but they are so inhospitable or placed so unfavourably in the galaxy that life like ours would be impossible on them. There may only be one or two in the whole Milky Way system capable of supporting life as we know it.

We earthlings, therefore, hold a unique, exceptional position. We can see everything that is, from the smallest to the largest, from the nearest to the most remote. We can know them and love them. Through our telescopes we can see new galaxies forming – or we can dig in the garden and through our microscopes discover microbes vital for our living.

To judge the true significance of things only by size is foolish. It is to forget that we are spirit as well as matter. Our spirit encompasses the whole of reality from the largest objects to the least. We can begin to care for little things because we now know they are under threat. For instance, the plankton in the ocean flourish in a very narrow temperature range. If we allow temperatures to rise, we destroy their possibility of life – and all those organisms which depend on them also perish, including ultimately ourselves.

We as a species, being spiritual beings, are capable of transcending our egos and actually caring for these other beings at the cost of a certain inconvenience to ourselves. Potentially, we can achieve this because as spiritual beings we have a moral responsibility for the well-being of our world and by our actions we can contribute critically towards it.

Theological implications

Just as Jesus came to mediate between humankind and God, so we too have a vocation to mediate between the various beings on our planet. We have to think incarnationally. We already know how critical for the survival of people are the sea levels in the Pacific or the rainfall in parts of Australia. This impacts on us as a moral obligation. We are called to preserve the richness of the life we see around us. We may not be able to save all species, but we can try to preserve what is possible.

One way we do this is by preserving natural places, by creating national parks or ecosanctuaries. These provide an environment where small or threatened organisms can survive and flourish. But they are also places where people can go and feel the integrity of their relationship with the natural world. A city child who never sees a tree or a sheep or a native bird, can go and see them 'in the wild' and spend time with them. ■

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Holidays – train time or enfolding time?

A holiday was once a 'holy day' – a time you took to slow down and let your spirit rest in God. A recent experience in Australia allowed Anna Holmes to do just that

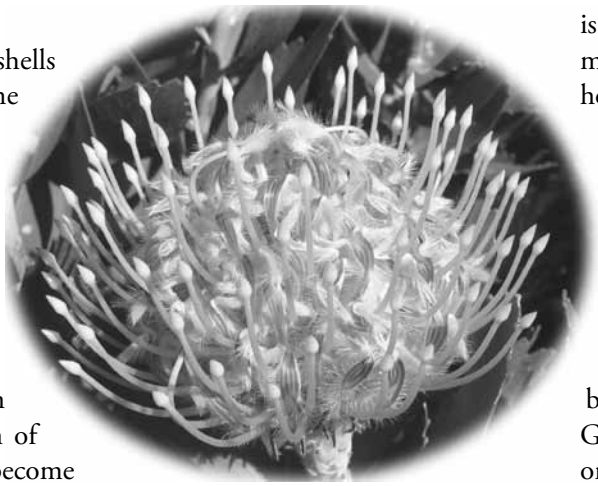
Christmas in New Zealand is a wonderful time of the year. It is a time of new birth, of summer flowering, of refreshment and renewal for people taking holidays. The original meaning of holidays was *holy days*. They were days set apart being in the presence of God, for renewal and refreshment. They allowed time to gaze with new eyes at the wonders of creation.

Holidays allow us to shed the shells of our everyday roles and come to a new place among strangers. We wear different clothes and behave in a new way on holiday. In a sense holidays allow us to be reborn.

Our lives are so busy that we seldom take time just to be. Time is a railway track down which we must drive the train of our lives. Even holidays may become a chore as we look for things to do, gather in all the family, organise our pets, our gardens and our houses. We may pollute the atmosphere by travelling long distances by road or air in search of something different. I sometimes wonder if the modern trend for touring is not a deep-seated need for holidays that are also pilgrimages. A pilgrimage is a journey seeking God and the holy. It is about enfolding time that allows us space to be still.

The art of holidays consists in taking time to be. Sitting still and resting in the sense of the presence of God lets us look with new eyes at the amazing and entrancing planet we live on. Allowing ourselves to feel the texture of the land, see the ever-changing colours of the sky, sea, and hills. Smelling the new mown hay and the flowers. Cooking things that take time to do, as an antidote to all the fast food we make and eat throughout the year on train time.

This year we had a special holiday. First was a conference – no that is not a holiday. But this was a conference



on *Spirituality and Health*. One of the sessions was about the way in which our bodies are designed to respond to quiet meditation. The slowing of breathing in meditation to six breaths a minute resonates with other systems in the body. If practised regularly it has effects that last weeks, calming and soothing the body from everyday hassles.

This type of breathing has been known for thousands of years. It was and is used in Christian, Buddhist and Hindu meditation. All the contemplative saints have practised it and found that it helped them grow in peace and holiness. I am sure that is what enabled Julian of Norwich to say with perfect certainty: "All will be well. All manner of things will be well."

Slow breathing affects the heart rate, and this in turn affects the feelings. A new sense of peace, wholeness and connection occurs with regular meditation. Stress is reduced, chronic ailments are improved, blood pressure comes down, a sense of well-being is increased and resistance to disease is also increased. All these results of meditation are based on evidence, not hope.

What intrigued me most about this paper was that focussing the mind – which is after all what meditation or mindfulness is about, seems to work better when the mind is focussed on transcendent things rather than just on the process of breathing. Taking time to be with God does make a difference. Not only does it have immediate results in terms of effects – it has been measured as working for about two weeks after a 20 minute session of meditation. Now that's what I would call a holiday.

We then travelled from Adelaide to Perth by train. The sleeping cars were snug, almost uterine in their enclosing of us, rocking us to sleep. Two and a half days of threading our way across the Nullabor Plain with only a few kangaroos, the odd camel and occasional emu among the semi-desert scrub, was very restful. The land has an ancient feel to it, watchful and self-possessed.

Next we went to stay at New Norcia. This is a Benedictine monastery north of Perth, set in the rolling countryside not unlike the vale of York in England.

A moment of revelation

Whilst walking in the hills recently following a favourite route near Mt Kaukau, I remembered a moment of revelation I had over a year ago, and was surprised how much that recollection boosted my faith again. In fact during that time I have been trying to recapture the distinct difference in the same view that caught my attention.

I find walking in the hills a therapeutic time to reflect, and often God seems to be part of it. It is sometimes difficult to focus in prayer, but God seems to speak through circumstances or in subtle ways. One day as I sat up high, I acknowledged that I didn't feel connected with God, but that I had a knowing that I could not understand, that God was still there even if I didn't sense it. I decided I didn't need to experience or hear God but just to be.

As I set off back, I glanced at the view I had seen many times before, across the hills. For the first time I saw the sea in the distance, and land beyond, yet I had been up there many times before. I was sure it was different and thought it must be the cape near Eastbourne. It stuck with me and I described it to friends. It became a strength to me that there was always the unexpected, more to see, more to grasp than we ever see at one time. It was as if God had affirmed himself in the revelation of the view.

I went up soon after (early in the morning) to check that this new view was still there. It was; it hadn't been a one-off miracle. However I then realized that I was facing west, and that it could only be the top of the South Island, and I could see further toward Farewell Spit. I couldn't believe it, it seemed so close. Again it seemed like God speaking to me – that there was always more, further revelation.

I have been up many times since, but only on a few occasions have I had the sense of unbelievable closeness, as though I could touch the cliffs of the Marlborough Sounds. For me it has become a metaphor for our experience of God, that we sense and see God to different degrees depending on both ourselves and other factors. Yet God is always there, even if as in a mist or invisible. ■

Chris Carey-Smith

Indeed there are little towns called York and Beverley nearby. They are not at all like their originals.

The monastery was once surrounded by four schools. These are now used for retreats and educational activities. The old guest house is a small hotel with wide verandahs and a pervading sense of peace. The monks pray the hours and guests may join them in their chapel.

In the countryside around the monastery the ground was full of wonderful flowers in every conceivable shape and colour. There were spider orchids with petals ten cm. across and tiny donkey orchids with yellow faces and red ears. Fringe flowers in fluorescent pink and orange with finely fringed edges. Pea flowers in every size were abundant, from ground creepers to small trees, including some amazing clashing combinations of maroon and orange. Some of them even produce 1080 to keep browsing animals away. All this lavish display grew in ground that can only be described as red gravel.

Everywhere we went, because we were on enfolding time – not train time, not hurried, preoccupied or busy, we met delightful people. We listened to and shared stories. It was a wonderful human time. That is what holidays are about – listening to and sharing. ■

Jumping for joy

Tui Motu *interviews a 'retired' couple who strongly believe the golden years are to be lived to the full*

Whatever would possess a 73-year-old grandmother to throw herself out of an aeroplane at 13,000 feet and be wafted around by parachute for 15 minutes before returning to *terra firma*? It is simply a measure of the dedication of Elizabeth Murphy in raising funds for her charity, the *Beacon of Hope*, a home hospice service operating in Ceredigion, Wales.

First, some background. *Tui Motu* published the story of the beginnings of *Beacon of Hope* in October 2001. At that time the organisation had been up and running for only a year. Its base is located in Aberystwyth, a University town by the sea in mid-Wales. Ceredigion is predominantly a rural county, and there are no residential hospices. Yet all the needs are there – terminally ill people and many others with chronic disabling diseases, still in their own homes; carers – usually the spouse – stretched to the limit trying to cope with a sick person and without adequate help.

Elizabeth and her husband Roger are both retired schoolteachers. They had set up *Age Concern* in Ceredigion in 1994. They then became aware of the peculiar needs of the housebound and the terminally ill of all ages. So they set about finding a solution.

The Hospice movement is very well established in Britain. In Wales alone there are 14 voluntary hospices, about half residential. They have always leant heavily on voluntary funding. *Beacon of Hope* was not only initiated by volunteers, but is also partly staffed by people giving their time and energy for no financial reward. In the seven years since it was started, *Beacon of Hope* has grown steadily and now employs four contract nurses, eight 'bank' or emergency nurses, five paid caseworkers as well as many volunteers. It requires a lot of fund-raising, since only about one-eighth of their costs are paid by the Welsh Assembly Government. Which brings us back to Elizabeth's parachute adventure.

The jump

What was it like doing your first jump at the age of 73? "Wonderful", says Elizabeth; "My instructor told me I would enjoy every moment of it – and I did!"

No qualms at all? "Just for a moment as I buckled myself up in the plane. But even the first moments of free fall were absolutely exhilarating".

As she arrived back on solid ground, the instructor to whom she was buckled, deftly put his feet below hers, so she had a 'soft' landing. She was one of eight volunteers who did parachute jumps that day, and between them they raised over £9,000 in sponsorship. For Elizabeth, the experience was entirely painless. She would do it again tomorrow! Who wouldn't – to raise so much?

Their local MP (retired), who has always been very supportive was so impressed, he decided he too would do a sponsored jump. His experience was not so joyous as Elizabeth's. In fact, he hated every minute of it. "It was like the cruellest torture in the lowest pit of hell", he declared. Nevertheless he raised another £3,000 for them.

Progress at Ffagl Gobaith

Since 2000 the Charity has gained many awards for its non-medical palliative care. Now it has the medical *Hospice at Home* nursing service. Its nurses operate from Aberystwyth in the North and Cardigan 40 miles to the South, and into the hinterland. The Director of Nursing is an experienced District Nurse who had researched integrated medical and social care. The Nurse Manager is a 'Macmillan Nurse' – the UK designation for those specialising in promoting cancer palliative care. The nurses assess the needs of patients in their own home and agree to implement a full packet of care from the moment of diagnosis in partnership with the statutory health and social services. The Charity's services are 24/7.

When nursing service was launched in May, Elizabeth and Roger chose to do it in style. A conference centre in Aberystwyth was hired and the local Westminster MP as well as Assembly of Wales members were invited, along with many local sponsors and dignitaries. Among the speakers was Elizabeth Luard – a brilliant writer with strong views on care of the dying. Elizabeth engaged a young violinist she heard busking. He turned out to be a musician with a national reputation. Good publicity pays off.

So what next?

Elizabeth takes a strong line about residential hospices. The UK experience is that running costs are prohibitive. Some very big voluntary hospices have no beds at all. All the established hospices say that if they were to be able to start again they would do what she is doing.

When *Hospice at Home* is fully established, then the public might demand some stand-alone residential hospice facilities, in their own grounds and not part of the statutory sector. The *Beacon of Hope* has always found or funded respite for patients and carers. Increasing numbers of people want to die at home, and the function of many hospices is to provide a brief period to stabilise optimum analgesia.

Roger and Elizabeth at the office – in a more formal pose

Ideally Elizabeth would like to see two small, affordable traditional hospice units, one at the north end of the county, the other at the south, where those who wished could go at the very end of life. She periodically gets offers of land or buildings, but none so far have been in the right place. There is also a limit to what the Ceredigion voluntary sector can afford, and the National Health Service does not get involved in such building and maintenance.

Profile of hope

"Rabbi Nachman of Bratislava (1772-1810] declared, 'It is forbidden to despair.'

...Emily Dickinson wrote that hope is the 'thing with feathers'.

In the 21st century, hope is the thing with muscles. And allies. Keeping despair at bay takes more than individual willpower or spiritual resolve; it requires effort and partners and platforms and committees and faith communities and movements... None is expendable."

Anita Diamant: *Pitching My Tent*

What the NHS "might do... will do... must do", she says, is to commission *Beacon of Hope* nurses for their services; the general public will do the rest.

All this organisation, training and payment of professional staff requires money, lots of money. Elizabeth says that services must be "realistic, attainable and sustainable". So the design of the services must be right, and the money has to be found. People will fund hospice and palliative care especially when they understand the voluntary sector's role. One trump card the Murphys use is to point out that they themselves are unpaid, as are so many of their 75-or-so workers. People like to be reassured that the money they give is not supporting a costly administration. Some may conclude that this factor is a luxury which is unlikely to go on forever. Elizabeth and Roger disagree, which may be one reason why the *Beacon of Hope* has been so successful.

Conclusion

Talking with Elizabeth and Roger brings to mind a couple of basic principles of practical Christianity. They have been ardent, practising Catholics all their lives. Retirement for them has not been an invitation to sit round in the sun doing nothing. The Gospel imperative led them along a new path of caring for others less fortunate.

In the absence of adequate local hospice provision, they saw a need and decided to answer it themselves rather than waiting for the state to do it for them. They have thoroughly enjoyed the challenge. Theirs is a fine example of the fact that you are never too old to start and sustain an initiative like the *Beacon of Hope*. You could say they are in it for love rather than money.

A Minister of Health once said that historically it had always been voluntary organisations which identified problems, found and proved solutions, and then the state took over while the voluntary sector moved on to 'higher things'. Elizabeth and Roger think that the 'higher thing' is partnership on equal terms between the statutory and voluntary sectors.

Roger and Elizabeth will tell you that when you retire from your lifetime profession, you only have to look about you to find lots of worthwhile projects. For them, there has been more to retirement than bowls and bridge. Or, as Roger would say, "...than golf and poker!" ■

Prayer and Action

Jim Consedine

Recently I took part in a protest rally and march from Cathedral Square in Christchurch, highlighting the overreaction of police in arresting some activist groups under the cloak of terrorism laws. I was pushing a pram with one of our tamariki aboard and carrying a *Catholic Worker* sign saying *pray for peace*. A policeman came alongside at one stage and said, "I agree with you, we certainly need to do that."

I suddenly realised that during this peace and justice rally – for that indeed was what it was – this was the only sign that gave any recognition to the spiritual nature of what we were about. None of the speakers had raised the dimension of the spiritual underpinning of peace and justice and the desire we were expressing that the police also act in peaceful, non-intimidatory ways. The philosophy of non-violence was not mentioned. It was as if Te Whiti o Rongomai, Thomas Merton, Martin Luther King, Mohandas K. Gandhi, the Buddha, Dorothy Day and Jesus never existed.

The point the sign was making is that no lasting peace – or proper social change for that matter – can come about unless hearts and minds are changed. And that means an inward journey to strengthen the soul. If I have learnt something in 40 years of social activism I have learned that simple truth. Political action on its own is simply not enough. Political action not grounded in firm moral and spiritual soil is destined to wither and die. Where we separate out social struggle for justice from prayer and moral principle, we plant seeds that cannot endure.

Conversely, faith on its own is not enough. It wasn't enough in the time of the apostle James who wrote, "A person obtains holiness by deeds and not by faith alone." And the apostle John wrote: "Our love is not to be mere words or mere talk, but something real and active." Just as successive popes have pointed out for more than 40 years that true peacemaking is rooted in justice, so like Siamese twins, prayer and action go together.

The struggle for peace and justice is one that belongs to everyone, not just so-called activists. Activists are simply people who take the command of Jesus "to love thy neighbour" more seriously than most. But this struggle can only succeed in a lasting way when its spiritual roots are recognised. It is through prayer, reflection and meditation that we come to recognise that the roots of lasting social change lie buried deep within the hearts of people. It is only the Spirit who can access our hearts. And it is only when hearts change that injustice is overcome and sustainable peace can be promoted in social and political structures.

This is a message that social activists need to consider. The world is littered with burnt out activists who didn't understand until it was too late that they were running their batteries low. And when they did realise they had a problem, they either didn't know or had forgotten how to recharge. They were too often left with the empty shell of unfulfilled hopes, tinged sometimes with bitter memories, of what originally had been wonderful ideals. Political groupings are very susceptible to this syndrome, especially at a time of a general election. For many it can take half a lifetime to recover from such disillusionment and exhaustion.

Which leads me back to our police protest march and the sign, *pray for peace*. It is important that protests, marches and vigils occur. They are a public witness to a particular cause for justice. It is also important that varying actions for peace and justice be an integral part of the spiritual life of each person, and certainly anyone who professes Christ. The church's teaching is clear about that. But in order to sustain such action, it is vital that it be rooted in prayer. Prayer is like a jug plugged into a divine socket and switched on. Once connected, little bubbles surface slowly. On occasions the bubbles become so powerful and dominating that they come to the surface and take over the whole jug. But because the water is never separated from the source in the socket, life is always bubbling just below the surface. It never goes away.

In the same way, divine life is always bubbling away just below our consciousness and never goes away. Occasionally as we tap into it, it surfaces and takes over our lives in overt prayer forms. But most of the time the divine is present out of mind just below the surface. It is keeping it warm and ready to come to the boil that is the lot of daily prayer, reflection and meditation. And it is from such prayer that the challenge "to love our neighbour" and become social justice advocates flows. In this sense, we are all called to be activists. ■

A peak moment

Mike Marshall

Being an only child, my moving to New Zealand after I got married was a hard call for my parents to take. However, when they retired they came to live here. They adapted readily, enjoying our young family and relishing the parish life and wider social activities.

Twenty years ago this year, my mother died suddenly during a trip to England to visit family and friends. Our pastor arrived on our doorstep, hugged me and simply said: "It's not fair." I flew back to England alone – we could not afford for all of us to go. My Dad was not a baptised Catholic and my extended family were not regular attendees, so it fell to me to organise the funeral.

Unique experience of love

The night before my departure, our house was full to overflowing as the community and friends came together for a Mass for Mum's soul, our family and my journey. I cannot remember details about that occasion, but the overwhelming feeling of love, support and grace I will never forget. I carried it with me, almost like a suitcase, over the subsequent days and events. It still comes back to me like waves as I write.

During the flight to London, I spoke to a woman who was also returning to England as her father was dying. We discussed death, my recent attendance at a Kubler-Ross talk and my own journey. I think it helped both of us.

My family was waiting for me when I arrived, and at once I was plunged into having to guide the funeral arrangements. The local priest, ex-army, was thought to be a bit daunting, but he listened and acceded happily to my requests re funeral music, readings, vestments and eulogy. The undertaker and family were at first taken aback and surprised that I suggested Mum be carried by family members in the New Zealand tradition rather than hired pallbearers. Throughout this time I endeavoured to support my somewhat shell-shocked Dad and Mum's three sisters, as well as keeping in touch with my own family and community back in New Zealand. Eventually I returned home with my Dad, and we celebrated a special memorial Mass in our parish church for my wife, children, family and community.

Parish as a resource

The death of a first parent is always hard, but had I not been able to draw on the spiritual resources I had been gifted through the entire parish community, that physical and mental journey would have been indescribably difficult. I am sure many of our parishioners have such peak moments, which has made it all the harder for some to walk away, or others, at best, to hang on by their fingertips.

In my parish we had worked strongly and successfully to implement the ideals of Vatican II. Our priest for 18 years, along with a core community of Sisters, nurtured and developed a community of committed, seven-day-a week Catholics, where we developed an educated and adult faith, with the priest assuming a truly pastoral role, accompanying us on the journey.

Aftermath

It was not destined to last. Our Vatican II parish has been effectively dismantled and brought 'back into line'. The cost has been high. Disillusioned families and individuals walked away, as ministries and leadership roles were reduced to 'father's helpers.' Two women left to take up ordained roles in the Anglican Church.

Recently, owing to the falling numbers of priests, our new parish priest started this year with the unenviable task of trying to cover two parishes containing three churches. Recently the Bishop gave two weeks' notice that one was to be shut down and Mass times altered in the two main parish churches. There were no meetings, no consultation, no direction in regard to reorganisation of ministries. It seemed to be simply about timetabling Masses.

On the final Sunday before the timetable changes, the supply priest noted that many ageing priest will not be around in five years time – yet here we have a situation where the Diocese is reminiscent of headless chooks running around timetabling Masses with fewer priests, rather than acknowledging the inevitable necessity of utilising the Lay Ministry (as at least one viable solution).

Twelve years ago, we had many people, active participants in arranging liturgy across 12 *Neighbourhood Groups* and parish ministries, who could organise and lead meaningful Sunday liturgies. From a parish where there was extensive and meaningful involvement in a multitude of ministerial and community groups, where ministries met for planning, practice and study, we have reverted to a much smaller group on rosters printed in the bulletin.

But for those used to adult Catholicism, there can be no going back to pre-Vatican II primary school.

The Acts of the Apostles

Beginnings (1:1-6)

Susan Smith

The Gospel of *Luke* and the *Acts of the Apostles* come to us from the same author, and so the reader should not be surprised at similarities in style and content found in these two important New Testament books. They both appear deceptively simple narratives, the first concerned with the infancy, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, the second with the emergence of the Christian movement after the Resurrection and the descent of the Holy Spirit.

Acts appears as little more than a simple chronological account of the community of believers between 30 A.D. and 60 A.D. The story finishes before important events in the community such as the deaths of Peter and Paul in Rome between 64-68, and before the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

One important question facing the contemporary reader is whether or not *Acts* is history as we understand it today. Probably not. For example, apparent contradictions emerge such as the author's narrative of Paul's journey to Thessalonica and the apostle's letter to the same community. In *1 Thessalonians*, written about 50 A.D, at least 30 or so years before Luke writes *Acts*, Paul commends the young Christian community for turning from idols "to serve a living and true God", a sure indication that the newly baptised Thessalonians were Gentiles. Luke, writing much later, tells us that Paul preached in the synagogue at Thessalonica, and argued with the Jews "from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and rise from the dead" (*Acts 17:3*). How are we to respond to such historical contradictions? And to complicate matters still further, archaeologists tell us that so far no ruins of an ancient synagogue have been discovered in Thessalonica.

So what was Luke up to? I believe that the opening verses in *Luke-Acts* provide us with a clue. In both instances, the author begins with a reference to "most excellent Theophilus" (*Luke 1:3*), and "Theophilus" (*Acts 1:1*). Who was Theophilus? He may well have been a patron who supported the author's literary efforts. Or he may have been a public official who was well disposed toward the young Christian communities scattered around the Mediterranean. Given that *Theophilus* is the Greek for "friend of God", the author may have intended it as a generic name for those followers of the risen Jesus who have received the Holy Spirit, "the promise of the Father" (*Acts 1:4*).

If Luke's primary concern in *Acts* was to provide guidelines as it were for the young Christian communities to live in ways that would ensure the proclamation of Jesus' name "to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (*Luke 24:48*), then statements such as Jesus arguing in the synagogue may represent problems at the historical level, but not at the level of theological truth.

When Jesus first stood up to preach in the synagogue at Nazareth, proclaiming the good news that the Spirit of the Lord was upon him (*Luke 4:18-19*), his audience attempted to kill him. In *Acts 17:13*, we learn that the Jews of Thessalonica after hearing of Paul's preaching, came "to stir up and incite the crowds."

Luke's message for the early followers of Jesus and for the contemporary disciple is that the way of Jesus must be our way too. Luke conveys this wonderful theological insight in narrative form – just as Jesus was hounded out of the synagogue when he first preached, so was Paul hounded out of the synagogue in Thessalonica. So too for us. Our witness to the good news probably will not win us friends in high places. We too will be hounded if not literally then metaphorically for the positions we take.

In the coming year, I want to journey with Stephen, with Peter, and with Paul from Jerusalem to the various Christian communities scattered around the Mediterranean. I believe that the *Acts of the Apostles*, readings from which appear in the Lectionary in the six weeks after Easter, has important messages for us today. ■

Susan Smith is a Sister of Our Lady of the Missions and teaches in her congregation's Asian provinces

A Mother's Journal

Kaaren Mathias

Its getting to Advent. The time of waiting, expecting, Mary, pukekos in punga trees…. and a swollen pregnant puku.

I've tried to think of other things for this Mother's Journal – but there is only one thing I can journal of honestly this month. I had a miscarriage two weeks ago. My unfurling fern frond, my Advent expectations, withered away. Hopes for Christmas belly and a baby next year are gone. It's kind of raw and proximate for sharing in a magazine – but what else can I write about? It's a grief that's somehow hidden, a loss barely whispered about, almost a kind of shame. I'm very sad about losing our little one but I know I'm not alone.

Each month thousands of families walk this lonely, dark path of loss. Friends and relatives hearing of our miscarriage have shared their own stories of babies that never made it. Women I thought I knew well have uncovered their own losses – babies I never knew of – some died many decades ago now. One friend never ended up with any alive children. Another young woman told me of losing four pregnancies in a row. She's hoping to be pregnant again soon.

We have been sent prayers and love. The chicken soup and hot chocolate have given me strength. So have many hugs and tears shared with my husband and children.

So we're not in New Zealand with spring and summer leaping expectantly at Advent. It feels right in many ways to be spending this early Advent time of waiting here in Himachal Pradesh where everything is closing up shop for winter. All around leaves are flaring into colour then dropping. First frosts have gnawed the grass so it's brown and dying, the rivers are smaller and quieter. Shadows stretch dark and cold over the valleys. It is a waiting time. I'm sitting by the tandoor (Himachali woodburner) and waiting. Waiting for life to bud and leap again.

Kaaren Mathias lives and works with her three children and husband, Jeph, in the hills of Himachal Pradesh, North India.

A bumper crop for bookworms

Kathleen Doherty's pick of best books for 2007

Short stories

Just when I thought that a year of exceptionally rewarding reading couldn't get any better, out popped the latest William Trevor, to turn 2007 into a truly vintage year.

There are no surprises, no changes of direction in *Cheating at Canasta*, William Trevor's 11th collection of short stories – and that should be enough to have readers of his previous works hunting for this one. With every collection this master of language – now nearing 80 – seems to have a more incisive view of the human condition. In every story the characters have secrets only hinted at, their relationships have spaces which are more important than the points of connection, they have loneliness which cannot be voiced.

William Trevor rarely states his conclusions: he sketches situations, leaves the reader to read between the lines and discover the truth. Among the 12 stories some deal with old loves unresolved, family relationships which continue smoothly only because one person chooses to withhold their true feelings, loyalty in marriage which survives long beyond the death of one of the parties. The title story concerns the trip which a husband makes at the request of his wife, now succumbing to dementia, to their old haunts in Venice. He overhears a young couple arguing as he sits alone in a bar, remembering how he still plays canasta with his wife, cheating so that she can always delight in winning. "My God", he thinks, "what they are wasting!" It is a poignant comment on the fleeting nature of happiness, pure William Trevor. (*Cheating at Canasta* is published by Viking.)

Recalling one's youth

Early this year *Out Stealing Horses* by the Norwegian writer Per Petterson (*Vintage pbk*) worked its way into my heart and has stayed there over many re-readings. It is always difficult to tell with a translation how much one owes to the translator, but certainly Anne Born has done a fine job in presenting exquisite prose to tell this story of loss of innocence confronted in old age.

The narrator has come to an isolated cottage in the far east of Norway where he expects to end his days alone. But he discovers that he has a neighbour in the same situation, and that they knew each other 50 years earlier, at the time of a happening which changed both their lives forever. The story skilfully interweaves the past with the present, questions are raised and gently answered, the relationship of boys with their fathers is explored and understood only years later when experience has provided the key.

Set in the spectacular landscape of Norway's lakes and forests, the story is raw and lyrical in turn, truly memorable. It is not giving anything away to quote the last words of this novel which echo an earlier lesson provided by the father and which are not a bad principle to live by: "...we do decide for ourselves when it will hurt."

Village life between the wars

Also in translation, *Fire in the Blood* (*Chatto and Windus*) is a little gem of a novella by Irene Nemirovsky, the second of her posthumously published works, the more significant in light of her death in Auschwitz. An introductory note tells that two hand-written pages of this work were with the manuscript of *Suite Francaise* Nemirovsky's unfinished masterpiece, rescued by her daughter after her mother's arrest; the rest was in 30 tightly-written pages lodged by the author with her editor months before her arrest, and published for the first time only this year.

It is a novel of French manners and morals, set in rural Burgundy after the first World War, with all of the darkness and intrigue which hides beneath the calm surface of village life. "Everyone lives in his own house, on his own land, distrusts his neighbours, harvests his wheat, counts his money and doesn't give a thought to the rest of the world." It is very like the village in the second part of *Suite Francaise*, but before the Germans came.

This is perfect storytelling, perceptive and powerful. The death of its author in the full flower of her writing life is one of the greatest blows the Holocaust dealt to literature.

Reconciling one's mixed blood

Long before he voiced any political ambitions, let alone thought about seeking the Democratic nomination for the US Presidency, Barack Obama wrote *Dreams from My Father: a story of race and inheritance*, republished three years ago (*Three Rivers Press*) but made even more interesting now as the Democratic hopefuls jostle for position.

Barack Obama is the son of a black Kenyan father and a white American mother. His father left when the child was only two, he saw him only once after that, eight years later, and when

On not going gently into that Good Night

"Venus"

Film Review: *Paul Sorrell*

"I'm at the end of my life, and I still don't know who I am", confesses septuagenarian English actor Maurice Russell. Maurice, portrayed to perfection by Peter O'Toole – another veteran thespian with a legendary penchant for a tipple – attempts to inject some zest into his faltering existence by forming an unlikely relationship with Jessie (played by newcomer Jodie Whittaker in a performance that matches O'Toole's), the teenage great-niece of his friend and fellow actor, Ian, for whom she has started work as a housemaid and carer.

Their relationship as it takes shape is complex, improbable, unpredictable, edgy, painful, even at times shocking. Yet, when once we step out of our comfort zones, real life can be all these things and more, and the film is never less than wholly engrossing. On one level, Maurice is a desperate old man grasping at the shreds of sexuality left by a prostate operation that has rendered him both impotent and incontinent. On another level, we observe him seeking existential solace from a girl – a harding-drinking, gluttonous, foul-mouthed, surly, provincial ingénue – whom he idealises in terms of the famous 'Rokeby Venus' of Diego Velazquez, a painting the pair contemplate together in London's National Gallery.

Maurice's world is fleshed out through the raw cityscape of central London – like him, drab, grey and decrepit – by his awkward relationship with the wife he abandoned in his youth with a clutch of toddlers (Vanessa Redgrave), and by the wonderful friendship he enjoys with Ian (another old trouper, Leslie Phillips). The two ancient actors fight, bicker, and swear at each other like troopers – all done with a delightfully exaggerated sense of the theatrical – but their deep affection constantly resurfaces, for example, in the touching and funny scene where the pair break into an impromptu waltz in 'the actors' church', St Paul's Covent Garden.

Maurice and Venus (as he calls Jessie) circle each other like wary animals, constantly testing the boundaries between them and laying down new ones. By the end of the film, they have formed an unbreakable bond.

Directed by Roger Michell and scripted by Hanif Kureishi, writer of *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *The Mother*, *Venus* will not be to everybody's taste but, as a portrait of a man gripped by a lust for life as the body fails, I know of few films that can approach it. ■

Barak was 21 his father was killed in Kenya in a car accident.

As a child of mixed race brought up in his mother's white family, he felt that he fitted in to neither black nor white society: to both black and white he was always characterised as 'the other'. After his father's death he embarked on an odyssey to discover the truth about who he was by retracing the migration of his family, and by meeting his African family.

It is a bitter-sweet series of discoveries, the pain seeps out as he tries in his heart to reconcile the opposing sides of his family, needing desperately to believe that black and white can get along, because, if not, his very existence must be a mistake. This is a wise book, attempting to diagnose the phenomenon of hate and to demonstrate that what unites people is greater and more powerful than what divides them. Few politicians have had the courage to share their stories so honestly.

Two histories intertwined

Travels with Herodotus, the last book by the Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski published by Alfred A Knopf a few months after his death earlier this year, is a wonderful ramble over the globe, part memoir, part meditation, part reportage. The author's constant companion on his travels is Herodotus, the Greek historiographer who reported in the fifth century BC.

The two writers are separated by two and a-half thousand years, yet both are equally affected by the human condition in the face of social upheaval. Both have an eye for the details which bring great historical moments down to an intimate level.

As he witnesses the civil war in the Congo or explores Tehran during the last days of the Shah's regime he has Herodotus close by ... "a refuge, a retreat from the tensions of the world." And he comes to the conclusion that the greatest discovery Herodotus made was that "we are never in the presence of unmediated history, but of history recounted, presented, history as it appeared to someone, as she or he believes it to have been." To have the two books going at the same time is a rewarding, if unwieldy, reading experience. ■

Grounds for hope

There is not much reason to be optimistic, but there is every reason to hope.
Archbishop Desmond Tutu

When death visits a family and threatens to do so again, the concept of hope becomes a paradox. Hope is needed for belief in the purpose and beauty of life, but also for the acceptance of death as being a blessed release from that very existence. In that space between life and death, the family often depends on learned and compassionate physicians in order to help bridge the gap.

The dilemma is beautifully described by Browning in his poem *Epistle*. Karshish, a dedicated physician and a contemporary of St.Paul, learns of Lazarus "that he was dead and then restored to life by a Nazarene physician". How this could happen is unbelievable, yet he wants to believe. The raising of Lazarus is beyond the training and intelligence of Karshish; he cannot make a judgment. He seeks desperately for an answer but can only conclude that "it is strange".

All the medical knowledge of Karshish is for nothing. He is facing a superior power that has wrought a miraculous cure and which requires a religious faith that he does not possess. Reason insists that it is not possible to resurrect a dead body. Imagination suggests another cause beyond reason, which would lead to faith and an acceptance of the miraculous cure. Lazarus would then be the living proof of an omnipotent God. Therefore, there exists a greater power than that of Karshish and which requires a faith to comprehend it. The wonder of an all-powerful God, who is also all-loving, becomes the hope that transcends human limitations.

The role of Karshish, the physician, is to tend to the body and instil hope in the family that all will be well, all will be for the best, even death might be a release. Christianity espouses the philosophy of a life after death and presents a new loving God whose power has been demonstrated by the living Lazarus. Karshish sees Christ as a medical man with extraordinary talent, not as a God. He is seeking the bridge between reason and faith and intuitively points to the hope of a continuity beyond life which, as a physician, is also beyond his capability. Fortunate is the family in the hands of compassionate care-givers. They demonstrate what is noble in a human being. They care for the sanctity of life and accept the paradox that death is another mysterious dimension of it. This is the seed bed of faith.

Crosscurrents

John Honoré

The daily press

Daily newspapers, world-wide, are steadily losing readers, bringing into focus the dilemma facing all metropolitan dailies. Do they concentrate on advertisers or readers for the bulk of their revenue? Do they ignore contentious issues as being uneconomic, or return to fearless reporting for the common good? It was interesting therefore that a November issue of the *Auckland Herald* had, on its front page, an editorial strongly criticising the *Electoral Finance Bill* which restricts public advocacy and campaigning in an election year. If passed, the *Herald* predicted it would be Labour's epitaph. The *Herald*'s stand is a welcome change from the usual content of New Zealand dailies.

A closer look at them reveals that often over 50 percent of the paper is devoted to advertising, with scant coverage of overseas news and a preponderance of articles devoted to murders, probation, prison terms extended or shortened, court appearances, judgments handed down or rescinded, police chases and accompanying photos. It reads like a news sheet for a penal colony.

Readers are turning to the Internet for information. There, they are not distracted with ads and crime statistics. A Catch-22 situation has developed – no advertising no income as against too much advertising no readers. Daily newspapers must return to investigative journalism and lead the debate on important issues.

Christmas prospects

As of this writing, the world is on the cusp of momentous events which will be resolved for good or ill by the time this issue is delivered. Readers are to remain calm, ponder on some of the following and start praying:

- The Sheriff of the South Pacific, John Howard, will be either in or out.
- Pakistani President, Pervez Mush-arraf, will be either in or out.
- A Democratic candidate for the presidency of the United States will have been elected.
- A UN panel of scientists, having issued an apocalyptic warning on climate change, might already be proved right.
- George W Bush and Cheney might have convinced the Senate to bomb Iran.
- The Israeli-Palestinian peace conference in November will no doubt have ended in failure.
- The economic crisis in the sub-prime mortgage market (whatever that is) will have deteriorated or improved.
- Foreign Minister Winston Peters, having shared a cigarette or two with Kim Jong II, might have upset China, South Korea and Helen Clark.
- John Banks might still be the mayor of Auckland and the 2011 Rugby World Cup might have been transferred to Christchurch.

It is enough to bring one to one's knees and that is good. It is Christmas, so stay there and pray that everyone remembers the birth of Christ as a promise of hope and joy.
A holy and a happy Christmas to you all, even to George W. ■

Why does the church beatify some and not others?

Having individuals declared saints and blesseds serves several purposes in the Church. Some purposes are served well, others not quite so well.One purpose is to provide the faithful at large with role models. While this works reasonably well, it could be done better.

I was looking recently at a classic picture drawn for the Feast of All Saints. The saints standing before God's throne were mostly distinguishable by their headgear. Papal tiaras, episcopal mitres, nuns' coifs, the crowns of kings and queens.

How many of those in the picture were married folk? Presumably one or other of the royal figures. After all, St Louis, king of France, had nine children. But not one of the saints in the tableau ps portrayed as married. No mother is pictured clasping her child close to her breast. No married couple is pictured tenderly holding hands as they stood flanked by their offspring.

Nothing much has changed since that picture was produced. We will have to be patient before the church finds ways to rectify the situation.

There is a more limited but still quite real way in which saints and blesseds serve as role models. This is for the members and the associates of the religious institutes which they founded or of which they were illustrious members.

Though still regretting the paucity of married laity who are beatified or canonised, I have come to see the value of beatifying and canonising founders of institutes, even small and local ones of which the wider church has never heard. My association with religious has made me aware of the extent to which these relatively small but vastly significant groups in the church draw encouragement and direction from a founder.

Each religious institute has its own charism special to itself. No two institutes are quite the same. The founder was in a very real sense an incarnation of that charism. Raising to the altar such a founder may do little for the universal body of the faithful. But it does a great deal for the members of the institute concerned and for those laity that link themselves with them.

Some founders indeed relate to the faithful of entire nations. Imagine the disquiet here if Pope Benedict does not canonise Mary MacKillop when he is in Sydney for World Youth Day. Yes, canonisation of founders has a value.

There is another function that canonisation or beatification can perform. This is the righting of a wrong. Antonio Rosmini, founder of the Institute of Charity, was beatified last month. Rosmini was ahead of his time in setting out to explore how the faith could be presented in current times. But many in the church could not stomach his endeavour. They secured his condemnation by the Holy See. Two of his works were for a time placed on the Index of prohibited books. A reprobation of his views later followed that was in force for more than a hundred years. Only in 2001 did the Holy See absolve him from condemnation.

Such a case history clearly made the path to beatification a difficult one. Official rules require miracles only for canonisation, not for beatification. But even to be beatified Rosmini needed a genuine miracle – though of quite another kind. Nevertheless within six years of being under condemnation by the church, he has been declared blessed. A true miracle indeed. And the righting of a wrong. It could be a long time before that record of such a curial turn around within six years is equalled. ■

Humphrey O'Leary

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

Paradise – their true country

Tom Cloher

Marie Celine Chapman and Marie Patricia Hitchfield died this year within six months of each other, in May and November, both in their 70s. From well known Auckland families – the Shepherds and the McCabes – they established in turn, with their respective husbands, families just as widely known in Auckland to-day. Their Requiems attracted hundreds of people, filling the parish churches of Onehunga and Takapuna respectively, on week-days at that.

They were remarkable women although they would be the last to think so. Commitment to their children and grandchildren was constant and total but in no way did this diminish their interest in and compassion for others. Unselfish, good-humoured, non-judgmental, hospitable: how did they manage it?

In short, they were faith-filled. God mattered. Prayer came naturally to them. They never told others what to to do, their attitudes and actions were in themselves sufficient.

They were self-effacing. I suspect that they would be mildly amused at these attempts to designate them as special – but they were!

Remarkable in life, they were admirable in the face of death. One felt she had lingered too long and prayed that God would 'let her go'. The other barely had long enough as the fatal prognosis rapidly moved from months, to weeks, and then to days. Both accepted the end of life with courage and calm. If there is an art to dying, they demonstrated it.

Beyond words, what counted in the end was the quality of the liturgy that celebrated the progress of their lives from time to eternity. We may lament if we will the periodic travails of our beloved church but we can rejoice in its capacity to honour women such as these. A combination of hymns and readings chosen, in part, by each of the Maries; readings presented by family members, pertinent prayers of the faithful , space for other special prayers (see below), offertory processions involving grandchildren, homilies and eulogies presented by people really well prepared, celebrants keenly aware of the importance of the occasion.

These recollections would undoubtedly be representative of many similar farewells for other distinguished parishioners in parishes throughout Aotearoa. Readers would be well aware that this is so, as I am. We should be collectively grateful that we have a liturgy equal to the task of duly acknowledging those whose lives have been an ornament to their families and communities.

Ascension

And if I go
while you're still here
know that I live on
vibrating to a different measure
– behind a thin veil you cannot
see through
you will not see me
so you must have faith

I wait for the time when we can
soar together again
– both aware of each other
until then, live your life to the
fullest
and when you need me,
just whisper my name in your
heart
... I will be there.

C.C.Hitchcock

(A prayer read by Jane Hitchfield at her mother's Requiem).

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