

Tui Motu



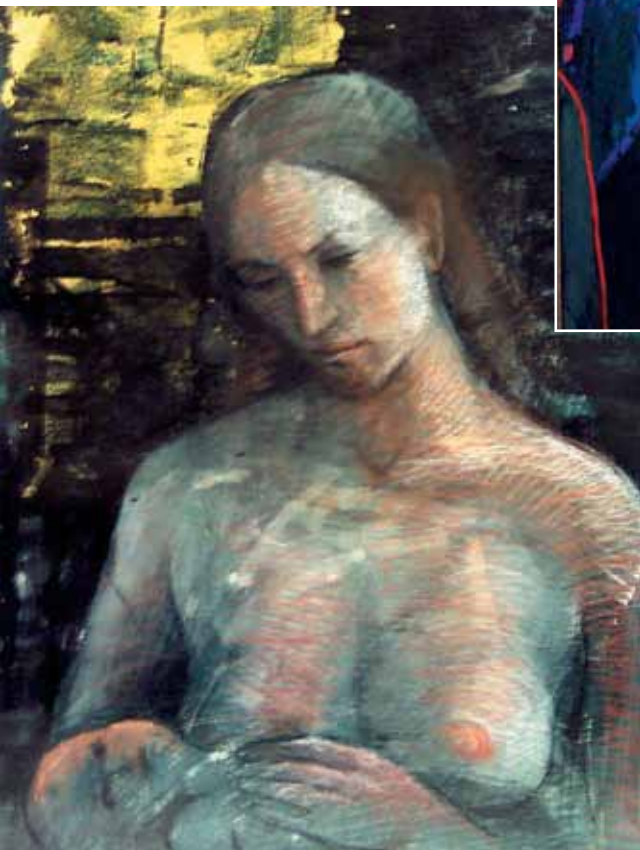
No room at the inn

December 2004 Price \$5

Mother and Child (below)

Margaret Ackland writes:

I was thinking about the casualties of war and the profound losses of 'ordinary people'. I was thinking about death, but also of the breaking of relationships and family bonds as people are brutalised...



Last Supper

Religious Art of Margaret Ackland



Still Life



Inside:

(left) *Year of Matthew*
by Susan Smith, page 25

St Matthew from *The Lindisfarne Gospels* (late 7th Century)

(right) *The Word was Made Flesh*
by Kath Rushton, pages 6 and 7

Sophia inspiring the evangelist Mark



Many readers commented on the stunning picture of the *Last Supper*, by Australian artist Margaret Ackland, used to illustrate the article by Timothy Radcliffe in the *October* issue. It was reproduced then in grayscale, which meant that her marvellous use of colour was lost. We can now remedy this: the full colour version is reproduced opposite.

Rod Pattenden comments: “We are drawn into the drama as we look closely at the faces of those around this table. Our initial surprise is to find we cannot discern the face of Christ except as it is reflected in the faces of his followers. Those faces express a range of feelings – from a sense of peacefulness to one of deep anxiety.

“Other faces look out at us as we become part of the picture. It is as if we have walked in late. Some people have been distracted by our entry and ask us through their eyes why we are there.

“A small child peers out at us from the right hand side of the work with an innocent gaze. The woman to the left of Jesus catches us with a look clearly more confronting and questioning. Across the table is the figure of a breast-feeding mother, symbol of sustenance and comfort, serving to amplify and make present the symbols of this meal of nourishment and hope.” (*Christ For All People*. Pace Publishing Auckland, ed Ron O’Grady)

For a more recent exhibition of her works, the same critic comments: “Margaret Ackland is well known for her inner city landscapes and the much-reproduced depiction of the *Last Supper* where Jesus gathers at table with women, children as well as men. Commissioned in 1993 by the Uniting Church to find an expression of inclusion at the church’s central ritual, it is also a dynamically

rich composition full of involving drama and light. The debate that this work created at the time of its completion centred on the role of women in the ordained ministry and the recognition that it was also about the ‘pictures’ that people carry in their head about the nature of authority and religious hierarchy.

“In her more recent work she has turned to the apparently everyday world of objects in domestic spaces. They are approached, however, with an extraordinary luminous intensity. Reflective objects, fruit and glass are all contemplated with a sympathetic compassion as the building blocks of a visual world intensely held, loved and delighted in. She has applied her persuasive ability with colour to create small gaps and slashes of apprehension that in turn flash in the eye as moments of insight and pleasure. They are akin to prayers that are rendered with one’s eyes open to the extraordinary richness of creaturely life.”

The cover picture is one of the artist’s own favourites. She says: “I have been involved with a refugee support group for a few years, as I have been increasingly disgusted with the Australian Government’s attitude which, sadly, seems to reflect the views of many here. I am also constantly shocked at the sneering insult that an accusation of being a ‘bleeding heart’ has become.”

We have chosen this rather stark and shocking image for our cover, because it not only reminds us of the millions of homeless and displaced people for whom Christmas will be anything but ‘merrie’, but also of the total indifference if not hostility towards refugees of many people, even self-declared Christians, and their governments. Here in New Zealand, we have only to think of Ahmed Zaoui.

Visit the website: <www.wagnerartgallery.com.au>

To all people of hope –
the editors and staff of *Tui Motu*
wish you every blessing
for Christmas and for 2005.

We offer our most sincere thanks
to all those generous people
who write for us for little financial reward;
who help in running the operation in Dunedin
and mailing out the magazine;
those who willingly give their time

to promote and sell *Tui Motu*;
those who pop in a little extra
with their renewal of subscription;
those who give time to serve on the Board;
and to all of you who trouble to buy *Tui Motu*
and who read it.

No Room at the Inn

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inside. . .



pp 8-10,
by Joy Cowley

*Infant Jesus.
Refugee*

The principal elements of the Christmas story are joy and delight: the birth of a child, the protective love of parents, the welcome of shepherds, the hosannas of angels. That's not the whole story. In *Luke's* account we read that there was no room for the Holy Family in the local inn and the Son of God was born poor, in a stable.

Matthew's account emphasises the destiny of this child to be the Messiah long awaited by God's people. But here too there are ominous signs. King Herod sees him as a possible rival. He massacres the children in Bethlehem. Mary and Joseph became refugees, like so many innocent people today.

This Christmas we have chosen to emphasise the plight of refugees. Some of it makes sobering reading, but it does no harm to remember that for millions of our fellow human beings, Christmas is anything but a time of joy. Refugees are people who no longer belong. Driven from their homes, they have to seek shelter in another land, where they may be more or less welcome. Sometimes they settle in a new home, and the story has a happy sequel – like the tale told on page 11.

But all refugees, even in a welcoming environment, have to grapple with a language and culture they cannot understand. Typically, the children will quickly acclimatise, but parents take far longer. They may be tormented with guilt and grieve for their loved ones they have left behind. New Zealand accepts a quota of some 750 refugee migrants each year. The figure is elastic: the Tampa incident, for instance, caused the door to be opened wider.

Not all countries are as welcoming, and many spend much of their lives in camps, wanted by nobody. There are over ten million refugees across the world. The worst humanitarian tragedy of 2004 has been the displacement

of over a million people in the Darfur region of the Sudan – with the connivance of a blatantly racist Sudanese government.

In Palestine, millions of indigenous people were driven from their homes to make room for Israeli settlers. Yasser Arafat strove all his life to restore his people's rights. The Catholic bishops of the Middle East and N Africa have appealed to Christians everywhere to pray, fast and intercede for these disenfranchised Palestinian people. An extract of the bishops' statement may be read on page 4. Perhaps we can spare time during the season of Advent to join others and respond to their appeal.

Sadly, for most of these bereft people, 2005 will dawn with little prospect of the restoration of their human rights. It seems that in recent times the political climate in the world has become harsher. This is graphically depicted in our cover painting by Australian artist Margaret Ackland. Superimposed on the body of the victim is a 'bleeding heart' representing the derisory reaction of many right wing groups for whom compassion has become a dirty word. Their response is, simply and bleakly, 'no room at the inn'.

The Christmas Gospel story realistically includes these elements of rejection and human persecution, but fundamentally it is a message of hope. Joy Cowley, who has written for us the story of *Jesus the Refugee*, adds a comment: "It's a sober story. That's the state of much of the world this Christmas. But deep down is certain knowledge: Good does not serve Evil, but Evil always, ultimately, serves Good." Ronald Rolheiser puts it another way: "God's concern is not about the 'survival of the fittest', but about the survival of the weakest."

Think of that as you contemplate the crib this Christmas.

M.H.

Spare a thought and a prayer for the refugee

Alan Roberts

A pilgrim to Bethlehem in the Holy Land will have heard of the Milky Grotto. Just around the corner from the Church of the Nativity is the dwelling reported to be where Mary and Joseph moved, soon after the birth of Jesus. The legend is that while breast feeding Jesus, Mary was informed of the need to take refuge in Egypt.

So great was her fear that the child was ripped from her breast causing the milk to splatter over the ceiling of the cave, which then turned white. Today, women who have difficulty conceiving are encouraged to scrape a little of the ceiling and drink it with a glass of water. Many letters of testimony to pregnancy have arrived from all over the world.

A tall story? Perhaps – but what about the fear Mary experienced? Most New Zealanders will probably know a refugee. What many won't realise is the trauma of their experience. To write this article I knew I had to make contact with one of our parishioners who has long been involved in helping refugees settle.

I soon learned that it is not just a matter of finding a house and material goods. A helper has to be prepared to support those who have left everything that breeds security. Most of the time people arrive with nothing but the clothes they stand in. There are language and communication difficulties and concern for loved ones sometimes assigned from a previous refugee camp to another country.

These are not people who have decided to migrate for a better life, but people who are forced to do so out of fear for their survival. The *Tampa* boat episode near the coast of Australia left some with the impression that a whole lot of bludgers were on their way to our shores.

Helen Clark did us proud, but could any of us deny that with a bit of imagination, generosity and sacrifice, there would have been room for all of them in New Zealand? *Tui Motu* readers presumably are intelligent enough to know that people don't choose to leave the familiar to risk an expensive journey in a dubious boat, or face the boredom and uncertainty of years in a refugee camp.

But do all realise that? Secure New Zealanders could never fully appreciate the depth of grief a refugee is experiencing. There are so many cases of people who have come to our land after being a fugitive in their own country. They have had to escape, and their first call is a refugee camp where they could remain for up to seven years. Some have experienced torture, imprisonment and the disappearance of family members. Their uncertainty and fear doesn't bear thinking about.

In the notes I was given explaining the experience of refugees, what stood out was the term 'continuous' – rather than 'post' – traumatic stress. The latter implies that the event creating the stress is in the past. But for the refugee, the fear is still present.

When trust has gone and memories are still very fresh, the past and present are difficult to distinguish. Carrying the burden of memory, refugees, even when safely ensconced into Godzone, still have to learn a new language, a new culture and find work, just to feel slightly at ease with their new life. For children, these things can be relatively easy, but for adults it is much more difficult.

One story concerns an Iraqi who arrived at his citizenship ceremony with his hand all bandaged. His carers found it strange, as they had seen him just a short time before. Later, they discovered that the man, a Muslim, had done this to himself to avoid having to touch the flesh of the mayor, a female, when he shook hands with her! That's only one, and perhaps one of the easier frustrations such people experience.

For us a sobering Christmas meditation on the flight into Egypt might be to reverse roles: imagine the fear and trauma of Joseph and Mary, fleeing from Herod to a strange, possibly hostile land. ■

Fr Alan Roberts is parish priest of Plimmerton, Wellington. In writing the article he spoke to a parishioner, Margaret Warmington, long time carer of refugees who arrive in New Zealand and are sent to the Wellington region.



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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.
Independent Catholic Magazine Ltd, P O Box 6404, Dunedin North, 9030
Phone: 03 477 1449; Fax: 03 477 8149; email: tui motu@earthlight.co.nz; website: www.tuimotu.org
Editor: Michael Hill IC; Assistant Editor: Frances Skelton; Illustrator: Don Moorhead
Directors: Rita Cahill RSJ, Tom Cloher (chair), Margaret Darroch, Robin Kearns, Chris Loughnan OP, Elizabeth Mackie OP, Judith McGinley OP, Kathleen Rushton RSM
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Hans Küng and ecumenism

It was refreshing to read the *November* issue on ecumenism.

For me personally the ecumenical experience has been refreshing and brought me closer to Christ's teachings. After having been involved in ecumenical groups and councils for over 25 years, I thought that the Catholic church, on an official level, had been successful in burying the issue.

I think this is because a small group within the church believes Catholic tradition to be more important than trying to live Christ's teaching.

I don't expect an apology and reinstatement of Hans Küng by the current Pope. Maybe the church will have to wait until after his death. The church has on many occasions used this skilful method of silencing people that dared to speak out during their lifetime. Küng kept composure to keep credibility. Jesus, however, was not always so politically correct and was quite prepared to call the Pharisees hypocrites.

Let us hope that our next pope will bring back life into the church. Maybe the second wind will be more successful than the first.

Louis Paulussen, Hamilton

Küng a heretic.

Tui Motu calls for Hans Küng to be relicensed as a Catholic Theologian. While I have a great deal of respect

letters

for much of Hans Küng's energy and commitment to ecumenism and interfaith dialogue, the laity also have the fundamental and inalienable right to be taught the true and authentic Catholic faith and not some distortion of that faith.

Hans Küng teaches against fundamental dogmas and doctrines of the Catholic Church – the divinity of Christ, papal infallibility, the dogma of the Virgin Mary, contraception, and the ordination of women.

If he was to be relicensed by the church as a Catholic Theologian and taught against these fundamentals of the faith, then Catholics would be denied their right to be taught the true faith by Catholic theologians. In fidelity to the laity, the church cannot allow this.

Chris Sullivan, Pakuranga

This harsh judgment of Küng's theology does not appear to be shared by Cardinal Lehmann, President of the German bishops – ed.

Thank God for Uncle Sam

Crosscurrents is at it again! Perhaps I am your only reader who does not share his relentless derision of everything American.

Notwithstanding the knife-edge build-up to the Presidential election, Bush

appears to have won the referendum on his foreign policy of pre-emptive war. There are many who believe, as I do, that UN resolution 1441 which had unanimous Security Council approval provided the necessary authority to take military action.

The French, Germans and Russians muddled the waters. They wished to be seen by the Iraqis as opponents of the war. They wished to recover the millions of dollars owed for the construction of the Osirak nuclear facility (France), for French Mirage and Russian MIG fighters and tanks, for German biological know-how.

I concede that the coalition's intervention in Iraq was illegal. Regrettably, I believe that future assaults on sovereign states will be of a preventative or pre-emptive nature. The United Nations has been shown to be a lame duck. The free world should be happy that the US has the muscle and the will to deal with these threats. Better them than the alternatives of Russia, China or the European Union – all totalitarian structures.

Just perhaps with the death of Arafat, America can persuade Israel to come to terms with Palestine – terms that provide a state for the latter whilst ensuring the security of the former.

Tolerance towards other religions in Muslim countries is slight, if non-existent. Preventative war may be essential.

R.S. Galliano, London (abridged)

Peace on earth

For Advent, the joint Bishops' Conferences of North Africa and the Arab regions (Latin Rite) issued a sober but impassioned appeal to their fellow bishops and Christian Faithful throughout the world, regarding the situation in the Middle East – and particularly in Palestine. We print excerpts:

The conflict in the Holy Land is the concern of all Christians, who are aware that their spiritual roots lie in the land of Christ's Redemption. We are grateful to the Holy Father for his words and initiatives in favour of peace.

"But we believe that the churches can do still more... if they all join together to sensitise their

governments, their people and the international community, their intervention will become a decisive factor in the attainment of peace, justice and reconciliation in the Holy Land.

"We, the bishops of the two Conferences, propose to our communities that **Wednesday, 22 December, be a Day of Fasting and Prayer** for this intention. We ask you all to unite with us in this or in any other initiative.

"*In Jerusalem everyone is born*, says the Psalmist. It is the duty of all to contribute to the building of peace and reconciliation in the Holy Land."

Tomb of the Unknown Peacemaker

an Advent reflection

Christopher Carey

Watching the ritual unfold on Armistice Day as the Unknown Warrior was ceremonially laid to rest at the National War Memorial, I was struck by how much the notion of war remains part of the New Zealand psyche. Here we were with all our mainstream media hanging onto every word and motion, honouring those who went to war to kill others on the back of the jingoism, patriotism and propaganda of the time. It was national liturgical ritual at its best – but honouring what?

Should we not respect those who, as the saying goes, ‘make the ultimate sacrifice’? Of course. These tens of thousands who have no known grave deserve to be not forgotten. The incredibly insane slaughter should not be forgotten. Didn’t 56,000 soldiers die at the Somme in one day? But there is something disturbing about the very people who sent them off to their senseless deaths – the government and the military – turning the whole business into an acceptable sacrifice. It was never that.

We also need to acknowledge 90 years after the event that the men who went off to that war went with a mixture of motives. A desire to serve their country was obviously one. Adventure was another. Others desired to see the big wide world.

Most knew nothing accurate about either the Kaiser or Germany. Sadly, conscription meant that eventually many went to war because they were forced to go. It is appropriate to remember these people and honour them. We have been remembering that incredible slaughter every ANZAC Day since 1919.

But do we ever honour the thousands of innocent civilians killed? Do we honour those who refused to go off and kill in foreign lands? What values did they stand for? Those who were labelled cowards or treacherous and had white feathers thrown on their lawns? Do we honour the families of broken survivors who paid the negative social costs of alcoholism and abuse from that war for generations afterwards?

What is it about war that attracts people, generation after generation? Is it simply jingoism? Or patriotism? Or is there a deeper appeal? New Zealand sent one in ten of its population to fight people they knew nothing about, on behalf of others about whom they knew little.

They now lie blown to pieces or buried somewhere in foreign soil. For what reason? We are now firm sporting and business partners and friends with all our enemies from that war.

The involvement of the church in these parades always intrigued me. Long after the church sold part of its soul to the military as paid chaplains, it continues to support these hyped up demonstrations of ‘loyalty’ with its prayers and presence. With Advent upon us, should we not be asking what it means for the church to be so easily identified with the ‘dogs of war’, when we are called to witness to the Prince of Peace – the one who commanded us to love our enemies? Is it that we don’t reflect deeply enough on human nature and Original Sin and our dark shadow side which finds appeal in the notion of ‘warrior’ and ‘soldier’? Is this not the unredeemed sinful side of our nature?

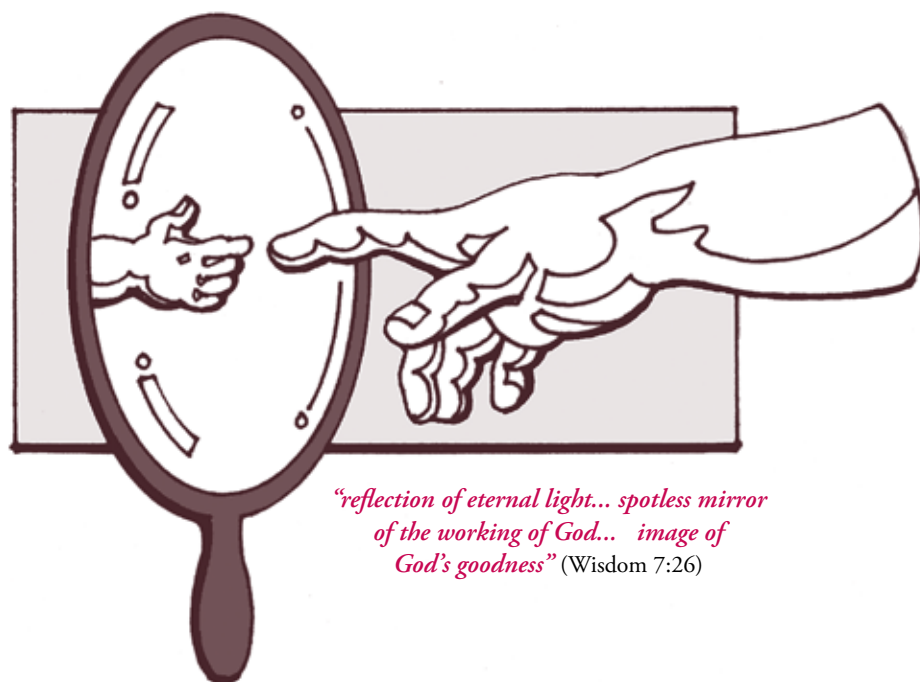
And what is it about peacemaking that makes it so unattractive? Peace is what we all desire, yet few seem to want to make it happen. Peacemakers are perceived as ‘soft’ and warriors as ‘tough’. The reality is, both perform difficult tasks. Peacemaking is the toughest assignment of all, when one is in it for the long haul. We Catholics have the examples of the Berrigan brothers to witness to that. There are currently three elderly Dominican sisters in prison protesting against US involvement in the Iraqi War.

There have been more than a hundred *Ploughshares* disarmament actions carried out in the past ten years: MX missiles, B-52 bombers, Trident submarines and other weapons of mass destruction have been symbolically disarmed by peacemakers. Those involved are nearly all Christians enfleshing their faith through action in the face of war and the arms race. Who hears about them? They proclaim ‘peace on earth, now’ – just like the angels at Bethlehem all those years ago.

Why do we find it difficult to honour such people? Why do we find it so easy to spend several million dollars to bring home the ‘Unknown Warrior’, yet difficult to properly acknowledge and honour peacemakers?

When are we going to see a national *Tomb to the Unknown Peacemaker*?

The Word was made Flesh



An encounter with a baby in an airplane cabin prompts Kath Rushton to reflect on the mystery of God becoming human.

In Old Testament, Sophia-Wisdom is pictured as present in Creation, and this loving involvement is ongoing.

In the birth of Jesus, described in John 1:1-14, Sophia-Wisdom pitches her tent among humankind

A Reflection on the Gospel Reading of Christmas Morning

I settled into my seat near the front of a late afternoon plane on my way to a *Tui Motu* Board Meeting. On the aisle seat opposite was an empty baby carrier that needed to be stowed away. Meanwhile, amidst the jumble of passengers finding seats and reaching up to overhead lockers, the young mother held the baby.

Serenely she stood facing the rear of the plane resting her back against the seat in front of her. Passing passengers cooed, greeted the baby, smiled in recognition and talked to each other. "It takes a baby...", said the woman seated beside me.

It took a baby to break into the isolated world of passing strangers. It took "aah a baby" and a mother, unselfconsciously Madonna-like, to connect the otherwise unconnected. This timeless moment of wonder, beauty and vulnerability – of humanity, was a miniature of the awe, the simplicity, the stillness, the serenity

and the mystery of The Baby who is the focus of Christmas and the tradition of the crib.

In a world of isolation, a world of self-absorption and frenzy, this gift immerses us, each Christmas, into stillness and the mystery of the Child. At the Eucharist of the night of 24 December, we will listen yet again to the Nativity story, repeated in crib, tableau, card and homily. The maiden with the child wrapped in swaddling clothes reaches out to us, retelling the hope of God coming among us in well known phrases from *Isaiah*.

The gospel writers probably knew a lot more about the life of Jesus which they did not record. Their purpose was to make meaning of the shameful rejection and death of Jesus. *Matthew* and *Luke* tell of his birth by using *Isaiah* to assure his readers that the suffering, crucified One is the one whose coming threads its way through the Scriptures,

whereas *John* draws on the Wisdom literature. In the gospel reading of Christmas morning from *John 1:1-18*, commonly known as 'The Prologue', Jesus is presented as the *Wisdom of God* who "pitched her tent among us."

For about one thousand years before *John's* Gospel was written, the Jewish people in their oral and written traditions, concentrated on how the Creator communicates with creation. Out of this speculation emerged the concept of *Wisdom*. This understanding developed from the wisdom of God to Wisdom from God. In other words, it went from a way of talking about wisdom as one of God's attributes to a being, separate from God, personified as 'Wisdom'.

The beginning of such thought is found in *Psalms*, *Proverbs*, *Job* and *Ecclesiastes*. Wisdom develops within Judaism until it is clearly personified as Woman Wisdom in the Books of *Sirach*, *Baruch*

and the *Wisdom of Solomon*. As such, she is identified with the Torah.

From the second century before the birth of Jesus, some Jews were not satisfied only with the concept of the personification of wisdom, that is ‘*Wisdom*’ spoken of as being like a person, but they portrayed ‘*Wisdom*’ as acting as a being separate from God.

John does not diverge from the Scriptural tradition but emerges out of it. The same God is at work through Sophia and then through Jesus. God who through Sophia has always gone out from Godself in creation, in the Exodus, and in the Torah, now goes out in Godself in Jesus of Nazareth.

The word for ‘Wisdom’ in Scripture is feminine. In Hebrew, it is *Hokmah* and in Greek, *Sophia*. The prologue of *John* uses a masculine term ‘logos’ which translates as “the Word”. Nevertheless it is Sophia who is being evoked.

As Sophia was with God at the beginning of creation, so ‘Jesus-Sophia’ was with God “in the beginning” co-fashioning with God, working, delighting and playing at God’s side. Sophia is the source of life and eternal life. Sophia and Jesus-Sophia symbolise light and a mirror. The *Wisdom of Solomon* tells us: “For she (Sophia) is

a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of God’s goodness” (7:29).

Sophia and Jesus-Sophia are sent by God into the world, and each “tabernacled” or “pitched her tent among us.” Most translations of *John 1:14* have “lived among us.” Sophia delights in the human family and seeks a place to abide in the created world. There are significant differences. Sophia “appeared on earth and lived with humankind.” However, Jesus-Sophia “became flesh” by becoming human and one of us.

The Prologue of *John* outlines what will happen in the subsequent story. Like Sophia, Jesus-Sophia will be the cause of division (light/darkness) among people. Like Sophia, Jesus-Sophia, who came to “his own” and “his own people did not accept him”, will experience rejection. This is not the full story, for Jesus-Sophia, like Sophia, will be accepted by some friends, gather a community and enjoy intimacy with disciples: “but to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.”

As this gospel unfolds, Sophia – in Jesus-Sophia – takes a human face that perhaps challenges us more than the baby human face of the Nativity scene.

Jesus-Sophia is the one encountered in the streets, in the houses, in the marketplace, in the temple, in the countryside, by the well.

The reading of Christmas morning reminds us that we encounter Jesus-Sophia still as we give flesh to Sophia in the streets, in the houses, in the marketplaces, in places of worship, in the countryside and by the wells of our land of Aotearoa New Zealand. The paradigm of Wisdom-Sophia is ours to make sense of rejection and suffering.

The delight of Wisdom-Sophia is ours to celebrate when Jesus-Sophia’s ways are lived among us, and we gather with her in the intimacy and community of her disciples. And we recognise Wisdom-Sophia when we chance upon her being fondled and adored by her mother in an aeroplane cabin.

Jesus–Sophia–Wisdom Pitched Her Tent Among Us ■

Dr Kathleen Rushton RSM is a Scripture scholar and member of the Tui Motu Board

Bible Society ad

I Forgot

Forgive me Beloved
but I forgot you see

I forgot how you burst into my eyes each
dawn so I remember to wake

I forgot how you move over my body in wet
psalms each morning as I bathe

I forgot how your stillness gently fills my
questions with abundant silence

I forgot how you tell my heart to beat
each and every time

I forgot that I see you laugh every day
in my daughter’s eyes

I forgot that my every nerve sings for you
reaching out, always going home

I forgot how you healed my soul
as I lay in the dust of my own gutter

And I forgot how your love
dances over me like fresh rain

You who swallow and birth the world
in every second of my day
forgive me

you see I’ve been so busy
I forgot

Jacquie Lambert



Infant Jesus, Refugee

Joy Cowley

The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother with you, and escape into Egypt, and stay there until I tell you”.

Neither of them knew how he could sleep through the bombing. Every time the house shook, plaster cracked and fell from the ceiling like fine snow, yet still his breathing was deep and even. Mary held him in her arms, the edge of her shawl raised to protect his face, but she could do nothing about the noise. It filled the night with no space between the explosions, the sirens, the voices that seemed to float bodiless in the chaos.

The entire city was on fire.

“They told us the planes wouldn’t come this far,” she said.

Joseph didn’t reply. He crouched beside her, arms around his knees, the reflection of the lantern blurring in his eyes. He was thinking of his parents, his brother, sister-in-law, their children, the youngest only six months older than Jesus and not yet crawling. The family home next to the bus station had been one of the first hit.

“They lied!” Mary drew the baby against her. He stirred and stretched like a cat but didn’t wake up. “They lied to us about everything!” Her words were lost in another explosion, this one so close that the pressure hurt their ears. A picture fell, sending shards of glass across the floor, and one of the

shutters came loose from the window. The room filled with a dull orange light.

Joseph looked at her. “We must leave.”

“No!” She shook her head as she rocked the baby. “The curfew, Joseph. They’ll shoot us. They will kill him!”

“We’ll die if we stay here.”

“There’s nowhere else to go!”

Slowly, he slid up the wall until he was level with the window. “The garage hasn’t been hit,” he said. “One of the bikes is fuelled and ready to go. We can get across the border to my cousin’s place.”

“They have troops at the border.”

“Yes, but I know another way. It won’t be comfortable.” He slid down again, so close she could feel his breath on her face. “The machine is old, rigid suspension. But it’ll get us over the hills where there are no troops, no checkpoints. God will protect us.”

She took a deep, stuttering breath. “God is great,” she said, but it sounded like a question.

“God is great! Praised be his name!” Joseph said firmly. “Wrap him warmly. Coats and blankets. When we get away from this furnace, the night will be freezing.” He helped her to her feet.

“You know, my cousin and her husband are very important people. They export carpets all over the world. They have contacts in the West. Pray they can find us a new country that has never known war.”

Mary sighed. Her husband talked like a teacher when he wanted to convince her of something, but she had doubt in her heart. She lifted Jesus in the crook of her arm and kissed the top of his head. “I am afraid for him, Joseph”, she said.

“We’ll find a land where he can fulfil what has been written for him,” Joseph replied. “He will never have to...”

The sound of a rocket ended his speech. They froze as it went overhead, then, as they pressed themselves against the wall, they heard the explosion, this time further away. Joseph picked up the keys to his Motor Cycle Sales and Service Shop, and went to the door.

“Stay here,” he said. “I’ll bring the bike around the back.”

“Be – be careful!”

As he opened the door, orange smoke spiralled into the room. He pulled his shirt up over his mouth and nose, and closed the door behind him, but not before Jesus woke up, coughing and fretful.

Mary sat on the floor below the smoke, settled the baby at her breast and sang to him as he drank away the burnt taste of war. It was a song she made up about a child of God growing up in a free land.

Joseph kept calling it paradise. The refuge house was at the edge of the city and from the back door they could see fields of long grass with black and white cows and willows along the bank of a small stream. The rainfall was still a source of wonder to them. So much water to make everything green! Here, people actually complained when the clouds dropped their gift!

“A paradise of beautiful empty land!” Joseph said. “We will have our own house and a garden. I will start another repair shop, and he will go to school. This is his chosen kingdom.” He held out his hands to Jesus, who laughed and took a few unsteady steps towards him, before sitting plumply on the rug.

Mary folded the laundry. Many things here were strange. She did not understand the language, nor had she got accustomed to the food. The shops were like treasure chests, so much of everything with labels she couldn’t read. The other women in the refuge went with her, helping her to choose and to count her money. It would take a year, they said, for her to get used to this country.

It had taken Mary almost a month to get used to the way everything in the house worked. Press a switch and a light went on. Turn a knob and food cooked. There was a hair dryer in the bathroom, a toilet that flushed every time, a vacuum cleaner, television, washing and drying machines. The woman Greta who managed the refuge, had a car. She had taken them to a beach of white sand where Mary had gathered shells and Joseph had sat at the edge of the sea with God’s child in his lap. Jesus had laughed and clapped his hands every time a wave broke over his feet.

Yes, this place was truly paradise.

A man came to the refuge to offer Joseph a night job in a fast food place. Joseph took it to earn a little money while they were waiting for their papers to come through. He cleared tables, swept floors, took out the garbage and came home to bed as his wife and son were waking. It was only for a while,

he said. When they got their papers, he would find a job servicing motor cycles.

One morning, he did not come home from work. One of the other refugees who could speak English, went to the fast food place and spoke to the manager. The night before, two men had taken Joseph away in their car. What men? No one knew.

Greta, the refuge manager, was away that morning, but she came in the afternoon to comfort a distraught Mary. “It’s the Department of Immigration. They have some questions they want to ask your husband.”

“Has he been arrested?”

Greta smiled. “No, no, nothing like that. They’ll visit you this evening to explain. I’ll be here to translate what they say.”

“Please. Is it because he is working?” Mary tugged at Greta’s sleeve. “I told him to wait until the papers were finished.”

“I’m sure there is nothing to worry about,” Greta said.

The two men who came that evening were pleasant. The younger one picked up Jesus and spoke to him, and they both shook hands with Mary, but their smiles did not go above their mouths. They inspected the family’s room and wanted to know what possessions Joseph had brought with him.

“They are asking,” said Greta, “if your husband has anything stored at someone else’s house. Papers, letters, legal documents.”

“No, nothing.” Mary picked up Jesus and held him close. “What are they looking for? I don’t understand this. When is Joseph coming home?”

The men had pulled the mattress off the bed and were now examining the pillows. Greta spoke many words to them and the older man replied, shaking his forefinger in the air.

Greta took Mary’s arm. “They say there has been a security problem. You had forged passports.”

“What? It was Joseph’s cousin...” Mary stopped. But of course. Where would he have got valid passports? “We left in the night,” she explained. “The three of us. We escaped only with our lives.”

Greta turned back to the men who had finished searching the room. The older one kicked the end of the bed for no reason and folded his arms. He spoke to Greta who looked quickly at Mary.

“What is it?” Mary hugged Jesus to her. “What is he saying?”

“He keeps saying it is a security issue,” said Greta.

“What security? My husband is a good man. He works hard. Greta, I need to know where he is!”

“You will see him tomorrow.” Greta glanced at the men. “They are sorry to be so strict. They are just doing their job,

Christmas



➡ they say. These days there is a much pressure on their department. It is the threat of terrorism, you understand. Men in parliament are saying there are too many refugees in this country.”

Mary stepped back. “Too many? How can it be? The land is so empty of people.”

“I’m sorry,” said Greta. “I’m telling you what they said.”

“They won’t make us go back.” She stared at Greta. “Will they?”

Greta didn’t answer.

“We can’t go back there!” Mary cried. “There is nothing for us but death. No future for our son. Please, will you tell them that?”

“I have done so,” Greta replied.

“Did they understand?”

Greta hesitated. “They told me it is what all illegal immigrants say.”

Mary sat down on the sofa. Jesus wriggled from her arms to the floor and crawled to the tangled bedding. Laughing, he put his head under the duvet and out again. He was playing a game. She smiled at him, although she was shaking right through to her heart. Be calm, she told herself. Joseph will be home in the morning and he will know what to do. He will sort out the problems. God has not brought us all this way for nothing.

She tried not to look at the men who were still talking to Greta. God is great, she said to herself. Holy is his name, and his mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear him.

Jesus pulled the duvet over his head, peeped out at her and laughed. ■

This New Jerusalem

*The steeple stretches skyward
its base forming a landing pad
on which angels may
alight to sing
Glory to God in the highest
in this new Jerusalem.*

*The sheep nibble
at the grass in the paddocks
resting after docking,
shearing and dipping.
Shepherds are no longer seen
listening to the angels’ song
in this new Jerusalem.*

*All the stars shine brightly
lighting the way for visitors –
from another holy land
who speak of hospitality
warmth and peace
in the visitors’ book
of this new Jerusalem.*

Sheila McGrath

Adult Education Trust

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I saw democracy die ... in my own land

*Tui Motu interviews Mandla-akhe-Dube
who got out of Zimbabwe after President Mugabe
manipulated the 2002 election*

Every refugee story begins in tragedy. But some have a happy ending – and here is one. Mandla-akhe-Dube (pictured right) left Zimbabwe because he “witnessed the death of democracy in his own land”. He came to New Zealand where he found a welcome and a job – and a hope that here he could help his beleaguered homeland.

Mandla had been employed to help monitor the presidential election of 2002, when President Mugabe was returned to power. The first task was to register voters and educate them in the democratic process, and then oversee the actual voting.

“However,” says Mandla, “the government was continually moving the goal posts. For instance the voter education programme was massively disrupted; the voice of the media was stifled; the ruling party, the ZANUPE, blocked the movement of buses to rural areas; local newspapers were censored. Meetings were banned. People were simply not allowed to gather. This was all an affront to the democratic process.”

Mandla and his team found themselves reduced from being proper monitors of the election to being mere observers. When election day came, there was a huge turnout especially in the cities. Queues stretched for hundreds of metres. The leading opposition party, the *Movement for Democratic Change*, filed an urgent application in the High Court, seeking an extension of voting for an extra day. The High Court granted it but the government stopped it.

Many people were prevented from voting. After the election the observers were denied access to the counting, and some of the results were highly suspicious. Out of six million votes Mugabe gained a majority of three hundred thousand votes. The opposition appealed against the result – but to no effect.

“What happened was a travesty,” says Mandla with some passion. “I could see no future in my own country. I was disenchanted. I just wanted to start afresh somewhere else. Painfully, therefore, I decided to leave.”

Mandla chose to come to New Zealand. He was attracted by the fact that the population is small and New Zealand stands apart from the world power blocs. Christchurch, with 300,000 people, is about the size of his home city of Bulawayo.

“I arrived here in November 2002,” he says. “I was invited to join an SCM flat with a young couple, Nigel and Natalia, who were very hospitable to me. I soon met their family and friends. They introduced me to the Kiwi diet and the accent which I found very difficult at first. I discovered rugby and the All Blacks, and became a supporter of the Crusaders!”

“In February last year I got a position with Christian World Service. I had come from a situation in Zimbabwe where we were on the receiving end of aid. But now I found myself on the side of the donors!”

“I was very homesick during the first few months here. The churches have been



very welcoming – hospitable as well as tolerant. And my friends back home as well as the media soon persuaded me I had made the right move.

“My task is to tell my people’s story, so that the international community won’t forget Zimbabwe. Working with CWS, I can help encourage their continuing contact with the Zimbabwe *Council of Churches*.

“My partner followed me here only two months ago, bringing two children aged 10 and 11. So now we are four! She too is still very homesick. She arrived in a snowstorm! The children however adjust much more quickly.

“Julius Nyerere talked about a man who left home to go away to find salt. I am like that person. I’m here to learn new skills, to observe how democracy works, see how businesses can operate ethically and transparently, and make contacts which will help me and my country in the long run.

“Each morning I dream I see a better Zimbabwe looming over the horizon. Potentially my country is the jewel of Africa, having every natural advantage. What we need is to put back there a proper political environment when Mugabe goes. That is my dream.” ■

That star...

Anne Powell visits Bethlehem, the place of Jesus' birth. But the plight of the Palestinian people takes her back into the predicament of Mary and Joseph, travellers in an often hostile, alien land



Bedouin girl

I set my heart on visiting Bethlehem. I learn where and how to catch the public transport from Jerusalem, pay the driver the small fare and climb into the minivan. Except for the windscreen, all the windows are curtained with dirty, dense fabric. All the other passengers are veiled Palestinian women.

I sit in the rear seat next to a young woman. We drive out of the city until our driver announces that we must all get out of the van because he is an Israeli; the van has Israeli registration and therefore, cannot travel beyond the Arab checkpoint ahead. Actually, I don't even grasp this announcement because I don't understand Arabic except for greetings and *Insha'allah* ("God wills it").

We tumble out of the minivan. I find myself in a barren, biblical landscape, surrounded by a cluster of veiled women. I am living in the Bible colliding with the present. In front of us is the checkpoint. One of the women, with eyes like a young doe, takes me by the arm and leads me off in the direction of the armed soldiers, lounging at the checkpoint. I feel for my passport. But we walk through without being questioned. My heart is a trapped bird in my mouth.

The young woman points out a badly dented blue car careering through dirt towards us. The driver is her uncle. He has a bearded, black-eyed accomplice who could be a terrorist in training. "Get in", she gestures. We do. Her eyes are kind. Introductions are made,

and we hurtle off through a desolate landscape of bombed homes, low saltbushes, and small, sad pockets of olive groves.

We travel for ten minutes. Without any warning, the uncle stops the car and leans towards the back seat. He thumbs: "Get out!" I have no understanding of what is happening. My mouth turns to ashes. I am clammy with fear.

The bearded accomplice shouts in thickened English: "The turn-off for Hebron is near. You cannot come with us!" The young woman does not speak at all. Her uncle points me in the general direction of Bethlehem. I offer them some money which they take. The heat and dust create a grubby haze as the car roars off.

I have no idea where I am. I stand still and look around me. This is what I see:

*ripped buildings
skeletons of cars
barricades of white rocks and
concrete blocks
ruins of olive groves*

I walk into hot wind towards what might be the city of Bethlehem. I think of Christmas cards with bells singing out joy and peace. Except for the slapping wind, everything is silent. I feel watched. I notice a UN jeep patrolling the tracks ahead. This does not increase my sense of safety.

The heat is intense. The surprise of a taxi encourages me. I wave out. The driver stops and is happy to take me to Manger Square. We reach the edge of

the deserted Square, boarded with tall palms and high stone walls. I ask the driver for directions to the *Church of the Nativity*. There, I bend to enter through the low door which once caused Moors to stall on horseback. Inside, grime-coated icons and walls blackened with candle smoke capture me.

My feet follow the sound of song. I climb down a winding stair to a grotto. There is the silver pointed star embedded in the floor of cracked, white marble. Heavy red drapes with tassels hang on either side of the star. Above the star cluster too many silver and gold oil burners for my liking. But the grace of the place holds me. The group of French singers leave.

*I am alone under the earth.
I am full of silence.
Time slows.
Before me is that star.*



Palestinian children

Palestine and Israel after Arafat

Bernard Sabella

Transitions are part of our lives: President Bush's re-election and President Arafat's death are but two examples. For many there may be no connection, but for us Palestinians we see them as intricately interrelated.

Could President Bush's second term signal the implementation of his declared intention for the establishment of a Palestinian State in 2005? For long, successive US Administrations have neglected the gross injustice that befell the Palestinians as a result of the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Pro-Israel sentiments in the White House, in Congress and in other important US sectors are an important input influencing US foreign policy as it relates to the Middle East in general and to the Arab-Israeli conflict, in particular.

Our expectation as Palestinians is that no dramatic change will take place in US policies towards the Middle East. Israel will never help Mr Bush make his declared intention a reality. The disengagement from Gaza, if it takes place, is a ploy to affirm and reaffirm Israel's virtual control of the West Bank through the illegal settlements there.

The West Bank has been virtually subdivided by Israel into town-Bantustans with Ramallah at the geographic centre. No physical contiguity exists between these town-Bantustans, not to speak of the complete physical separation of the Gaza Strip from the West Bank. If we add Israel's full control of Palestinian borders, resources, population movement and air space, among others, then a Palestinian State would be paralysed from its very inception.

President Arafat insisted on the '*Peace of the Brave*'. He was always citing the late Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, as a leader with whom he himself could have continued on the road to peace. Rabin,

a tough military figure and a decorated war hero in Israel's wars, had come to the realization that peace meant territorial compromise.

The present right-wing Israeli government is in no position to follow Rabin's footsteps. Its primary consideration is security. Peace with the Palestinians would simply mean concretisation of the separation wall; cordoning off of the Gaza Strip after disengagement; continued control of Palestinians, their resources, borders and territories; and consolidation of town-Bantustans in the West Bank alongside the preservation and strengthening of Israeli settlements there.

President Arafat, given this Israeli position, had no room for political manoeuvre or for convincing his people of the utility of peace with the Israelis. Israel has set on a course of destroying the service infrastructure of the Palestinian National Authority by levelling administrative buildings, destroying police compounds, wrecking statistical records and interfering with ordinary day-to-day running of Palestinian institutions. The message to the Palestinian people has been: 'we can do whatever we wish and there is no-one to stop us'.

For peace to be possible, changes are necessary on all sides. President Bush needs to propel his new administration into a position of impartiality that would gain credence with both sides. Prime Minister Sharon needs to widen his disengagement plan from Gaza into a disengagement plan from the West Bank as well. Palestinian leaders need, then, to revise their position and undertake steps that would show the genuine interest of their people in a lasting and just peace.

My prayer is for President Bush to show the integrity that could change America's image in the Middle East and help make peace between Palestine and Israel an effective reality. ■

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

Into this world, this demented Inn, in which there is absolutely no room for him at all, Christ has come uninvited. But because he cannot be at home in it, because he is out of place in it, and yet must be in it, his place is with those others for whom there is no room.

His place is with those who are discredited, who are denied the status of persons, who are tortured, bombed, exterminated. With those for whom there is no room, Christ is present in the world. He is mysteriously present in those for whom there seems to be nothing but the world at its worst. (Thomas Merton)

Christianity and Islam

*An excerpt from the final lecture Hans Küng gave
as Professor of Ecumenical Theology in Tübingen before his retirement in 1996*

In my young years Islam was not an issue in and for Europe. Even at the Gregorian University, in Rome, one heard of Islam only in dry and derogatory statements: that it denied the divinity of Christ and demoted Jesus to a mere prophet.

In 1955 I went by ship to Tunisia and by train to Algeria. I have vivid memories of a nocturnal conversation under a bright starry sky with the then Provincial of the White Fathers, who were responsible for the Catholic mission to Muslims throughout North Africa. We were on the roof of the neo-Gothic cathedral of Carthage, once the seat of St Cyprian and a place where Augustine often stayed.

Why, I asked, had it been impossible to make any progress whatsoever in decades of mission to the Muslims? I was told the dogma of Christianity was very complicated and that its view of marriage and sex was very rigorous for African Muslim circumstances.

The Provincial was going to withdraw all the missionaries from Islamic Africa and transfer them to black West Africa... When I returned to Carthage last year (1995) the Catholic cathedral had become a very fine city museum; there was no longer any trace of Christian missionaries, nor of Augustine's episcopal see in Hippo Regius, where we celebrated Easter in 1955.

Subsequently I came to know Islam in the gigantic area from the Atlantic and Central Asia to the Sea of China and the Indonesian islands. Here was an Islam which, in contrast with the views of many anxious people today, is no

more a monolithic unity than Judaism or Christianity.

- In Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, where Russification was already far advanced, Islam enjoyed more respect and consideration from the Soviet authorities than the Russian Orthodox Church, which they deliberately provoked.
- Islam was different in Lahore in Pakistan, where it is the state religion, with all the attendant advantages and disadvantages.
- ...different again in Indonesia, which in its toleration represents the opposite pole to the strictly orthodox Islam in Saudi Arabia or in Khomeini's Iran.

From confrontation to dialogue

Historically, the encounter between Christianity and Islam has been overshadowed by political and military confrontation between these two religions – so intimately related and yet so intimately hostile to each other.

The first two confrontations developed from the Arab offensive against Byzantium and then the conquest of North Africa; the third was the rollback in the Crusades; the fourth was the Ottoman expansion in the Balkans; and, finally, the fifth was caused by European colonialism, which brought all the Muslim areas from Morocco through North Africa, Egypt and the Middle East to India and Indonesia under its economic, political and military control.

The Christian 'West', now the superior in every respect, is the trauma of Islam. Up to the 18th and 19th centuries Islam had always regarded itself as the religion of the victors because of its apparently

unstoppable expansion. How could Western colonialism force to its knees an Islam which in the early Middle Ages had been so excessively strong in military, political, economic and even cultural terms? Only because Western science, technology and industry had left behind an Islam which remained in its mediaeval paradigm.

After the Second World War the largely newly-founded Muslim nations became independent states as a consequence of the process of decolonisation, thus indirectly leading to a revival of Islam. Since then, a 'war' has been raging in the Islamic world over the right course to take between modernisation and re-Islamicisation.

The strength of Islam

Will Islam preserve its centre in its identity crisis, or will it finally become worldly, a development of which there are already signs? Here, a decisive role is played by the way in which the Koran is understood. Not the Prophet but the Koran is the origin, source and decisive criterion for all Islamic faith, action and life. The Koran has supreme and absolute authority.

Westerners must take very seriously the decisive meaning the Koran has in the life of the masses of believing Muslims. Whenever I hear the cries of prayer and verses of the Koran recited from the minarets in Fez or in Cairo or in Jakarta (somewhat too early in the morning), I realised what a strange fascination this holy book of the Muslims can evidently have.

This is a living book, which does not lie in a cupboard like a family Bible, only used rarely or only to be read silently.

It is a book which, with the rhyming prose of its Surahs, is to be recited in public time and again: its words and sentences accompany the Muslim from the hour of prayer in which the Koranic confession of faith is sung in his ears to the last hour of his life.

The unambiguous confession of faith is of the one God, the almighty and merciful creator and judge: *"There is no God but God, and Muhammad is his Prophet!"*. Together with this simple and at the same time universal confession of faith, which is tied neither to a people nor to a land, the duty of daily prayer, a tax for the poor, fasting and the great pilgrimage to Mecca are the five pillars on which the house of Islam is built.

The considerable power of integration inherent in Islam is grounded in the compactness of its faith. Muslims find 'contrary to reason' the dogmas of one God in three Persons and an Incarnation of God, statements of faith which make Christian faith so 'complicated' for many people.

In the summer semester of 1982 I engaged in a series of dialogue lectures on Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. In the case of Islam I started with three points from the Vatican II declaration:

1. For Muslims Islam can be the way to salvation. The axiom *'outside the church no salvation'* was in fact already abandoned by the Council, but still has to be formally corrected. Unfortunately the World Council of Churches even now does not see itself in a position to correct the claim that salvation comes only through Christianity; it is threatened with massive blockages by the fundamentalists.
2. The Koran can be understood as the Word of God for Muslims, though Christians will always ask whether this Word of God is not at the same time a human word of a prophet, like the Bible.
3. Muhammad, whose name and person are unfortunately not mentioned in the Declaration of Vatican II, can be accepted as an authentic prophet.

The future of Islam

Quite unlike other prophets Muhammad is a prophet and statesman at the same time; the Koran is both a prayer book and a law book; indeed, Islam is a way of salvation and a social system in one.

That also makes many Muslims ask, where they are free to do so, "Can Islam also be a total way for the whole of economic, intellectual, social and political life, revealed by God in a new century? Can this be true of the commandments of God – a comprehensive system extending down to details, in which religion is utterly mixed up with economics, politics and culture?"

Islam also seems to many Muslims still to be trapped in its mediaeval straightjacket. In other words, Islam – rather like Roman Catholicism before Vatican II – faces a double paradigm shift: not only that of the Reformation, but also of modernity, the Enlightenment. It faces a tremendous leap from the Middle Ages through modernity to post-modernity. Will it succeed? Who will finally gain the upper hand?

- Will it be the orthodox traditionalists who, unconcerned with developments in science, law and society, call for a literal application of the detailed religious regulations of the Shariah to the present order.
- Or will it be the innovators in both religion and politics who, while maintaining the great tradition (*taqlid*), call for an opening of the door

of independent interpretation (*iqtiḥad*) which has been closed since around the year 900. This would attempt a translation of the original Islamic message to the present day in order to make possible a competitive economy, science and society.

This is the fateful question for Islam. Will it ever be possible to combine 'Islam' and 'republic', tradition and modern democracy (this is again a question in Palestine)?

Will Islam remain authoritarian? Will it remain a kind of theocratic state in which there is no government independent of the clergy, and there are no independent parties?

A state in which freedom of faith and conscience, the right to resist and legal opposition, are not granted?

A state where women are denied the right to make individual and political decisions knowing no religious or ideological neutrality?

A state where non-Muslims occupy only the position of a tolerated minority, and only male Muslims have human rights in the modern sense – if anyone does?

Just as many Catholics do not want to see a second papal re-Catholicising of Europe in the style of the present Pope in place of ongoing conciliar aggiornamento, so too many Muslims do not want an Islamicisation of modernity rather than a modernisation of Islam. ■

Vatican II achieved a real breakthrough towards an understanding between Christianity and Islam.

First, what they have in common:

The Church has also a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to us. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own.

Then, it addresses the main difference:

Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as a prophet; his virgin

Mother they also honour, and even at times devoutly invoke. Further, they await the day of judgment and the reward of God, following the resurrection from the dead. For this reason they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-deeds and fasting.

Finally, practical consequences are drawn: *Over the centuries many quarrels and dissensions have arisen between Christians and Muslims. The sacred Council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding; for the benefit of all people, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.*

(Nostra Aetate 3)

A Creed to

I was reminded the other day of leading confirmation classes in the early 1980s. On the premise that theological treasure is found in the heart of a person rather than in the head of some authority, I would encourage confirmands and their adult sponsors to write their own creeds. Once given permission to write what they believed, rather than what someone told them they should believe, all sorts of gems came to light.

I was musing on this following a conversation with a parent of a soon-to-be baptised baby. “I don’t believe that,” he said to me. The ‘that’ was a phrase in the creed. Instead of trying to translate the ancient words into contemporary relevancy, I asked him, “What do you believe?” He focused upon his wee child, spoke from his heart, and revealed a treasury of faith, hope and love. Whether we mean to or not, whether we use pen or not, we each write our own creeds. Our lives tell the stories of what we believe in.

I resigned from a committee last week. I served on it for seven years, and I still wonder why I was ever appointed. It is a committee concerned about regulations, rules that everyone is meant to fit within, and the exercise of compassion towards those who occasionally don’t. The bread and butter of this committee didn’t mix well with the creative cooking in which I usually indulge.

For those who know me, I was born breaking rules. Rules are simply someone else’s ideas about how I should live. Occasionally, more often than not I confess, they contain a measure of collective wisdom. Yet I need to argue with and test the rules in order to make them my own. I believe it’s ‘gotta be good’, not because someone says it good, but because I’ve experienced its goodness.

The starting place for a personal creed is not to say *I believe in God*. As my fervent critic says, “Even the devil believes in God!” (I think he was referring to my horns at that point). No, the starting place for a creed is our experience of goodness. It’s in the matrix of our lives that we go looking for grace or, more accurately, grace finds us.

I was standing in front of the congregation a few weeks back, holding a gorgeous babe, about to splash it with the symbol of our common vocation, when I was overawed. The mother was publicly declaring why she wanted her child baptised, and in so doing used very moving words of deep, unconditional love. I came over all goose-bumpy. “It doesn’t get any holier than this,” I told myself. “This is the holy of holies, where earth and heaven meet, and love and God are one.”

I think if I had been using the NZ Anglican prayerbook it wouldn’t have happened. I don’t think it contains a liturgy where responses are not scripted. When I ask parents why they want their child baptised, I do not provide them with

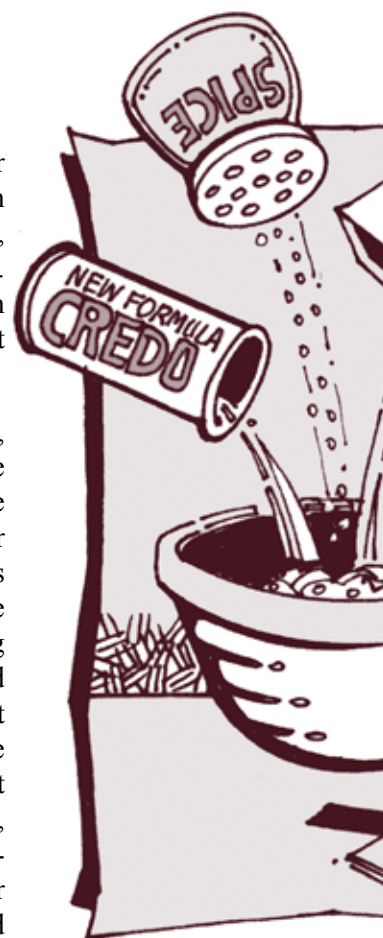
answers. They must find their own words to express their own heart. And, more often than not, something beautiful happens. The love that is holy bursts forth showering all within earshot with its grace.

That’s why prayerbooks, helpful as they are, are secondary documents. The primary documents are our lives and experience. That’s why doctrines and creeds are secondary documents, marking in time where passion and grace has been. They are not at the frontier of theology where experience and speech interact to give voice to holiness. No, doctrines and creeds are post-match pastimes, analyses after the event, the preserve of retired players-turned-commentators, coolly dissecting the game that was.

Consider the virgin birth as expressed in the Apostles’ and Nicene-Constantinopolitan creeds. For many Anglicans the literalness of God implanting a fertilised egg within the compliant Mary is pure nonsense. Further, such literalness divorces God from the potential holiness of sex and the making of a new life.

Protestant biblical scholars have told us ‘virgin’ was a cultural First Century way of expressing Jesus’ uniqueness. “It is not about Mary and anatomy, but Jesus and theology.” I’m not so sure. Behind the word ‘virgin’ there was Mary’s experience of conceiving, being pregnant, and giving birth. Maybe the word is pointing to the holiness of that whole experience.

The making of a new life can be a holy moment. It can be a moment of miracle. Just like it can be when a new life emerges from the womb. A moment of love and wonder. When I hear the phrase ‘Virgin Mary’ I interpret



to Believe



Glynn Cardy

it as pointing to the holiness of the deep and mysterious love possible between a mother and a child.

Part of my creed is that I believe in the immaculate miracle of new life and the holiness of love. Yes, this is imaginative theology. I choose imagination over the sterility of literalism and the rules of yesteryear. I believe in the power of imagination to enhance and expand our inhalation of God.

I went to see a movie the other night: *Love's Brother*. Not my usual fare. An Italian-Australian love story. The theatre was full, yet I was one of only six men. "Uh-oh," I thought, "is this going to be what the Lion Red blokes call a 'Chick Flick'?" Interestingly though, the real love in the story was between the two brothers.

I liked the Catholic priest. It's not often I like priests in movies. This character was male and old (of course!), and was present at nearly every function in that community. Yet it was on the grand occasion of the arrival of one of the first espresso machines in Victoria when, with due solemnity, he blessed it that I knew this man was of my soul. I confess I am a lover of good coffee.

But, putting that bias to one side, what I liked about the priest was that he was speaking the language of his people. His actions pointed to the holy not being shut up in the church, but among the life of the ordinary. The holy was present in the taste and aroma of coffee, and in all the connections past and present associated with it. If we believe in the doctrine of the Incarnation, is it not possible that God is incarnated in coffee?

A little story about coffee. As you may be aware, coffee originated in the Ethiopian highlands and became popular throughout the Arabic and Ottoman world. Christians

were initially disdainful of the 'hellish black brew'. However, Pope Clement VIII found it so pleasing to his tastes that he baptised it and made it a Christian beverage saying, "Coffee is so delicious it would be a pity to let the infidels have exclusive use of it." Even if the motives were a little mixed, I'm glad the glorious brew found its way into Euro-culture and eventually to Godzone.

One Catholic who does not speak my language is Cardinal Ratzinger. In person he may be very nice, but he signs off some nasty-sounding documents. A case in point being the July 2004 critique of modern feminism, accusing feminism of propagating disharmony between the genders. I found it hard not to hear a chorus line in the background: "men control, women have babies".

I'm not trying to pick on Roman Catholicism. Anglicans aren't exactly blameless in our discriminatory practices. With all the praise heaped upon Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, it is sobering to remember that the Church of England still refuses to consider nominating any woman to be a bishop. Such prejudice is totally obscene and corrosive of the Gospel.

My reactions to the priest in *Love's Brother* and Ratzinger's recent missive help me identify what I believe. I believe in a world where prejudice on the basis of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation will be overcome. I believe too in a world where God speaks through the love and caring interactions of a community and is celebrated.

These are matters of the heart, and then the head. These are beliefs emerging from the furnace of my experience and tempered by interacting with the dreams and realities of others. These are things that matter.

In those confirmation classes of two decades ago I tried not to write a personal creed. Teenagers, used to a pass/fail education, would look at my creed as 'the correct answers' and judge their beliefs accordingly. Adults would do likewise. So, bearing that in mind, I offer today's *Glynnian Creed*, to be read once and never recited or remembered again:

I believe in the midst of our lives grace finds us.

I believe something is good, not because we've been told it is, but because we've experienced it.

I believe in the power of imagination.

I believe in the miracle of life and the holiness of love.

I believe in a world where prejudice will be overcome so that everyone can be who they are, and who they wish to become.

I believe in a God who speaks through the love of a community, and is celebrated with laughter, wine – and wonderful coffee. ■

Glynn Cardy is Vicar of St Matthew's-in-the-City, Auckland

Dangerous Passions

Mike Noonan explores the dark depths of wounded human nature, and challenges the church to put honesty before lip service to laws

It was a terrifying moment. I was five, and something had just broken in me. I'd heard and seen my mum and dad fighting before, but I didn't believe until now that they might harm each other badly. My dad, in a rage, had pushed my mum down the stairs. The argument was in full swing when the doorbell went. Fr Troy, our parish priest, was here for a visit. What happened next was unreal.

All viciousness repressed, the atmosphere immediately changed to one of welcome and politeness. My mother quickly rustled up some tea and cake. We all trooped into the living room and for the next hour behaved like a normal family being visited by their parish priest. We had a lovely time and so did Father Troy. As he was leaving he told us what a lovely family we were and how he always experienced a deep peace in our home. It reminded him of the Holy Family.

It was a mixed blessing. Father Troy may well have saved a life that day. His blind affirmation of our family life, however, isolated us still further. In those days it was shameful to talk about family violence. And family violence thrives on secrecy. Just as family violence thrives on secrecy, so also does sexually abusive behaviour.



Cait invited us for a meal. It was Jack's fortieth Birthday. We arrived to an intimate candlelit gathering around a meal table. Cait and their two daughters had prepared a beautiful meal. They had also decorated the walls with photos of Jack from significant moments in his life. The present was quite exquisite, made by Cait – months of delicate work.

It was one of those magical evenings, the gathered company relaxed and at ease with each other, sharing in the valuing of Jack as friend, father and husband. Mellowed by the atmosphere we had imbibed, Maria and I reflected on our way home on how much we valued our friendship with this family and our respect for the road Jack and Cait had traveled together in their 20 years of marriage.

Three days later we learned that there had been a terrible betrayal. Jack, it seems, had been having an affair. One of the guests gathered at the table that night was uncomfortable, knowing that Jack's lover was also present participating in the celebration Cait had prepared. He informed Cait after all the other guests had left. We never saw Cait and Jack together again. For us, that night was an experience of intimacy, then breakage akin to a death.

Cait experienced an anger of Old Testament proportions: she was outraged and wanted a public shaming of Jack. Cait and Jack's children suffered heart-breaking confusion at what was occurring between their parents, and one daughter ran wild in her distress. Cait and Jack's relationship broke and so did the family.

The disciples who gathered with Jesus

to eat the Last Supper experienced that same sequence of intimacy, betrayal and breakage. For them and for us who share the Last Supper through Eucharist, the quality of the remembered intimacy will always be tinged by the knowledge that it has been shared with a betrayer.

When a vocation is betrayed, whether it is marriage, religious life, or priesthood, the community within which that vocation has been lived is wounded and damaged. Many people in the church, and still more outside the church, have been astounded and wounded by the discovery that there are priests who have been sexually abusing children. Still more astounding has been the discovery that there are bishops who have protected the priests at the expense of the children.

As a result of such scandals, what the Catholic hierarchy has to say about gender and sexual ethics is characterized, in popular thought, as irrelevant at best and dangerous at worst. The authority with which the Catholic Church could speak is compromised and undermined.

However, it would be wrong to characterise this type of behaviour as being a problem only of repressed priests whose sexuality has got out of control. In Australia, as I write this article, 200 arrests have been made of health workers, teachers and others who have downloaded child pornography from the internet. Very few professions have been left untouched by this scandal. Thus far, six of those arrested have taken their lives. Police tell us that, but for New Zealand law being framed differently, a similar swoop could be made here.

Use of the internet is revealing that large numbers of people are driven or seduced by a hunger for images of sexual perversion and violence. Should we be surprised by this? Perhaps not. It was precisely this disjuncture between public face and private reality that Jesus was most vehement about.

In early spring, TV One screened a BBC Series entitled *Dangerous Passions*. Jealousy, anger and desire were examined in turn. I found the programmes to be food for the soul. These passions are so much part of daily life and yet rarely part of our parish discourse. It is almost as if what happened within my family when Father Troy visited is replicated in our churches on Sunday.

Instead of speaking about what is difficult, we sing our hymns sweetly. Jealousy, anger and desire leap out of the Scriptures, describing how passionate God is about refining our hearts. Perhaps our 'dangerous passions' should be brought to the altar each Sunday at the offertory procession. They are part of our daily bread that is broken, part of the bread – made by human hands – which needs to be transformed.

Serious discussion of sexuality and sexual ethics within the local church appears to have been silenced by a complex mix of fear and confusion; our confusion at the gap between our church's teaching and what is lived and fear of being branded as hypocrites. The many documents and letters issued by the hierarchy appear to spring from a disembodied rationality and seem disconnected from what happens within the families who make up the church. Formation in relationships cannot happen through the written word alone: a deeper formation is needed.

Without that deeper formation we fall back on the law, and we style ourselves as the 'morally outraged'. Sadly our church's response to the *Civil Union Bill* made us appear just that, fighting a rearguard action to protect those aspects of the law which uphold Christian moral values. I believe it revealed just how much our church needs that deeper formation.

The reason the church exists is not to uphold legal or even moral values. The reason the church exists is to make God's love present by being a

loving community at the heart of the world and at the service of the world. Compliance with a law or some high sounding moral teaching should never be taken as a measure of a follower of Jesus. Jesus was very clear about the danger to the soul when an outward compliance with the law masks inner rebellion. So, it seems, is the Church each time it undertakes a renewal in moral theology.

We need a renewal in moral theology, but not just through the writing of scholars. We need to accomplish this renewal together – people, priests and religious – by sharing wisdom, openly calling and challenging one another to live our vocations and our relationships in a truthful way. We need a way of 'doing' moral theology that begins from where we are. Lest the living waters become and remain polluted this is an urgent matter of "Physician heal thyself!"

Gaudium et Spes, the statement of Vatican II on the place of the church in the world today, remains a prophetic document. "The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts." (GS 1)

I look forward to the day when we, as church, have the capacity to speak about the dangerous passions in our relationships, not with the authority of a people who know all the answers, neither with the defensiveness of shame, nor with fear of expensive law suits, but with the humility of a people who are on a journey and who need to learn how to live our relationships with integrity as physical, sexual beings. To succeed in that would really identify us as a community at the heart of the world and at the service of the world. ■

Mike Noonan is Area Manager of Relationship Services in Dunedin



Shanghai skyline

In the footsteps of Marco Polo

Observations from a first trip to China

Tom Cloher

Our journey to China actually began 21 years ago. We were living in Adelaide in a reasonably roomy house just one km from the University, so we decided to post a vacancy on the student notice board for a woman undergraduate who would be additional company for our ten-year-old daughter.

Arriving home from work one midwinter evening I discovered that a 34-year-old Chinese gentleman, nearing the end of his doctoral studies, had virtually succeeded in convincing my wife and daughter that he was the person we had in mind! And what did I think?

So SW joined the family. He was a survivor of the Cultural Revolution that dispatched him from his studies to work in the fields for two years, followed by another two years in a factory. He retained a healthy disregard for the 'Gang of Four' who had implemented this unrealistic and disruptive policy.

His application to his studies was astonishing but equally so his facility for written English. He passed on chapters to us for comment on his use of English, and we could only make minimal suggestions for improvement. More remarkably, he took to sending chapters of his thesis to overseas journals for publication with consistent success prior to its submission to the university, a phenomenon we have not witnessed before or since.

Somewhat against the odds we kept in touch for 21 years before finally succumbing to SW's recurring invitations to visit China. We were not surprised to know that he was now a research Professor in the School of Geology at a prominent University as well as the Director of its newly opened Museum of Palaeontology. (His doctorate was a comparative study of ancient life forms in China and Australia, specifically the Flinders Ranges of South Australia).

Napoleon is reputed to have said: "China sleeps. When China wakes, beware!" Whether he did or not, someone

should have, because there are signs abounding that the slumbering giant is making a dramatic entry into the 21st Century. Looking across the skyline in Beijing there is a seemingly endless chain of cranes reaching high into the sky signalling what must be one of the greatest surges in city building in history. Most of it relates to preparing to stage the Olympic Games 2008, but Shanghai too is bursting with urban renewal and extension.

There are signs of a transport infrastructure to go with it. Trains are swift, frequent and reasonably comfortable, but there are no such things as spare seats. You have a reservation or no seat. Planes too are efficient; the airports very modern and large scale, at least the ones we encountered. There seems little reason to doubt their stated objective of bringing transport infrastructure and equipment up to the best contemporary standards.

The biggest challenge will be the road systems, particularly in the large cities where the reigning strategy seems to be "challenge the competition to the nth degree", the element of risk seeming very high at times. When I put my safety belt on in a Beijing taxi, the driver indicated his disapproval as if I were placing a vote of no confidence in his driving skills!

Pedestrians are comparative fringe dwellers in the midst of the city traffic. You probably secure your best chance by getting in the middle of a group of locals and moving with them, thus claiming the benefit of their experience and judgment.

A defect our Chinese guide frankly identified was the comparative concentration upon the urban environment. She believes there are two Chinas, urban and rural, with about half the population in each. Rural China is another world, she insisted, where people earned about a tenth of their city compatriots. Another accompanying irony is the emergence of a wealthy class, the inevitable product of capitalism, whose lives and possessions do not sit well with the communist tradition.

Some of the hotels in Shanghai would compete with any on the globe. The China Daily (English edition) acknowledged its concern for the urban-rural imbalance. However, no criticism of the government surfaced at any stage of our journey, nor in the Shanghai Daily, though some fairly trenchant remarks appeared about Indonesia and the United States.

The other significant aspect of government control was continuance of the 'one child policy'. In public it was rare to see two children together. Usually one girl or boy was in the company of parents or grandparents, who seemed preoccupied with the child, sometimes vying for its attention.

We spoke at length during a train journey with a 32-year-old married woman who discussed the policy in impeccable English, describing it as 'a very sensitive issue'. She said expectations of grandparents placed considerable strains upon young married couples. She regarded herself as fortunate, as she had a younger married sister who shared the responsibility.

It was obvious too from her remarks that traditional concern for her parents and those of her husband loomed large in their future plans. Imagine, though, the situation of a young couple who alone became responsible for both sets of parents as well as providing an heir for them.

Despite the sensational trappings of modernity, China's richest treasure remains its antiquity. You cannot help but sense that this is indeed the 'world's oldest continuous civilisation'. We were introduced to some dramatic evidence of this.

First, the Great Wall, an astonishing piece of engineering stretching 6000 km westwards from the mountain ridges north of Beijing, originally constructed to protect the Chinese empires from Mongolian 'barbarians'. While much of it is in disrepair, significant sections of it are being carefully restored, quite enough to test the hardy or to enable lesser brethren to claim that they have walked along it. (SW was later to assure us that anyone who has done so might be classified as a hero!).

Second, a visit to the Shanghai Museum that houses an extraordinary collection of Chinese bronze and artwork, beautifully displayed. Third, from the ancient city of Xian we travelled by bus to visit the Terracotta Warriors (see picture above right) discovered in 1974, having been buried for 2000 years. Eight hundred have been excavated and restored to date; they face east in battle formation, including horses and chariots.

The artistry is breathtaking, the individuality of the figures and the sense of expectancy as if at any moment they could take another step. As one observer put it: "were

you to close your eyes for some minutes, then open them suddenly, you wouldn't be surprised to find they had marched away!"

Tour sites featured Buddhist temples, some very beautiful and well kept. These seemed to be the only architectural statement of a spiritual nature. In Chongqing, a bustling metropolis and port on the Yangtze River, there was a steeple peeping up from a host of city roads and buildings. The church was almost built in a ravine, but a steep stairway led me to a Catholic church, built in late Gothic style. It was open and presented a familiar interior and a prayerful lady. An elderly man, unable to speak English, pointed to the date of the church's opening -1893. Not long in terms of Chinese history but it has surely lived though an extraordinary epoch, and survived. (I hope that some reader can elaborate as I sense it would be a church of some consequence for missionaries of this period).



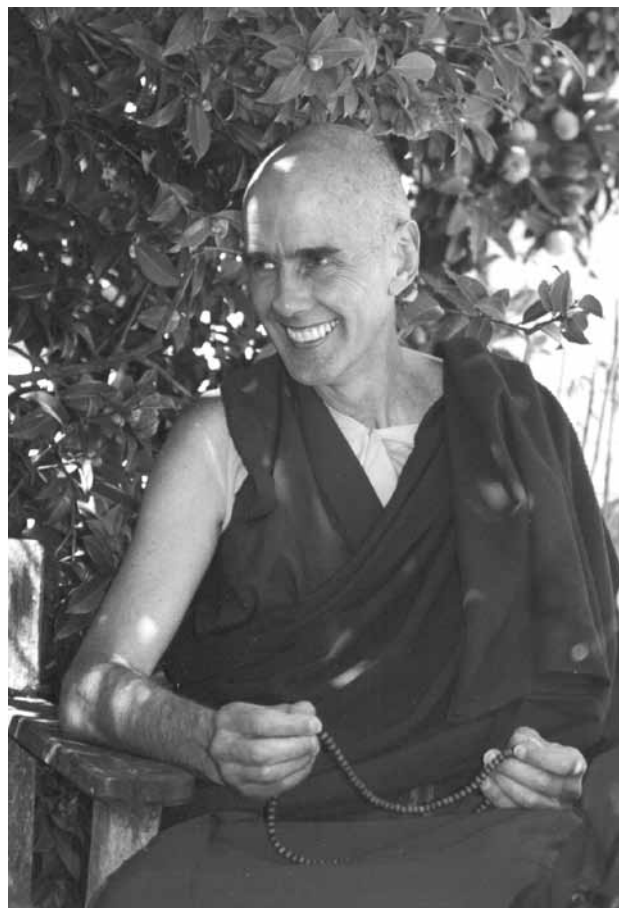
Brief though it was, the journey made quite an impact. Despite the barrier of language, in many situations we discovered a people of evident energy, commitment and apparent good humour. Conversations seemed an art form, including as many as five without too much effort.

The market places were an entertainment and a challenge indicative of their entrepreneurial flair. But they have more to offer than material goods. We could do with some of the wisdom and composure no doubt derived from such an explicit and well-formed culture.

There is a widespread and intense desire to study English, for the Chinese see it as an international communication medium, as indeed it is. At the rate China is developing, it won't be long before there might well be a comparable passion in the West to learn Cantonese. ■

A young man in search of his soul

Patricia Williams, who lives in Mangere Bridge, did this interview for *Tui Motu* with Tenzin Chosang, a Buddhist monk



In an ordinary Auckland street stands a not-so-ordinary house, the Trashi Gomang Buddhist Centre. Bright yellow and red, it shines out among its more sedate suburban neighbours and is home to Tenzin Chosang, a Buddhist monk of South African parentage. Tall and slim and with an ascetic appearance, this gentle and quietly-spoken man readily agreed to share something of his life's journey and how he came to be in charge of a Buddhist Centre in Mangere Bridge in Auckland.

Patricia: *Would you say that itchy feet brought you to New Zealand in the first place?*

Tenzin: Yes, you could say that. After teaching for two years in South Africa I joined a yacht going to Brazil and England. But England was expensive so I joined a yacht going to the Caribbean and then into the Pacific. We stopped off at the Galapagos Islands, the Marquesas, Mururoa, Tahiti, the Cook Islands – and finally New Zealand.

Patricia: *So what brought you into contact with Buddhism?*

Tenzin: At the end of the '80s, through a whim, I started reading Buddhist writings and found that Buddhism really paralleled my experience. Dorje Chang Centre in Herne Bay was the closest centre and Khensur Thabkhey Rinpoche was the teacher there. I formed a strong connection with him. When His Holiness the Dalai Lama came to New Zealand in 1992 he advised Khensur Rinpoche to teach in Mongolia which Rinpoche did for two years. But a group of his students asked him to return to New Zealand and in

1996 he started his own centre, Trashi Gomang, in Mangere Bridge.

Patricia: *Which aspect of Buddhist teaching first attracted you?*

Tenzin: The Buddha's teachings around suffering really clicked for me. It goes back to when my sister caught polio when she was 18 months old. She went through enormous suffering. I remember seeing her coming out of the operating theatre in such pain. How could a loving, omnipotent God allow such suffering in a small child? I was just a boy, but the question remained.

I was brought up an ardent Christian but when I was at university, the God idea didn't match my experience at all, so I gave up Christianity altogether. I have the strongest respect for Jesus and his teachings, but the God thing just didn't gel with me. The Buddhist teachings on how and why we suffer made lots of sense.

Patricia: *What training did you undergo to become a fully-ordained monk?*

Tenzin: I studied with Khensur Rinpoche and other teachers for seven years before taking novice vows. When His Holiness came to New Zealand and Australia in 1996 I asked him to give me vows but he didn't have time and told me to see him in India the following year. But at a gathering of over 3,000 people in Sydney His Holiness told me to take lifelong vows of celibacy. That was truly an auspicious and awesome occasion.

In 1997 I took novice vows in Dharamsala in India. India has given shelter to thousands of Tibetans in exile, and my monastery at Mundgod in the south is one such place. It is a dynamic and extraordinary place of over 3,000 monks. I stayed for four months and then returned to Auckland. His Holiness had told me to take full ordination in 1998 so I was back at Dharamsala in March to become a full monk.

Patricia: *Was it a difficult transition for you?*

Tenzin: Some areas were difficult. I'm imbued with Western culture and had a great admiration for Western literature, drama and particularly music. For example, I found Asian music difficult to listen to. And the language has never been easy for me. I don't learn languages easily and I've never really mastered the Tibetan language. This made the vast amount of study involved more arduous.

Patricia: *Can we get back to how the Buddha explains human suffering?*

Tenzin: The Buddha says that everything we experience is the result of karma. Karma is actions done in the past which have left habitual tendencies like little seeds on our minds. When conditions are right those seeds will ripen into a suffering or pleasurable situations, depending on whether the original motivation was positive or negative.

Patricia: *Is it then an endless cycle of birth, suffering, death and rebirth to which one has to surrender helplessly?*

Tenzin: No. The Buddha teaches that if we can change how our mind works, we will create more and more positive experiences and break the endless cycle of suffering for ourselves and others. That is why he taught a huge repertoire of meditations, visualisations, exercises and practices aimed at creating a clear, omniscient mind free of all negativity.

Patricia: *Some would say that Buddhist concepts are difficult to grasp.*

Tenzin: We see and react to reality in a completely mistaken way. The Buddha described very exactly how reality exists,

but it is very difficult to understand. One has to think about it again and again. You have to internalise these teachings by study, contemplation and meditation. But initially you have to check it out. See if it accords with your experience.

Patricia: *Buddhists are renowned for their non-violent beliefs. Can you briefly explain?*

Tenzin: All beings want happiness and don't want suffering – even the smallest insect. We believe that all creatures have what the Christians might call a soul, so all creatures are equally precious. Also, as all our suffering comes from our own mind, it is not others that cause our problems but ourselves. Seeing this, one learns not to blame others but develop great compassion for them in their suffering, even if they are creating mayhem.

Violence only makes suffering worse and brings intense future suffering, so the Buddha taught us never to react with violence. The best example is the Dalai Lama whose people have suffered enormously under the communists, yet still he only has compassion and continuously seeks a peaceful solution to the situation, never advocating violence.

Patricia: *Of course there is much more to Buddhism than what we have touched on today.*

Tenzin: Yes. It is vast and involves commitment during several lifetimes. ■

Patricia Williams lives with two other women in a small Catholic community in Mangere Bridge, Auckland



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Burning one's boats

Letting go of the past is hard – especially when an arsonist does it for you

Paul Andrews

If you have ever been in Manresa, Dublin, you may remember the chalet. It features fetchingly in our website, a one-storey wooden building set in trees, the first structure you see as you come up the drive. It was built as a cricket pavilion in the days when this place was Baymount School. As time passed, it found use as an overflow (two bedrooms) for the retreat house, and a worksite for myself.

One room was my office, furnished with books and test materials, where I met people. I sometimes used the bright kitchen for art therapy, and other groups used it for meetings. In another room I kept some nine thousand files from forty years of practice as psychologist and therapist. Such files are confidential, and I used to wonder how to dispose of them. They would require a massive shredding operation. What about burning them? – but bonfires are not allowed in the city. Well, the Lord took it out of my hands.

In the small hours of one Sunday, in December 2003, when I was away on retreat, my brethren were awakened by the sight and noise of flames engulfing the chalet. There was nobody in it, thank God. By the time the fire brigade arrived, the all-wooden structure was a blackened shell, all its contents destroyed. The 9000 files, books collected over forty years, notes, tests, theses, all reduced to ashes. So was an early painting by Jay Murphy, a little Connemara picture by Ita Quilligan, and a cockatoo in Dresden China brought back from Germany by my father nearly seventy years ago; and calculators, stationery, ornaments, beds, tables, a suite of armchairs and couches as well as smaller chairs, a Tudor cupboard in black oak; a V'Soske Joyce hand-woven rug, bed linen, a hot press, a well-equipped kitchen and bathroom. Nothing left but black ashes.

The local grapevine names the culprits as three young men who enjoyed two other conflagrations, one of a JCB on our front field in 2002, the other of a wooden shack on our neighbour's ground a year earlier. It is a bit unnerving to share a neighbourhood with guys who get a buzz out of torching buildings, but the Gardaí are not yet in a position to stop them.

I grieved, mostly over tiny things, like an irreplaceable photo of my mother as a cheerful teenager. It was the personal losses, representing more than half a life's work, that hurt most. The happening seemed senseless, with just one thread of meaning. At the end of retreat I had told the Lord I was ready for anything. I can hear him chuckling over my offer. It may be that in his inconvenient way, he was calling me

gradually to let things go. My brother put it pithily: *You mention disengagement. Already the reminders of mortality that we both have encountered let us know that we will depart as naked as we came.*

When I had left the fury and the grief behind, the question remained: where was God in all this? Not too far away, in fact. I got real help from friends. One of them, a farmer, wrote:

'We manage to accumulate so much in our lives. It is only when someone close dies and you have to deal with their affairs, that all the things that meant so much to them are seen in a different light. I used to love our silver. It was all family stuff. When we were relieved of it all some years ago by someone who felt they had to have it, I was greatly saddened. However since then we have replaced some and inherited some more. But I can no longer invest any emotion into the things.'

'I remember visiting a friend in Australia who was recently bereaved. On my first night with them he showed me his little cellar with a prize collection of old Australian wines. To my amazement he picked out a bottle and announced we would have it with supper. His wife was stunned. He just said that he had been saving vintage wines for years and had never tried any of them. After the death in his family he woke up to the fact that he might fall under a bus never having tasted any. Over the week I was there we opened and drank three glorious bottles of wine. At first I felt horrified that I might have been to blame for a rash un-thought-out decision. But the look on his face as he savoured every drop and enjoyed sharing, made me change my mind.

'We seem to desire to hold onto so many things that are precious to us – the things that remind us of people we loved, of past achievements, and of beauty. But in the end these things are within our minds and our hearts. Everything on this earth is dynamic. When one amazing sunset disappears for ever, another glorious sunrise appears elsewhere.' (Thank you, Simon.)

Life did not allow me to grieve for long. Helped by a good broker, we collected more insurance than I had expected. With that nest-egg, and an empty site, we have what the politicians call a window of opportunity: to use modern materials to build what we need. As Job said: *The Lord has given and the Lord has taken away* – and now he seems likely to give again. Blessed be the name of the Lord. ■

Paul Andrews, an Irish Jesuit priest, is soon to 'winter' in New Zealand doing supplies and hunting fish

The Year of Matthew

Susan Smith

Liturgically, 2005 is the Year of *Matthew*. This Gospel is the first book in the New Testament, though it was written some 15 years after *Mark*, around the year 85. Traditionally it is thought to have been written by Matthew, the tax collector.

Contemporary scholars argue that the author was probably a Greek-speaking Jew living in Antioch, in modern Syria, and wrote predominantly for Jewish Christians. There is a decidedly Jewish flavour about it. For example in his genealogy, *Matthew* traces Jesus' ancestry back to Abraham, the father of the Jewish race (1:1), whereas *Luke*, writing for Gentiles, shows how Jesus is descended from Adam, the father of the human race (3:38).

The two gospel writers composed their narratives about Jesus of Nazareth quite differently. The First Century Christian communities expressed their belief in Jesus not through a mindless uniformity, but rather through a rich diversity.

Matthew did not suddenly decide to write his story of Jesus. Rather, as the first witnesses of the life and death of Jesus died, it became apparent that more than scattered oral and literary traditions were needed if the memory of Jesus was to be kept alive.

Matthew depends primarily on *Mark's* gospel, written about 70A.D. But the author also draws on oral and written traditions about Jesus that *Mark* did not use as well as traditions not known to *Mark* or *Luke*. For example, the famous Last Judgment parable in *Matt* 25 does not occur in either *Mark* or *Luke*.

The four Gospel writers had access to differing traditions about Jesus which



they creatively transformed into a narrative conveying the meaning of Jesus for their particular communities.

The infancy narrative (Mt. 1-2)

There are three points in *Mt.* 1-2 that deepen our understanding of the author's theology of Jesus of Nazareth – God-with-us, or *Immanuel* – in human history.

- In his genealogy, *Matthew* mentions four women – Tamar (1:3); Rahab (1:5); Ruth (1:5) and the wife of Uriah, the Hittite (1:6). These women all emerge as somewhat 'dodgy' characters. Tamar tricks her father-in-law Judah into a sexual relationship with her, as he has failed to properly care for her after the death of her husband. The Gentile woman, Rahab, is a prostitute who aids the Hebrew people as they seek to enter the Promised Land. Ruth is a Moabite a traditional enemy of the Israelites who, encouraged by her mother-in-law Naomi, persuades Boaz to marry her; while the wife of Uriah, Bathsheba, becomes the wife of David in dubious circumstances.

This genealogy ends by referring to Mary whose pregnancy is a source of concern to Joseph. Despite their

presumed 'dodginess' these women are key players in the story of salvation, often in ways that subvert our more common ways of understanding how God works in human history.

- In *Mt.* 2:1-12, we learn that wise men from the East came to Jerusalem in search of the child who "has been born king of the Jews." Upon finding him these Gentiles fall down and worship the child, unlike Herod and his cronies who seek to murder him. In this gospel, written for a Jewish Christian community, Gentiles are well represented among the heroines and heroes.

- Jesus makes his home in Nazareth, and is later referred to as 'the Nazorean' (*Mt.* 2:23). 'Nazorean' can have more than geographical significance. The Hebrew word *n'zir* translates as one who is devoted to God, while another Hebrew word *n'er* means "branch" (cf *Isaiah* 11:1). *Matthew's* description of Jesus as a "Nazorean" is meant to teach us more than Jesus' geographical locale – it demonstrates the salvific significance of Jesus the Nazorean in human history.

The beginning of *Matthew*, tells us that women have been – and will be – key players in God's saving plan for humankind. Strangers rather than Jews recognise the real meaning of the birth of the child. And the name "Nazorean" implies that Jesus is the one who saves us, the promised Messiah.

Clearly, "God's ways are not our ways."

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

Meditation on Psalm 139:9-10

*If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea
even there your hand shall lead me
and your right hand shall hold me fast*

I'm a late settler, a Pom.
Bradford's where I'm from.
On a cool dawn I boarded a flight
On a DC10, bright
In the silvery light,
And came to this hanging-down
jewel of land
Where day becomes night,
Christmas is hot
And spring is September.
And the Lord did remember,
He never forgot.
At the farthest ends of the sea
His right hand was waiting for me,
Holding me tight.

Joan Firth

Conversation with the Hairdresser

She asks me
am I ready for Christmas
her mirrored eyes
already fringed with tinsel.
I say no
never have been
and add
(risking irreverence)
no one ever was
not even His folks.

Robin Kearns

Compassion and the Cat

*Compassion
comes
with knowing
like a cat
with its slow
steady lick
knowing its own fur.*

Trish Harris

They Speak in Silences

Angels they say
speak in silences
that are like vast vaults
filled with motes dancing
in sun beams
And if you glance quickly
you might see
their wings unfold
and flash free colours
that have not
yet been seen
but this, I know
they spill like waterfalls
into a far, far deeper
sea.

Peter Rawnsley

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Hidden secrets



In My Father's Den

Film Review: Paul Sorrell

Based on the novel by Maurice Gee, this darkly gothic tale of rural New Zealand – Central Otago, in fact – is a prime example of what Sam Neill called our ‘cinema of unease’. The word that best describes the film, and its protagonist, Paul Prior, is ‘edgy’. The Otago landscape forms a subtle backdrop, majestic but also alienating, a witness to ugliness as well as beauty and tenderness. Moody and impressionistic, the real meaning of the film is not in the events it depicts but in the emotional undercurrents that swirl in the depths of the human heart.

The film begins with Paul's return home to the township of Ruatapere South (Roxburgh in real life) to attend his father's funeral. He has made a name for himself in London as an international journalist and war photographer; nominated for the Pulitzer Prize, he surprised everyone by withdrawing his short-listed entry, a photo of a young girl who was the sole survivor of a massacre in the Balkans, at the last minute. Back in the sticks, his acquired English accent and aloof manner irritate the locals and he withdraws into a protective shell.

The already sombre mood of the film darkens with the unexplained disappearance of Celia, the teenage daughter of Paul's former girlfriend and a pupil at the school where he is a relieving teacher, who has formed a special understanding with Paul and begun to find some chinks in his armour. This event is the trigger for a cycle of violence and revelations that lift the lid not only on Paul's dysfunctional family but a community disfigured by prejudice, brutality and the dark shadow of sexual abuse.

But this is one of those films where the action is secondary to the currents of impression and emotion that flow through it. It's demanding to watch because meaningful exchanges and telling images drift past in a constant stream – as they do in real life – and we need to be constantly alert for significant nuances that might help us unwrap the mystery of Paul's character and purpose. Key scenes are replayed and expanded, enlarging our understanding with each reprise.

The image at the heart of the film is the place named in the title ‘my father's den’. This is a dark but beautifully constructed shed where the younger Paul experienced formative encounters with books and maps, with sex and with his father – the scarcely seen but potent presence whose death sparks the events of this remarkable if somewhat overburdened film. ■

Where is faith going in Godzone

The Future of Christianity: Historical, Sociological, Political and Theological Perspectives from New Zealand

Edited by John Stenhouse and Brett Knowles

ATF Press, Adelaide (distributed in NZ by Omega Press, Auckland)

Price: \$39.95

Review: Albert Moore

A lively conference can produce fruitful books. The considerable international conference on “The Future of Christianity in the West” was held at Otago University in December 2002. It featured some leading scholars from Britain and America who questioned whether religion was actually in decline in the face of secularisation and pointed to new and vital directions and developments. (We reviewed aspects of this in *Tui Motu*, March 2003, pp22-3.)

The editors state in their introduction that this international perspective is to

Book Reviews

occupy a second volume. Meanwhile the present volume includes 14 contributions on ‘the future of Christianity’ from a range of approaches with a new Zealand perspective. “The editors have not tried to rein in this diversity, nor to impose any party line.”

The outcome, to my mind, is a comprehensive and stimulating range of articles which will extend the reader's knowledge and also open up some lively issues for discussion by students and religious groups. For instance, two leading NZ church historians deal with “Christianity and National Identity” (Allan K. Davidson) and “Social Policy and the Churches in the 1990s and Beyond”

(Peter Lineham). Anthropologist, Erich Kolig, raises critical questions about NZ secularization and Maori religiosity expressed sometimes controversially, in public areas of NZ culture and politics.

Most of the other articles are of shorter length, between 10 and 20 pages, for instance on developments in Pentecostalism and in trends to “believing without belonging”. Readers of *Tui Motu* will find familiar names in Rory Sweetman and Neil Darragh. Mike Riddell concludes the volume with a visionary, even apocalyptic article on “Beyond Ground Zero” finding hope in such symbols as a ‘liquid church’. This volume stimulates interest and furthers our knowledge of the changing forms of religion in NZ. We do need more discussion of our wider NZ situation. This volume is to be recommended. ■

Smorgasbord of delights

Ah, the unifying power of literature! I find myself in total agreement with the sentiments (if not the grammar!) of a punk musician/poet who announced on a website this year “Me and a good book is a party, me and a good book and a cup of coffee is an orgy”. On that reasoning, this has been a great year for parties and orgies.

When I started reading *Living to Tell the Tale*, the first volume of a projected three-volume memoir by the Colombian Nobel Laureate Gabriel Garcia Marquez, I had the eerie feeling that I had read it before – and yet I knew this was not possible because it had just been published. It took only a few pages before I realised that the landscape and the people of the memoir are also the landscape and people of the novels. For devotees of the novels this is a fascinating journey of discovering the connections between the novelist’s life and art which are so closely linked as to be virtually inseparable.

Marquez had the good fortune – for a writer – of being born into a family full of total eccentrics. “I cannot imagine a family environment more favourable to my vocation than that lunatic house...” he writes, crediting the women particularly, with their matter-of-fact dealings with miracles and ghosts and the fantastic, with nurturing the magic realism so evident in his novels.

This first volume ranges from Marquez’s birth in 1927 through to his departure for Europe in the 1950s, but much of the story pre-dates his birth and sets him firmly in a family where the most unlikely happenings were the norm, and it was expected that unexpected things would happen. The memoir moves effortlessly from past to present and back again, giving a rich and detailed picture in the sensuous prose which is so much a hallmark of

Books of 2004

Kathleen Doherty

Marquez’s writing. It is all summed up in the epigraph: “Life is not what one lived, but what one remembers, and how one remembers it in order to recount it.” (*Living to Tell the Tale*, Penguin, \$27.95)

In another culture on the other side of the world, another great writer has told his story. *A Tale of Love and Darkness* by Amos Oz (Chatto and Windus, \$54.95) is reported to be the biggest-selling literary work in Israeli history. No doubt the story of four generations of a family making the long and tortuous escape from Lithuania through Poland to Israel, the promised land, could be the story of thousands of modern-day Israelis, but with his insight, humour and deep compassion Amos Oz has produced a memoir which manages to be touching and tragic and in places very funny. He has described it as “part of my peace process with myself”, acknowledging that it has taken him a very long time – he is now 65 – to talk and write about his mother and the terrible effect her suicide had on him when she was 38 and he, her only child, was 12. The book’s ending, where the getting-to-be-elderly writer struggles to understand why his mother chose to leave him, is one of the most affecting passages one is likely to read.

Whatever one’s thoughts about the Israeli–Palestinian situation, reading this account of how Israel was the precious refuge which promised so much after generations of turmoil can only reinforce the belief that such a complex problem cannot have a simple solution.

In lighter vein ...

Everyone who has been part of a book discussion group will know that discussing books is only a small part of what happens: very often what the participants reveal about themselves and their relationships with each other is infinitely more interesting. It is therefore no surprise that when six people in California embark on six meetings to discuss the six novels of Jane Austen, the stage is set for some zippy interaction. “Each of us has a private Austen” is the intriguing first sentence of Karen Joy Fowler’s *The Jane Austen Book Club* (Viking, \$34.99), and all of the members of the club think that they are the only one with a true appreciation of the author. One of the group is the narrator, but in an interesting stylistic twist, we are never sure which one.

There are touches of which Jane Austen herself would surely have approved: the general suspicion of the only male invited to participate when he arrives with an unread matched set of the novels – everyone else has well-loved, well-thumbed copies – and the disapproval which greets one participant referring to the author as “Jane”. “That was more intimate, surely, than Miss Austen would wish. None of the rest of us called her Jane, even though we were older and had been reading her years longer.”

The five women involved, ranging from twenties to late sixties, are all at different stages of self-discovery and self-acceptance; the only man, who manages to remain strangely at ease in a volatile group, has probably learned this skill by living with three older sisters – and he is surely in want of a wife. Each of the private Austens is revealed in the six participants. At the end they have all changed in most satisfactory ways.



A time when Muslim and Christian lived at peace

Ornament of the World – How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain

By Maria Rosa Menocal

Back Bay Books, USA – 315pp

Review: John Buckner

My knowledge of the Islamic period in Spain's history was rather vague till I came upon this book. It has revealed to me a fascinating, highly civilised country on a par with that other contemporary centre of culture. The first chapter is a brief background history of the period. It tells how the Umayyads, who came to power not long after the death of Mohammed, were massacred in 750 by the Abbasids; they moved the capital from Damascus to Baghdad just as the Umayyads had moved it from Medina to Damascus.

The sole survivor of the massacre of the royal family, Abd al-Rahman, fled west arriving eventually in Spain. The Muslim armies had already taken over the country from the Visigoths, but the arrival of this young man was the start of a whole new era. Abd al-Rahman moulded the country into a thriving, powerful and well-organized state. In doing so he was careful not to upset the multi-ethnic nature of it. Under him the

Muslims, Jews and Christians learned to live and work together.

The other chapters tell of various subjects such as language, how Arabic became supreme and continued as an excellent vehicle for poetry as it had been for centuries, but also as a vehicle for learning. Andalusia became a shining light of philosophy and science. Byzantium preserved and handed on the knowledge of the ancient Greeks to Baghdad and from there to Cordoba.

Aristotle and Plato were little more than names north of the Pyrenees, but in Andalusia their works were being translated and commented on by Jews, Muslims and Christians co-operating together. Cordoba became a wonder not just for its architecture but also for its libraries. Later Toledo rivalled it and became the intellectual capital of Europe in the 11th century – by this time a Christian city where Arabic remained the language of culture and learning. Christians used Arabic in their liturgy, the Mozarabic. Though largely ousted by Latin, Arabic is still used in Toledo and Salamanca.

Both Baghdad and Cordoba lost their pre-eminence in the 10th century. Andalusia was invaded by Berbers, Almoravids

from across the Straits of Gibraltar, who had a more rigid and fundamentalist view of Islam than the Umayyads. The downhill movement went on but it was not till 1492 that the last of the Islamic rulers handed over power to Ferdinand of Aragon and his queen, Isabella of Castile. A few months later they signed the decree expelling the Jews, despite promises made to the contrary. The Muslims, even those who converted to Christianity, shared the same fate. Now it was the turn of Christian fundamentalism. The days of tolerance were gone, and much of the learning of earlier centuries ended on the bonfires.

History has lessons to teach us, but we are loath to learn them. Maria Menocal writes that the Serbian army in 1992 deliberately shelled the National Library in Sarajevo. Over a million books and more than a hundred thousand manuscripts were destroyed. Since when are libraries strategic military targets?

The writer is Professor of Spanish and Portuguese at Yale University. She tells us she completed the book just prior to 9/11. She resisted the temptation to alter the book in any way because of that disaster, but preferred to leave us to draw our own conclusions. ■

▷▷ The enormous influence of books on the way one views the world is the starting point of **Fiona Farrell's** *Book Book*, (Vintage, \$26.95), arguably one of the best novels to be published in New Zealand for many years. It is a meander through a life of reading, a beautifully paced exploration of how we get to be who we are.

Set very firmly in 2004 – the war in Iraq and the capture of Saddam Hussein are woven effortlessly into the narrative – this is a book which recalls with enormous clarity the excitement of discovering books for the first time, the escape they offer when life turns

nasty, the way they enlighten the darkness, the solace and entertainment they provide.

Book Book is catalogued as fiction, but one is left with the feeling that it is a thinly-disguised memoir – certainly the author and the narrator share a great deal: childhood in Oamaru, university in Dunedin, OE in Oxford and Toronto, return to New Zealand. In exposing so much of herself and of her literary imagination, Fiona Farrell has given us a wonderful gift. Take your time when you are reading this book. It and the memories it evokes are to be relished. ■

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Death of a legend – Yasser Arafat

The death of Yasser Arafat resurrects the hope of creating an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel. It was not achieved under the leadership of the man who symbolised the Palestinians' struggle for freedom and self-determination. Whether critics or supporters of Arafat, all Palestinians recognised him as the father of their country. In the last few years of his life, he remained a prisoner in a ruined compound, isolated and reviled by Ariel Sharon, his arch enemy, and diplomatically ignored in any peace negotiations by America and Britain. Yet he remained steadfast in his opposition to the illegal occupation of Palestinian land and continued to champion the right of return of all Palestinian refugees.

Arafat's isolation mirrored that of all his people. Every Palestinian village and city is cut off, one from another, because of over 120 Israeli checkpoints on the West Bank. Despite the Israeli threat of assassination and the American determination to marginalise him, Arafat continued to insist that the main obstacle to Palestinian reform was the Israeli occupation. His refusal to rein in the terrorist elements of Hamas, or his inability to do so, was based on the fact that he could not attack Hamas when Hamas was being attacked by the Israelis.

Sadly for Arafat, towards the end of his life, Palestinian respect for him began to fall away. His shortcomings as the practical leader became more evident and his control of the Palestinian Authority started to slip. Stories of corruption began to circulate, which he denied. But these wrangles began to sap his strength and undermine his authority.

Perhaps it was time that such a dominating figure quit the stage in such a war torn region. If that is so, then it is time that Ariel Sharon quit as well. These two men seemed incapable of ever reaching a solution to the

establishment of two separate states. From the Palestinian perspective, the likelihood that Sharon will try to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian dispute still seems unlikely. Two new players might be a better hope for both countries.

But whatever the criticisms, Yasser Arafat will remain the personification of Palestinian national aspirations. He is now a legend for his people and this will underpin the hope of a future Palestinian nation. He did not achieve this goal himself, but he devoted his life to the cause. One can ask no more of any man.

Win for (the) moral majority

George W. Bush is back in the White House with even an increased majority in the popular vote. It is a clear victory. The Republicans now control the Senate and the House of Representatives. Last month, this column suggested that the election would be a referendum for Americans on Bush's foreign policy. But, as in Australia, the fifty-first state of America, pre-emptive war took second place in the minds of voters.

It appears that Bush's victory is due to the power of the American Christian right situated, as in the civil war of 1861, in the Southern States and the Mid West. The geography and the language of the Puritans protecting their "God given right" to own slaves is similar to the Christian fundamentalists of today who freely quote The Bible – always the Old Testament of course – as their rallying cry against gay marriages, stem cell research and abortion. Gerry Falwell, the Evangelist *par excellence* emailed his millions of followers to consider Bush "not only to be our president but also a man of God."

Rightist evangelicals were not the only ones determined to re-elect Bush. Grassroots right-wing Catholics were just as determined to sink John Kerry's chances. In Ohio, Bush won 54 percent of the Catholic vote. The president appeared to have the personal characteristics that most appealed to voters. His domestic 'moral' agenda blended conservative ideology and Calvinist theology. The Republican party has become the Christian right. "Satan is in Fallujah" said a US marine, "and we will get him".

The American electorate has reaffirmed its choice of a 'war president'. What was once Bush's illegal and immoral war is now the continuation of that war with one considerable difference. The war in Iraq and any future conflict are now the responsibility of all Americans. It remains to be seen whether American citizens will eventually reject this imperialism as they did in Vietnam.

Helen the Conqueror

The Prime Minister Helen Clark, ever the astute politician, can sense victory next year. The popularity of Don Brash and his merry band of incompetents is falling in the polls. We will have to wait until the 2005 Orewa speech for another hit by Brash.

As a result, the Prime Minister is back to her supercilious best in dismissing any criticism of Labour Party policy. Her old arrogance, pre the Orewa speech of 2004, has returned. The last Labour Party conference raved on about "moving NZ ahead", ramming through legislation on the foreshore and seabed issue and ignoring demands for lowering tax. She is off to APEC to talk about trade deals with George W. We peasants will be informed in due course.

On behalf of Helen (who hasn't the time) and myself, may I wish a holy and a happy Christmas to all readers of *Tui Motu*. ■

How to interpret the fine print

Saying Mass now and then in Latin in the pre-Vatican II format is an illuminating experience. One cannot help comparing 'what we did then' with 'what we do now'. I never say an old-time Mass without being grateful for the much improved format we use today.

Celebrating the Tridentine style has also brought home to me the weight one should give, or should not give, to liturgical prescriptions. In saying the old style Latin Mass, I carefully perform the bows, kisses of the altar, signs of the cross, that the rubrics prescribe. But there is one prescription that I cannot bring myself to observe.

At the close of the Eucharistic Prayer, at the "To Him with Him, in Him", etc, the rubrics of the old-style Mass, told the celebrant to take the Host and make with it three signs of the cross from lip to lip of the chalice, and then two further signs of the cross between the chalice and his own waist. It seems utterly lacking in respect and faith to waggle the Host around in this unseemly fashion. So I simply raise Host and Chalice quietly as in our current form of celebration.

Yet generations of priests without question treated the Host in what seems to me (and I believe would seem to most today) a quite inappropriate and even irreverent fashion. Why? Because the rubrics said to do so. In this there is a lesson for us today? In March this year the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments issued an instruction, *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, that went into considerable detail as to how the Eucharist should be celebrated. Much strikes the reader as out of touch or unnecessarily restrictive. What is the relevance of prescribing that the Communion plate should be retained if in New Zealand the overwhelming majority of the faithful receive communion in the hand (n. 93)?

Why reprobate the use of glass for chalices on the grounds that only "materials deemed to be truly noble" are admissible

(n. 117), when exquisitely designed glass chalices have found their way onto the shelves of New Zealand public art galleries? Why stress that one may at any time in any place in the world choose to receive communion on the tongue while making no attempt to redress the situation whereby the faithful in many parts of the Church are not allowed the option of receiving in the hand?

We need to learn a lesson from the prescriptions that governed the old Latin rite. Much of what was said was good sense. But some would have been better ignored. Much was indeed later authoritatively done away with. A similar degree of selectivity needs to be exercised regarding this recent batch of prescriptions.

The writers of the instruction were addressing what they asserted were crucial problems of malpractices that bring dishonour on the celebration of this great sacrament. In last month's *Tui Motu* Fr Joseph Grayland, lecturer in liturgy at *Good Shepherd College* in Auckland, expressed the view that the instruction is much more about preserving a mediaeval edifice of priesthood in the face of a growing lay ministry than it is about promoting good liturgy and eliminating abuses. Our bishops themselves in the letter they published last April on the instruction made it clear that they consider that there is little amiss in our country. To keep things right, they consider that what is needed is instruction, not regulation.

One of several conclusions is that while we should view with respect a Roman instruction that sets out to deal with abuses, we should not give its individual parts excessive weight. These may at times be poorly grounded and often treat of matters that do not concern us. ■

Humphrey O'Leary

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

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Being civil about unions

Some observations about the Catholic Bishops' submission to the Select Committee on the Civil Union Bill

The Civil Union Bill states its intention to provide a mechanism for different, and same sex, couples to achieve formal legal recognition of their relationships. It is one of several measures designed to remove discrimination in both the legal and social spheres. The provisions of the Marriage Act are specifically excluded.

So, it was pleasing to see the supportive aspects of the Bishops' submission to the Select Committee on the *Civil Union Bill*. For example, moves to remove injustices and inequities that affect people in *de facto* and same sex relationships were supported, although they stated a preference that it is provided under other legislation. Other observations were less supportive.

For example, the Bishops referred to our common obligation to seek the truth. Implicit in this exercise must be that ideas commonly accepted in the past may, with the advance of human

knowledge and understanding, be found to be erroneous. History has not always found the church pursuing this ideal. The absence of theological debate and the castigation of dissenting theologians bear witness to this.

Arrival at the point of truth has often been tortuous and not for the faint hearted. There is abundant evidence of widespread support in our society that a minority of our citizens have their relationships recognised. But could we not afford to be less dogmatic about the initiatives proposed by the Bill?

The Bishop's submissions do not seem to have addressed the practical and social problems confronting homosexuals. The submission appears to proceed from an intellectual rather than a practical base. Does it obliquely infer that there is no case for persons of the same sex to co-habit?

Is celibacy the only option for those whose sexual orientation has been

determined by nature, not by choice? Such a stance does not seem to acknowledge the widespread theological discussion that seems to indicate that the issue remains not as morally certain as it seemed once to be.

What is more certain is God's unconditional love for his creatures. Is it any coincidence that parents whose families include a homosexual or lesbian rarely discriminate in their attitude and acceptance of such children? In this critical respect, such parents seem most to resemble their Creator.

The projected Bill formalises relationships; it is not an elevation in status, but the commitment required by the Bill reinforces stability and confers formal legal recognition of fellow citizens who are often marginalised by mainstream society. In terms of human rights it is a matter of justice. ■

Two Auckland parishioners

The Nelson father's acquittal

The Catholic Church's official comment

The verdict in the trial of the Nelson man acquitted of killing his disabled daughter has brought forth inappropriate comment from pro-euthanasia sources," says Nathaniel Centre spokesperson, John Kleinsman. The Nathaniel Centre is the Catholic Church's bioethics centre.

"The man's lawyer, the judge's comments, and the jury's verdict have clearly established that there was a lack of intent to kill the baby in the Nelson case, which is not the same as the intentional killing which takes place in a euthanasia scenario. We are talking about a tragic situation in which a deeply upset parent who was pushed too far and who had almost no support, snapped under the pressure. The father has stated his deep regret for what happened.

"The case prompts us to reflect again on the key principles which form the basis of a just and caring society. As stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, and everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. The right to life is not dependent on a person's health, ability or disability. Those who are disabled have the same right to life and protection as all others. In fact, in light of their vulnerability they require greater protection.

"The mark of a caring society is its willingness and ability to care for those who are most vulnerable. That includes ensuring that caregivers and parents are well-supported at all stages of a disabled child's life." ■

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Talk to Judy on 09 360 3045 if you can help