

Selections from the Winter 2007 issue
of Spiritual Growth Ministries Journal of Contemplative Spirituality:
Refresh
"Encountering Jesus"

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COMMENT by Andrew Dunn

We are never without another major challenge to the Christian beliefs about Jesus Christ. The books, film and ongoing debate around Dan Brown's Da Vinci Code is the most recent. The publication of 3rd century Gnostic gospels, the "Jesus papers" and novels purporting to throw new light on the life and family of Judas Iscariot have come one after the other. This issue of Refresh is not intended as a rebuttal of this recent barrage, rather a response that focuses us again on the richness of the New Testament witness to him in his birth, life, obedience, death, resurrection and ongoing presence.

Whatever our form of devotion to Jesus, and there are many that have arisen in the life of the church and beyond, there is one simple truth we can't ignore. And it is that whenever we read the Gospel stories we enter into a moment of encounter with this one who has so gripped people's imaginations that he can't be ignored.

It's as if we meet Jesus again and again for the first time (as Marcus Borg puts it so aptly) as he woos, probes, encourages, stirs, blesses and invites us to engage more deeply, affectively and intellectually with him in our situations of life and faith. He won't lie down or go away! He can't be tamed or petted like a zoo exhibit. He can't be banished to the museum of history. He keeps on getting his hooks into us and fascinating us again and again.

In this issue of *Refresh* we are seeking to encourage fresh insights into Jesus, fresh engagements with him in the wide breadth of who he is portrayed to be in the New Testament documents. Philip Yancey's book title of *The Jesus I Never Knew* makes the obvious, but oft forgotten truth, that we never can encompass him in all his reality and that there is so much more of him to discover. One of the limitations of the various forms of Jesus devotion is that they tend to limit our understanding of him to the particular way being promoted or presented, often out of a particular historic context, person's experience or event. Other limitations centre around theological stance and doctrinal formulations which, important though they are, can be very concrete ways of controlling him and who he wants to be to us, for us. Even "modernity" and this scientific age distort and confuse who and how he is for us by limiting the mystical and miraculous.

So, devotion to Jesus, fellowship with him and engagement with the New Testament material about him, have to be seen as a lifelong exploration with new insights and vistas, fresh angles of encounter that keep unfolding.

Our suggestion in this issue is to engage with him in all the variety and richness of who he wants to be for us over a lifetime and not be caught, and therefore limited, by any one way however rich it may have been. This is an activity that is particularly suited

to a contemplative, reflective, devotional approach. It nourishes a more mystical stance to life and faith and shifts intellectual challenges away from the issues of modernity and a scientific view as sacrosanct, back to the immensity of incarnation, cross and resurrection and the implications for life today.

BEGINNINGS

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the Prophet:

"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had born a son; and he named him Jesus.

(Matthew's Gospel 1:18-25. NRSV 1990.)

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed. ...

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God." ...

Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

(Luke's Gospel. 1:1-4; 26-38. NRSV 1990.)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ... From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

(John's Gospel 1:1-5; 14, 16-18. NRSV 1990.)

But when the time arrived that was set by God the Father, God sent his Son, born among us of a woman, born under the conditions of the law so that he might redeem those of us who have been kidnapped by the law. Thus we have been set free to experience our rightful heritage.

(Galatians 4:4-5. *The Message*. Navpress. 2002)

JUMPING JESUS by Colin Gibson

It has long seemed to me that Jesus as a credible human being, let alone a divine being, has been badly let down by his human presenters. Anxious to impress his significance on their contemporaries, theologians, church authorities and artists have combined to create a number of classic images - stereotypes, now - which may still impress the faithful but look oddly irrelevant today among the billions of pictures which clog our minds and imaginations, thanks to the media.

The Byzantine Christ in Majesty stares down from the mosaics with apparently frowning face and unseeing eyes; the Man of Sorrows wears his crown of thorns at a cocky angle on the latest Easter *Listener*, his mild eyes and cosmetically enhanced face showing little sign of real suffering or sorrow; and I am drawn to remember a childhood Sunday School poster-image of a handsome, bearded, white Jesus in a beautiful garden, wearing a white robe and surrounded by adoring children, one of whom asks 'Why do you have those holes in your hands?' The holes are virtually invisible; in direct contrast to the Mel Gibson caricature of a human body almost obliterated by sadistic and prolonged torture.

Jesus in childhood fares no better: there he lies swaddled in a white cocoon, or rests (good little baby) in Mary's arms, or sits upright in the Temple, meek and mild, surrounded by attentive and adoring old priests - one wonders, were any of the Jewish priesthood ever young? Indeed, was Jesus ever a boy who ran and jumped for joy, who turned cartwheels in the sand, who showed any of the wild whirling energy and undisciplined emotions of any real human child? No, most of us apparently prefer the passive Jesus, the meek and mild Jesus, the God-possessed, unlaughing man, the kindly friend, the helpless hanging victim. No wonder that the English poet Swinburne railed against the 'pale Galilean' who had blighted the red-blooded passionate lives of his fellow Victorians.

My sense of this Jesus is altogether different, and I have tried to express it in a hymn. The text draws on many sources: Charles Causley's *Ballad of the Bread Man*, the pumpkin-headed scarecrow in Hayao Miyazaki's animé film, *Howl's Moving Castle*, the wonderful children's picture book, *Jesus' Day Off*, by Nicholas Allan, and best of all my own grandchildren's frenetic rushing about and play-acting and unrestrained tears and laughter. Isn't it time the Christian Church gifted its own Wondrous Boy with at least such human energy and delight? We might even begin to interest the unbelieving world again.

In my church we premiered this hymn with Sunday-school children bouncing on three small trampolines. Try it for yourself, at least in your head.

JUMPING JESUS!

Jumping Jesus, Jumping Jesus,
jumping up all over the place,
doing cart-wheels, turning hand-stands,
leaping up with a smile on his face.
Jumping like a Jack in the Box
jumped right out of a hole in the rocks.
Jumping out ahead he goes;
if we follow where he shows
he will keep us on our toes, jumping Jesus.

Jumping Jesus, Jumping Jesus,
jumps between the earth and sky,
fills my head with dreams and visions,
makes me think that I can fly.
Jumping like I jump on the bed;
jumping with me, as he said.
jumping through my days and years,
jumping through my hopes and fears,
jumping through my joys and tears, jumping Jesus.

Jumping Jesus, Jumping Jesus,
puts the bounce into my life,
takes my hand and whispers softly,
'love's the thing, not war and strife'.
We will leap together so:
jumping, jumping, here I go!
Learning how he does that trick,
bouncing on his Pogo stick;
off he goes - I'd best be
quick - Jumping Jesus.

Colin Gibson

Jesus asked his disciples, "Who are the people saying I am?"

Matthew 16:13

Who were you, Jesus
to the people of your day?
Up and coming healer
miracle after miracle
building your reputation
Grade one magician
producing endless bread and fish
from empty desert hats
Forthright speaker
challenging the hierarchy's
crooked leading

Who were you, Jesus?
John, Jeremiah, Elijah offered
as they tried to pin you down
fit you into a mould
they could all understand

Who were you, Jesus?
Son of Mary
Son of Man
Son of God
True picture of earth's Creator
blasting forever
the stern, unfeeling God-idea
so firmly believed
allowing them to hear

to see
to touch
the flesh and blood
that throbbed with life
and hope
and love

Who are you, Jesus?
Deeply significant historical figure
no longer relevant in today's fast
moving world
your name on lips of millions
but not in prayer?
Pal, buddy, mate
casually taken for granted
by modern believers?

Are you an add-on
a bit on the side
that gives our lives
more zing, pizzazz?

As we move
one day closer
to Eternity
who are you, Jesus?

Anna Johnstone
The God Walk.

*Pray then in this way:
Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we
also have forgiven our debtors.
And do not bring us to the
time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.
For the kingdom and the power
and the glory are yours forever.
Amen.*

Matthew 6:9-13 + footnote. NRSV

WHEN DID FAITH IN JESUS BEGIN? *by James Dunn*

The significance of the step being advocated here ... should not be missed. For it is tantamount to asserting that faith goes back to the very *origins* of the Jesus tradition, that the Jesus tradition emerged *from the very first* as the expression of faith. In so saying I do not mean that the tradition was formulated only in the light of Easter faith, as Wrede and the kerygmatic theologians have assumed. I am referring to the first stirrings of faith which constituted the initial, pre-Easter disciple-response. I am asserting that the teaching of events of Jesus' ministry did not suddenly become significant in the light of Easter - much more significant ... as various markers in the gospels indicate, but not significant for the first time. The suggestion that the remembered Jesus was wholly insignificant, un fascinating and un intriguing, having no real impact prior to his death and resurrection, is simply incredible. Peter and the others did not first become disciples on Easter day. There was already a response of faith, already a bond of trust, inspired by what they first and subsequently heard and saw Jesus say and do. ... Only so can we explain how the Jesus tradition is so rich and full as it is - hardly the deposit of casual and vague memories first jerked into faith by Easter. ... it is the recognition that Jesus can be perceived *only* through the impact he made on his first disciples (that is, their faith) which is the key to a historical recognition (and assessment) of that impact.

James D. G. Dunn. *Jesus Remembered*. Eerdmans Pub. 2003. 132

AN INVITATION

Marcus Borg tells the story of being invited to talk to a men's group about Jesus and to make it personal.

"Nobody had ever asked me to do that before. I had given hundreds of lectures about Jesus, but nobody had ever said, "Make it personal." It was a challenge. Not being sure how to proceed, I wrote the words *Me and Jesus* on a piece of paper, began to think about them, and was led to memories and reflections about Jesus in my own life. It was a rich and illuminating experience, and I encourage you to try this yourself sometime. Simply begin, as I did, with your earliest childhood memories of Jesus, track them through adolescence and into adulthood, and then see what happened to your image of Jesus over the years."

Borg. *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*. 1995 p3.

As you read these articles and are reminded of your own first discoveries of Jesus we invite you to do a *Me and Jesus* reflection over the time you have known him and see how this has developed and how it is now.

THIS BETHLEHEM SPOT

Was Jesus born
in this Bethlehem spot?

Not a nice stable at the back of an inn,
but the animal end
of an ordinary house-cave
among the dung and the feed?

Did Mary breathe deep,
hold and push
in this underground smoke
darkened shrine?

Did Joseph stand helpless
among the men
safe away from the
blood, pain and tears
around a fire warmed
against the winter chill?

Did the whenua of God
lie on this
star shaped spot
where millions have prayed?

Is it here God inhaled that life - giving breath,
and exhaled that first joyful cry?

I don't know!
And none of it matters ...
Unless Jesus is born in me
this Christmas
Unless I breathe life afresh
with God
Unless I leave the helpless men
at the safe end of my cave
and join the woman in the
messy hand dirtying work
of giving birth to God's world today.

John Heberton

CRUNCHY SAYINGS OF JESUS

When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside. Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him. Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down and taught his climbing companions. This is what he said:

"You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

You're blessed when you're content with just who you are - no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.

You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for.

You're blessed when you get your inside world - your mind and heart - put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.

You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom.

Not only that - count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens - give a cheer, even! - for though they don't like it, I do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble."

Matthew 5:1-12. *The Message*. NavPress. 2002

JESUS THE STORY-TELLER AND POET by Adrienne Thompson

A child and his mother wander through fields at the edge of town. Their eyes scan the ground for twigs, dry leaves and scraps of rubbish, anything that could feed their little cooking fire. It's a daily chore, but also a daily companionable walk.

At the beach a woman slips off her engagement ring and puts it on to the wing of her glasses which she leaves on her towel as she goes for a swim. Later, coming blindly out of the water she snatches at her glasses, forgetting the ring which flies off into the sand. The woman, her husband and children hunt for what seems like hours, sifting sand through their fingers, but the ring is never found. The children remember the anxiety of that hunt and the sadness in their mother's eyes.

A parent listens to the news and hears of the catastrophic collapse of a building which has killed several people. Aghast she thinks - I've been there! That could have been me or one of my kids.

These are stories of events I've experienced or observed. Stories dredged out of memory because I want to make a particular point. Stories I have spent time on, choosing the words in which I tell them, shaping them for my audience. In a minor way I am, or try to be, a story teller.

So I wonder, what did it mean for Jesus to tell stories?

Words from my childhood have stuck in my mind. It's nearly 40 years since I stopped reading my King James Version of the Bible. But the phrase floated into memory: "the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth". (And courtesy of Google and the Bible Gateway website I even found the reference: Luke 4:22.)

The Bible is inspired, Jesus was inspired, Jesus taught about God. Words "proceeded from his mouth" and I had a mental image of inspiration being entirely external and magical. In another verse "He opened his mouth, and taught them," says Matthew 5:2 (KJV again). As if the words were all there, pre-packaged in his brain and all his mouth had to do was recite them. Those were my assumptions and I never gave much thought to them. But that changed when on my first silent retreat I immersed myself in the Gospel of Mark and began to try, with intellect and imagination, to understand the man Jesus. A mechanically - inspired mouthpiece of God didn't inspire me at all. I began to wonder.

Here was a man passionate about a great Idea - the Kingdom of God. Did he ponder and brood and chew on it, absorbed in its many-coloured, multi-textured implications? Did he seek for the words and stories that would express and explain it? As he walked and watched, did images fix themselves in his mind? Birds on the path ahead of him, pecking up seeds. Pure, thirst-quenching spring water bubbling out of the ground. A woman taking a handful of leaven and mixing it through stone-ground flour, stirring and kneading dough until it is smooth and elastic, letting it rest and rise. Did Jesus know the creative joy of playing with images, tossing them around his mind, savouring each one? Did he experience that *click* in the brain or *thump* in the heart that says "Yes! This is how I can tell it. This is how it will work!"?

Jesus was story teller certainly, and probably poet as well. I'm told that translated back from the Greek into Aramaic his recorded words have a memorable poetic cadence. There's evidence that he loved the Psalms; he quoted them even on the cross. Did his mother, who sang her *Magnificat* before his birth, sing more songs of her own making to the child Jesus? As he learned to read and recite in the synagogue, (rows of little boys cross legged on the ground swaying back and forth as they chant in unison) did the words of ancient Scripture become the store room from which he would draw treasure? (Matthew 13:52).

Jesus observed: the farmer ploughing and planting, the gardener pruning and fertilising; the housekeeper lamp-lighting, mending, bread-making; the fishermen sorting their catch; the employer taking on staff; the children playing at weddings and funerals. Every-day routines became for him, and then for his hearers, metaphors of God's kingdom infiltrating among us. Jesus listened to people talk: reports of disasters like the collapsing tower (Luke 13:4); debates about political issues; conversation about social events; even discussions about party manners. And perhaps Jesus remembered. Did he, like children I've watched in Bangladesh, go with his mother to pick grass for the oven? Did he watch and help as my children have watched and helped me as I knead and shape dough? Was it his mum or one of her friends who hunted so desperately for a lost treasure that she became for Jesus an image of God's searching love? From memories, observations, and everyday interactions, Jesus shaped his stories.

Thinking about Jesus as poet and story teller has added a new dimension to my relationship with him. God's creativity, blazing in stars or secret in seed-pods, has always held me in awe. It's wonderful because it's beyond my reach. But Jesus' creativity is expressed in human words. Stories. Word-pictures. Jokes (who wouldn't laugh at the idea of someone gulping down a hairy, humpy camel?). Poetry. Pungent one-liners. I can relate to that creative process. Jesus becomes for me not a remote, divine figure but a real person who used his creative energies to communicate astounding ideas to real people. Like me.

MORE CRUNCHY SAYINGS

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same.? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Matthew 5:43-48. NRSV 1990.

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?"

Mark 8:34-37. NRSV. 1989

"Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." The he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

Mark 9:35-37. NRSV. 1989.

"Woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.
Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.
Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.
Woe to you when all speak well of you,
for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets."

Luke 6:24-26. NRSV. 1989.

"Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit?"

Luke 6:39. NRSV. 1989.

Here hangs a man discarded,

A scarecrow hoisted high,
A nonsense pointing nowhere,
To all who hurry by.

Can such a clown of sorrows
still bring a useful word?
Where faith and love seem phantom,
and every hope absurd.

Can he give help and comfort
to lives of comfort bound,
When drums of dazzling progress
give hollow worldly sound?

Yet love that freely entered
the pit of life's despair,
Can name our hidden darkness,
And suffer with us there.

O Lord, now that you are risen,
Help all who long for light
Give me your hand of promise,
As I walk into the night.

Brian Wren
Faith Looking Forward.
OUP 1983

EASTER SUNDAY by *Laurence Freeman*

It seems odd at first that so little space in the Gospels is given to the most important element of the story. We would not have celebrated the last Supper or the Crucifixion or got through the emptiness of Saturday if it were not for the Resurrection. Yet the Gospels seem to treat the Resurrection almost as a footnote. The point is probably that they and the communities for whom they were written well understood the all-embracing centrality of the Resurrection. They took it for granted that the meaning of the whole story came from it. Everything in the Gospels is bathed in the light of the Resurrection. The Gospels don't only make a case. They reflect the actual life of the community they nourish.

The Resurrection experience is real. It happened. But exactly what were the physics of it we don't know. It wasn't observed and it can't be described. But it can be seen by its effects and felt deep in our selves. In Indian thought there are four states of consciousness: ordinary waking, dreaming, dreamless sleep and the fourth which is enlightened, unitive awareness. This fourth state ('turiya') is pure consciousness but not strictly a separate state because it enfolds and penetrates all consciousness. Perhaps this helps understand the Resurrection experience as something that underpins and pervades all Christian thought and action.

The Resurrection appearances that are the theme of the liturgical readings in the coming days of Eastertide are strange narratives. They emphasise the physicality of the risen Jesus. He can be heard, seen, touched and eaten with. But he is no longer bound by ordinary material limitations. And he is still on a journey through this realm of perception towards the Ascension when he passes beyond the realm of signs or, perhaps, enters into everything so that everything is capable of signifying him.

How do the Gospels describe the disciples' experience? In Matthew we are told that 'Suddenly Jesus was there in their path' and his first words are 'do not be afraid.' Before he disappears from their sight he assures them he will be 'with you always to the end of time.' In Mark he reproaches them for their incredulity and dullness but never for their desertion of him. In Luke he

teaches the Emmaus walkers how to understand him in terms of scripture. And in John we have the richest collection of stories, including the appearances to Mary of Magdala, to Thomas and to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. In John, too, Jesus breathes on them and gives them the Spirit as part of the Resurrection event. There are many theologies in these diverse accounts. Over the millennia they have been developed into the profoundly catholic diversity of Christian understanding.

One common feature of the Gospels on the Resurrection is the role of women. The first appearances are to women who, unlike the male disciples, believe immediately once they recognise him although, like the men, they are amazed or at first prevented from seeing him clearly. Women are also the first apostles of the good news. For a patriarchal society in which the testimony of women was not valued this is an extraordinary choice. Perhaps it illustrates the meaning of the event. The Resurrection does not usher in a new religion or philosophy or dream about the next life but a new way of living this life. The injection of the risen life of Jesus into the human and cosmic realm is progressive. As it spreads through the transformed minds and hearts of disciples we see that it is not a privatised experience. We see and meet Christ in community. (Meditation for this reason creates community as we know). And those can be called his disciples who have felt the beginning of the transformation he effects and also the mission and meaning that follow. When this happens we are no longer paralysed by choice, as so many modern people are, but experience the freedom of being chosen and empowered. Jesus as teacher has expanded beyond his culture, his time and himself. He is a teacher on a scale and at a depth that is hard to imagine. But he is not a co-dependent guru who accumulates adoring but star-struck disciples. He empowers those he loves to become spiritually mature, to go out and make their proclamation and with whom he works (Mk 16:20). The Resurrection continues to happen and extend its influence. It is still beginning.

As John Main reminds us every time we meditate we enter into the paschal mystery. Each meditation takes us into fellowship (never a 'perfect' community) as on Thursday, the silent meal. Through death of the ego as on Friday. Through days of uneventfulness and hidden action as on Saturday. And onto Sunday and into the beginning of the great dilation and great awakening of the Resurrection, the universal embrace that is salvation.

Easter Message 2007. World Community of Christian Meditation.

THE GOD OF THE TROLLEY MARKS by Elizabeth Julian

Armed police? What were they doing there? Wasn't I about to sit down for a coffee and a truffle? Well, yes, but a day or so earlier. At about 8.15pm on 5 January I suffered a cardiac arrest, collapsing in our Rintoul St kitchen. How could this have happened? I was a reasonably fit, 54 year old Sister of Mercy who didn't smoke or drink, weighed 50kg and walked half an hour daily.

My crash to the floor quickly brought two community members. The 111 call centre operator gave CPR instructions. Two ambulances and a fire appliance arrived within a minute of being dispatched. Suddenly there were six men and their emergency equipment in the kitchen. Although they applied the 'paddles' and restarted my heart, the paramedics said it didn't look too good. My downtime was six minutes. Apparently the survival rate for a cardiac arrest is only 2-4% with a high risk of brain damage. I didn't experience any bright lights, meet anyone, feel as if I were moving through a tunnel, or have any out of body experience - how boring!

I have no recollection of events in the half hour prior to my arrest. Apparently I phoned my brother in Auckland for his birthday, told some friends I would organise a picnic for Monday, and prepared a food parcel for a woman who had phoned earlier.

In ICU on Saturday afternoon (or was it Sunday?) I eventually heard my sister telling me I was in hospital having had a cardiac arrest. Opposite me armed police were standing around Graeme Burton's bed.

I don't remember anything more until waking up in the Coronary Care Unit. During the next ten days I experienced incredible care and concern from dedicated medical and support staff. I then went by air ambulance to Auckland for further tests and the implantation of an internal cardiac defibrillator, returning to Wellington Hospital five days later for another couple of days.

What has the above got to do with Easter? My *Dominion Post* horoscope for 5 January read: "Not everyone will get what you are trying to do. Don't waste time on the sceptical or the condescending. Focus on people who are on the same page as you." So if you include yourself among the sceptical and condescending, read no further! If you want the Easter connection, then proceed.

"If Christ is not risen, your faith is in vain" (1Cor15:17). St Paul's words are at the heart of the Christian message. Christians are called to proclaim with their lives God's power to bring life out of death. God raised Jesus to new life. It is in this reality that our hope lies.

But where does this hope come from? In the New Testament resurrection accounts, Jesus' disciples experienced his risen presence (unrecognised initially) in the midst of utter devastation. The one they loved had been crucified. Their hopes were shattered. But then God made a way where no way was possible: a distraught Mary Magdalene encountered the risen Jesus thinking he was the gardener, a stranger walked beside two disheartened disciples offering a new perspective on all that had happened, those huddled together in terror heard words of peace. As those first disciples experienced then, it is precisely when the darkness seems greatest and situations seem most hopeless that God always makes a way.

But how do Christians find that way forward today, that is, where do they experience the risen Jesus and how do they help others to see in their darkest moments? The New Testament accounts alluded to above and my own experience over the past few months confirm that first we have to stay with the darkness. That is, we have to name it, and keep watch with one another there. Friday night and Saturday were nothing short of hell for my family and community. But even then there were stirrings of hope. Those gathered when I was on a ventilator rightly concluded that I was an organ donor-life could come from death.

Then when it seemed I was going to pull through, brain damaged was feared. I kept repeating, "Why I am here?" But gradually I improved and I live to tell the tale.

As a Christian I experienced the risen Jesus present in the love and concern of my family, Sisters of Mercy, friends, colleagues, parish community, neighbours and students. God's power to bring life from death, hope from hopelessness, was made concrete for me through the enormous skill and dedication of the hospital staff and emergency crews involved in my recovery.

Jesus is Lord. The ambulance trolley marks are still on the kitchen floor, wonderful reminders of hope in darkness.

WHERE IS THE HISTORICAL JESUS NOW? by Derek Tovey

Just over one hundred years ago, in 1906, Albert Schweitzer (perhaps best known as a famous missionary doctor in Africa) wrote a book which, when it was translated into English, was given the title, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*.¹ Schweitzer's monumental achievement was to survey much of the research done on the historical Jesus since Reimarus' posthumously-published work began the enterprise in 1778. Above all, he was able to show that most of the "Lives of Jesus" published in the nineteenth century were subjective projections of Jesus arising from the type of Jesus (usually some sort of teacher of ethics) most congenial to the author. One writer reported that what Schweitzer had done was show that these nineteenth-century writers of "Lives of Jesus" were, as it were, looking down into a deep well and seeing their own faces reflected back at them. The effect of Schweitzer's book was to bring the "quest" for the historical Jesus to something of a halt for several decades, so that what has often been called the "Old Quest" for the historical Jesus gave way to "No Quest".²

I have been asked to write an article for this journal outlining the current state of research into Jesus, but it is difficult to know where to start and how much to say. After the Second World War a number of factors led to the start of a "New Quest" for the historical Jesus, and since the mid-1980s this research has gone through something of a "renaissance" (as one scholar has put it) and a resurgence. So much so that books and articles on Jesus pour off the scholars' pens (now keyboards) in seemingly ever-greater quantities. Unfortunately for anyone wanting to keep up with even the "major players", a number of the leading scholars in the field have published very big books, and some are writing multi-volume works on Jesus.³ Occasionally, too, one wonders whether a modern-day "Schweitzer" surveying the scene (an impossible task) might not come to the same sort of conclusion as Schweitzer: scholars are creating (or finding?) Jesuses according to their own tastes.

I also wonder what I should say about current research into Jesus in a journal such as *Refresh*? As it happens, there are a number of features of current research, which often goes under the name of the "Third Quest" for the historical Jesus, that are quite pertinent. Let me outline what some of these features are. I conclude with questions that suggest their pertinence for contemporary spirituality.

First of all, historical Jesus research is now much more an interdisciplinary and inter-religious exercise than it was before. This is partly because the centre of gravity has shifted from Germany and Europe to the United States, where much research is carried out in secular universities and colleges. In the past twenty to thirty years, Jewish scholars, as well as scholars who hold no particular religious faith, have joined Christian scholars in the enterprise. Not only is this the case, but many scholars, of all religious persuasions or none, are employing a host of different methods drawn from the disciplines of archaeology, the social sciences, and even psychology.

A number of scholars are consciously eschewing a confessional stance, and seeking to work "purely" as historians. E. P. Sanders, for example, describes himself as an historian, and not a "theologian".⁴ John P. Meier, a Roman Catholic scholar, illustrates what he is trying to do in his research by creating the fiction of an "unpapal enclave", that is a committee of 'a Catholic, a Protestant, a Jew, and an agnostic' all working together to come up with 'a consensus document on Jesus of Nazareth...based on purely historical sources and arguments' that would provide a 'rough draft of what ..."all reasonable people" could say about the historical Jesus'.⁵

Other scholars, on the other hand, are quite explicit that they write about Jesus from their perspective as committed Christian believers. Marcus Borg, for instance, has written a number of books where he not only attempts to write for "ordinary" enquirers and Christians, but shares something of his own faith and understanding of Jesus.⁶

An understanding amongst scholars engaged in Jesus research these days that is now "axiomatic" is that Jesus must be understood as a Jew, within his own first-century Jewish context.⁷ The reasons for this are several. One has been the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, along with the study of other inter-testamental Jewish literature, not to mention archaeological work, much of it by Jewish archaeologists, all of which has illuminated the world in which Jesus lived and taught. Another has been the engagement of Jewish scholars since the 1970s in historical Jesus research. A third reason has been the need to counteract centuries of anti-Jewish sentiment exhibited by Christians, and cast into stark and horrifying relief by the Holocaust, and the support of a number of German biblical scholars for the Nazi cause. It was recognised after the war that the lack of interest in the historical Jesus by German scholarship had contributed to the ability of scholars sympathetic to Nazism to paint Jesus not as a Jew but an Aryan!

But there is little agreement as to what sort of a Jew Jesus was. Was he a "marginal Jew", one who expected an eschatological in-breaking of God's rule in the near future? Or, was Jesus a spirit-filled, exorcism-performing "holy man"; or perhaps a teacher who taught in aphorisms and wise-sayings, something of a Jewish philosopher, and rather like a Greek, or Hellenistic, cynic philosopher? There are a number of discrete pictures of Jesus caught up in those generalising questions; and anyway, given that scholars are much more aware of how diverse first-century Palestinian Judaism was, is it possible to be sure which type of first-century Jew, Jesus most resembled? One thing is certain: Jesus can no longer be divorced from his roots in first-century Jewish culture as was sometimes the case in the past.

Finally, scholars have sought to make historical investigation ever more rigorous and to overcome certain distortions and biases. At the same time, questions have been raised about the whole nature of history, and the historical task. Scholars are now more aware of the subjective nature of history. They are also less sanguine about being able to pin down precisely the Jesus of history. Indeed, they recognise that the "historical Jesus" is a product of the reconstruction of historians. This has led to a discussion of the relationship between "the real Jesus" and "the historical Jesus".

What has "the historical Jesus" to do with the Jesus of contemporary Christian spirituality? Some might say, "not much". But the challenges raised by trying to define or describe the historical Jesus can alert us to the challenges and sometimes the dangers

in how we understand the Jesus in whom we put our trust. Are we creating for ourselves a "congenial Jesus"? How much does "the Jesus of history" challenge our own "personal view" of Jesus? Might we be in danger of bending our image of Jesus to suit our preferences and hopes? Might a Jesus made foreign to our culture, because of belonging to another, allow us also to find a Christ that sits outside of all cultures? Yet, at the same time, a Jesus rooted in another culture might allow us to consider a Christ rooted in another's culture as well as our own. And might we learn from the insights of those who sit outside our circle? Finally, the recognition of the constructed nature of "the historical Jesus" enables us to encounter again a "real Jesus": a Jesus never captive to our intellects, yet known in a trusting, questing relationship.

1 Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (trans. John Bowden et. al.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

The original German book had a different title, which translates into English as *From Reimarus to Wrede: A History of Research on the Life of Jesus*. It is, perhaps, on account of the English title that it has become commonplace to describe historical Jesus research as a series of "Quests".

2 This, it has been shown, is something of a generalisation, and, especially outside of Germany, research of Jesus continued, though somewhat chastened.

3 However, for those wanting an overview, I can suggest Mark Allan Powell, *Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998). See also, Ben Ill Witherington, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995)

4 And W. Barnes Tatum, *In Quest of Jesus* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), especially chapter five.

E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 2, 334. Also E.P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1993), 2, 8, 76.

5 John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Volume One: The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 1-2.

6 See Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus and the Heart of Contemporary Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994). Also Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision* (London: SPCK, 1993).

7 The word "axiomatic" comes from Geza Vermes, *The Changing Faces of Jesus* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 2000), 268.

JESUS THE INTERCESSOR by Graham Redding

"Prayer is as simple as picking up a telephone to speak to a close friend. Jesus is always there for you. Just tell him what is on your heart."

I still remember that first instruction on prayer, which I received not long after becoming a Christian twenty-five years ago. It conveyed a sense of immediacy and intimacy in relation to prayer that, for a new Christian, was helpful.

As time passed, however, I found that the telephone model of prayer didn't quite cut it anymore. For a start, it seemed to favour speech above silence, talking above listening, babbling above waiting. It seemed to portray Jesus more as a kind of cosmic buddy than Lord of the cosmos, thereby undermining the otherness and sovereignty of God.

Moreover, as I became familiar with the New Testament, I discovered a much more nuanced relationship between Jesus and prayer than the telephone model was able to convey. I noticed in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, for example, Jesus' instruction on prayer, including the template for prayer that became known as the Lord's Prayer, and I pondered the possibility that prayer might be as much a learnt activity as it is a spontaneous outpouring of one's innermost feelings. I noticed Paul's exhortation to seek the mind of Christ, and wondered what role prayer might play in this task and what kind of disciplined attentiveness might be required. And then I noticed those texts that refer to Jesus praying for his disciples (John 16:26; Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25), and I began to think about Jesus as Intercessor.

As I studied the book of Hebrews I noticed that the reference to Jesus as Intercessor was linked closely to his perceived role as High Priest. I found it fascinating that the author of Hebrews used the liturgical symbolism of the priesthood in ancient Israel to interpret the ministry of Jesus, and not least, his prayer life.

As James Torrance points out,¹ in ancient Israel, as in Israel to this day, the central act of worship and prayer took place on the Day of Atonement. That was the day in the year which gathered up the worship and prayers of every other day. On that day, an offering was made to God which gathered up every other offering made daily in the sanctuaries. On that day, the worship and prayers of all Israel were led by one man, the high priest, "the one on behalf of the many". The climax came when the high priest, with the names of all Israel on his breastplate and shoulder, laid his hands on the head of an animal and sacrificed it, vicariously confessing the sins of all Israel. He then took the blood of the sacrificial victim in a vessel, "ascended" into the Holy of Holies and there interceded for all Israel that God would remember his covenant promises and forgive his people. As he was praying in the holy presence of God, all Israel was praying outside, one great volume of prayer ascending to God, led by the high priest. He then returned to the waiting people outside with the Aaronic blessing of peace.

The declaration that, as High Priest not just of Israel but of all humankind, the Risen and Ascended Jesus exercises an ongoing ministry of intercession is of immense theological significance. It suggests, first of all, that the redemptive work of God in and through Jesus of Nazareth did not end with the events of Easter. It is ongoing; it is continuous. As Andrew Murray, in his classic book on prayer, says of Jesus in this regard, "He lives to intercede."² What a remarkable affirmation to make!

This suggests, further, a Trinitarian view of prayer, in which the Son prays to the Father in the Spirit, and we, for our part, are drawn by the Spirit into the eternal prayer-life of the Son. Thus conceived, prayer is not so much something that we initiate and do; it is something in which, through the activity of the Spirit, we are privileged to participate.

In this regard, I find the Johannine concept of abiding in Christ rather helpful. Often, the Christian discipleship seems to be portrayed predominantly in terms of *following* Christ, and the Christian life one of *imitating* or following the example of Christ. I'm sure we've all heard the advice given to young people to ask themselves in times of temptation, "What would Jesus do?" And some of us may have seen the car bumper stickers that read "WWJD", or, "What would Jesus drive?"

Now while these questions are valid to a point, they do presume a certain understanding of discipleship that focuses on following the example of a man who lived two thousand years ago. John, however, would have us think about discipleship in slightly fuller categories of participating or abiding in the ongoing life of the One who participates or abides in the life of the Father and who assures us of his prayers. Under this model, our task is not to somehow second-guess what Jesus would do or say in a given situation, but rather to share actively in his risen life and allow that life to permeate and transform every aspect of our lives, including the activity of prayer.

I was intrigued to discover a few years ago, during the course of my doctoral studies on prayer, that the vast majority of the earliest Christian liturgical prayers and doxologies appear to have followed a Trinitarian pattern. Prayers were offered to the Father, *through* the Son, in the Spirit. This pattern explicitly recognized the mediatorial role of the Son in relation to prayer and worship.

Regrettably, it is a recognition that the Church has not maintained consistently in its worship. I invite you to take note of the prayers next time you are at church. I would say that, as often as not, you will find them to be Unitarian (directed to God, singular, with little or no recognition of the mediatorial role of Christ) and Pelagian (portrayed as something that we do, we offer thanks and praise, we confess our sins, we intercede for the life of the world).

When intercessory prayer follows a Pelagian pattern in public worship, it tends to come across as something we feel we ought to do. We ought to pray for others because, following the example of Jesus, we should be concerned for the world. Thus conceived, prayer becomes a kind of Christian duty. Often such prayer seems to be tacked on to the end of the worship service, almost as an afterthought to the high point of the service, which is the sermon.

Understood in terms of sharing in the eternal intercessory work of the Risen and Ascended Christ, however, intercessory prayer takes on an entirely different character. It is interesting to note that Diebold Schwartz, one of the forerunners to the Genevan Reformation, located the prayer of intercession within the Eucharistic prayers of consecration and thanksgiving, thereby acknowledging that intercessory prayer is inextricably linked to the intercessory work of Christ in his role as High Priest. John Calvin continued this practice.

In conclusion, it seems to me that acknowledging Jesus as Intercessor necessarily involves four things:

1. A recognition that, through the activity of the Spirit, our prayers (and indeed our worship) somehow share in the eternal energy of prayer and worship that flows within the Godhead. There is a sense in which, through these activities, we share in what one theologian, Barbara Brown Zikmund, describes as the Triune God's "eternal dance of togetherness".
2. A disciplined seeking after the mind of Christ, as we try to look at the world through his eyes and pray as he would have us pray. I like to think of this in terms of praying in the shadow of the Cross. It is there that we encounter the casualties of life and history, and hear afresh the revolutionary perspective of the Beatitudes.
3. An acknowledgement that our prayers do not start and finish with us. Jesus is the Pioneer and Perfector of our faith, our Advocate and Intercessor. His prayers precede, perfect and follow ours, which means that we need not be ashamed of our rather meagre and stumbling efforts or feel obliged to cover everything in a single prayer.
4. Maintaining the link between thanksgiving and intercession. We pray in a spirit of thanksgiving for what God in Christ has done and continues to do in our place and on our behalf. We do not know how to pray as we ought, but Christ prays for us, with us and in us. As James Torrance puts it so eloquently, "Prayer is the Father's gift of grace in giving us Christ to stand in for us and in giving us the Holy Spirit to teach us to pray, and lift us up in prayer into a life of loving communion."³

In the nineteenth century, Scottish theologian John McLeod Campbell described prayer as the "utterance of participation in the life of Christ." I have yet to find a better definition, and believe it conveys in a nutshell all that I have said above about the nature of intercessory prayer and the role of Jesus as Intercessor.

1. James B. Torrance, "Prayer and the Priesthood of Christ", *A Passion for Christ: The Vision that Ignites Ministry*, Handsel Press, 1999, p.56.
2. Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, Whitaker House Press, 1981, p.194.
3. *A Passion for Christ*, p.62.

JESUS AND THE COLLABORATIVE RULE OF GOD by Chris Marshall

Jesus promised the kingdom of God, French biblical scholar Alfred Loisy famously quipped at the turn of last century, and what we got was the church! In saying this Loisy was actually making a comment on Jesus' eschatological outlook. He was suggesting that the historical Jesus never expected the church or the church age to follow after his own ministry because he believed that the end of the world - the advent of God's kingdom - was imminent. Such a reading of Jesus' eschatology is, it should be said, seriously flawed. But the sense of let down implied in Loisy's contrast between the kingdom of God and the empirical reality of the church remains palpable. In some ways it resonates even more powerfully with our cynical generation than it did in Loisy's day. If Jesus announced the kingdom, why is it that all we've ever heard about since then is the *church*? And the church, after all, isn't worth getting very excited about.

Whether or not Jesus intended to found the church is debatable.ⁱ But he certainly didn't focus much of his attention on it. What excited Jesus, what totally dominated his horizons, was God's kingdom. The phrase is constantly on his lips; there are around 60 different sayings in the gospel tradition in which Jesus uses the term. His whole mission centred on the happy announcement that "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near".ⁱⁱ The kingdom of God is the key to *everything* Jesus said and did. Without some understanding of this term, it is impossible to make proper sense of the gospel narratives.

What did Jesus mean?

Although he used the phrase "kingdom of God" dozens of times, Jesus never defined precisely what he meant by it. There were perhaps two reasons for this. On the one hand, Jesus could assume his hearers already knew what he was talking about. The notion of God's kingship pervades the Jewish Scriptures and was the presupposition of all Jewish theology. On the other hand, Jesus intended his entire ministry to give content to what he meant by the term. The kingdom of God was not one idea among many in his theological lexicon; it was the master-theme from which all else flowed, and which everything he said and did further illuminated.

Put differently, Jesus took a familiar concept in Palestinian Judaism and infused it, through his own teaching and practice, with fresh meaning, or at least with a distinctive set of implications. It is not really possible therefore to capture the richness of meaning of the kingdom of God in a simple definition. To do justice to the concept we need to appreciate both its standard biblical-Jewish connotations and the particularities of Jesus' use of it.

An activity, not an abstraction

The first thing to note is that the word "kingdom" in biblical and Jewish tradition has a *dynamic* rather than a static sense. It denotes an activity more than a territory, a power more than a place. God's kingdom is not a piece of real estate; it is God's action of ruling. It is God's exercising of royal power, God *functioning* as a king. Accordingly the term "kingdom of God" in Jewish tradition is perhaps better translated as the reign or rule or kingship or government of God.

Jesus shared this dynamic understanding. That is why he spoke of the kingdom of God "coming upon" or "arriving" or "appearing". That is why he could appeal to his miracles, especially his exorcisms, as evidence of God's kingdom in action.ⁱⁱⁱ The kingdom of God was not, for Jesus, simply a theological proposition.^{iv} It was not a set of laudable values. It was an event. It was a divine energy at work in him to overthrow the powers of darkness and set captives free, to feed the hungry, to heal the sick and raise the dead. When Jesus spoke of "entering" God's kingdom he meant entering the sphere of God's power. To "see" or "receive" the kingdom is to be receptive to God's redeeming power. To "inherit" the kingdom is to be a beneficiary of the future triumph of God's transforming power. The kingdom of God, then, is God's power at work to put right what is wrong in the world, and so to accomplish God's will on earth as it is in heaven.

An awaited event to confirm present faith

Scripture speaks of God's kingly activity in two distinct senses.^v On the one hand, throughout the Old Testament there is a repeated affirmation that God's kingdom *already* exists in fact. As the one true God and the creator of all that exists, God alone "is a great king over all the earth".^{vi} He is also the only true king of Israel, which is a unique theocracy within the family of nations.^{vii} In both cases, God's kingdom is even now a present reality.

But it is a contested reality. According to the biblical narrative, a major rebellion is underway. Satan (the personification of evil) has risen in opposition to God's rule; humanity has fallen under the sway of evil powers; even creation itself seems out of control. Despite the reality of God's heavenly rule, all is not well in the realm. Sin, sickness, death and disease seem to deny the fact that God is in charge. Empirical experience contradicts theological affirmation.

To resolve this contradiction, as well as affirming the present kingship of God, the Old Testament also speaks, on the other hand, of the coming of God's kingdom. It looks forward to a final day when God will exert his ruling power to defeat evil, to regather Israel and restore her sovereignty, to heal creation of its distortions and end the tyranny of sin, sickness and death. The coming of the kingdom is the hope for the coming of God in person to bring all reality back under his loving lordship, so that the earth is once more filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea.

It is this *future* dimension of God's kingship that Jesus directly evokes when he commences his ministry by declaring "the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near".^{ix} The time of waiting is up! The time for the manifestation of God's final rule has at last arrived. Future hope is becoming present experience, precisely in and through the activity of Jesus himself.

Jesus' total ministry was concerned with demonstrating the fulfilment of this biblical hope. His exorcisms were proof that Satan had been bound and his house was being plundered.^x His healings were testimony to Isaiah's prophecy that God's coming reign would enable the blind to see, the deaf to hear and the lame to walk.^{xi} His feeding miracles anticipated the end of famine.^{xii} His calming of storms and walking on water reasserted God's rule over the natural order.^{xiii} His parables were coded invitations for people to discover the kingdom in unexpected places and make it their own.^{xiv} His eating with tax collectors and sinners enacted the end of religious prejudice and showed that God was now drawing all people into a new relationship of intimacy with God's self.^{xv} Through the person and activity of Jesus, the long awaited act of God to reclaim the world was underway.

The beginning of the end

But biblical hope was not to be fulfilled in one fell swoop. God's eschatological reign was busting in, but not in its totality. Yes, Jesus healed many sick people, but sickness and death were not ended forever. He even raised the dead, but they all died again. He fed the multitudes, but hunger and famine were not abolished. He spoke of setting the oppressed free, but the Romans remained in control. He sought to reunite Israel around himself, but he was accused of blasphemy and repudiated by his own leaders. He announced God's peace, but suffered a violent death. How on earth then could he claim that God's awaited kingdom had dawned?

Because it *had* dawned, though only in a partial way. Evidently Jesus came to inaugurate God's end-time rule, to make a beginning, to establish a bridgehead for the future, to set a process in motion that would eventually result in a transformed creation...but not just yet. This is probably what Jesus meant by the "mystery of the kingdom".^{xvi} God's kingdom was *already* here, making an enormous difference in the lives of those who could recognise it. But it was not yet here in all its apocalyptic splendour.^{xvii} The fullness of that reality must await Jesus' death, resurrection, and future return in glory to complete what he has begun.

This "already...not yet" dynamic made agricultural metaphors a particularly appropriate way for Jesus to speak of the kingdom. Just as a seed is the present form of a future crop, so Jesus' ministry is the present manifestation of God's future triumph. Just as a tiny seed looks insignificant to the human eye but is in fact charged with life-giving potential, so Jesus' embodiment of the kingdom seemed unimpressive on the outside but was in fact the beginning of cosmic redemption. Just as a planted seed is hidden from sight while it grows and changes, so God's kingdom is invisible to the naked eye but powerfully at work behind the scenes. Only those with "eyes to see and ears to hear" can discern its presence,^{xviii} and when they do, things must change.

An announcement and a demand

According to Mark 1:15, Jesus' message of the kingdom consisted of two parts - a declaration and a demand, an indicative (a statement of fact) and an imperative (a summons to response).

Fundamentally Jesus' proclamation was an announcement of something that God was doing. God was taking the initiative. God was drawing near to his people in a fresh way, satisfying their yearnings for his intervention to liberate them from their bondage to evil, both spiritual and political. That's why Jesus calls his message a "gospel". It is joyous good news about God's arrival on earth to set his people free. "The time is fulfilled, God's saving power is here!"

But the indicative of God's saving action brings with it an ethical imperative. Unless people respond to God's action, unless they "repent and have faith in the gospel", unless they are prepared to change the way they live and place all their confidence in

God's action, they will miss out on the marvel of what is happening. They will not only fail to benefit from it; they will fail even to comprehend it. The only way to understand what is taking place is to respond wholeheartedly to what understanding one already has, however limited. Only then - only when one is committed to action - does further insight follow. Jesus advocated what New Testament scholar Dominic Crossan helpfully terms a "collaborative eschatology". God's redemptive activity invites, and requires, human collaboration in order to achieve its goal.

The kind of collaboration the kingdom demands is nothing if not radical. It involves, as the parables of the hidden treasure and pearl of great price suggest,^{xix} a total disinvestment in the world system as it is and a reinvestment of all that we are and all that we have in God's work of transforming the world. It means changing our allegiances, priorities, values, ambitions, relationships, politics and practices. It requires living now in a manner that is consistent with what life will be like when God's rule is complete and, at last, "God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven".^{xx}

So what?

One of the most attractive things about recovering the kingdom-focus of Jesus is that it enables us to *integrate* into our practice of discipleship a diversity of commitments that are often assumed to be mutually exclusive. Some Christians champion personal piety and spiritual growth; others stress political involvement and social transformation. Some give priority to miracle-working power and spiritual warfare; others emphasise verbal proclamation and individual evangelism. Some focus on personal holiness, others on social justice or environmental responsibility. The good news is that *all* these concerns may be affirmed as inseparable components of living within the orbit of God's rule. If we take Jesus as our paradigm, then "seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness"^{xxi} involves the integration of three overarching commitments. First of all, the kingdom meant for Jesus *the presence of divine power to rectify what is wrong in the world*. This is most clearly demonstrated in his miracles and exorcisms. These were not just cheap party tricks or random displays of paranormal power. They were representative tokens of how human brokenness will be remedied when God finally gets his way on earth. Christians therefore, above all else, ought to be a healing presence in the world as a testament to God's transformative intentions. Healing in all its dimensions - physical, mental, spiritual, social and relational.

For Jesus the kingdom also meant, secondly, the closeness of *God's personal presence, as a loving parent, drawing men and women into deeper levels of spiritual intimacy*. Jesus was clearly concerned to universalise the experience of God's love. He emphatically disregarded all social and religious boundaries that functioned to exclude the "unworthy" from closeness to God. He welcomed everyone to the messianic feast. Accordingly Christians ought to be not only people of prayer and joyful worship, but also people of hospitality, those who embrace outsiders and who expect to find in their fellowship fresh experiences of God.

Finally, for Jesus the kingdom meant *radical community*. Jesus did not set out to found a new religion; instead he sought to radicalise his existing religious community, so that it more fully resembled the eschatological will of God. Three main features of this new community stand out in Jesus' teaching. It is to be an *inclusive* or international community, that transcends barriers of race, class and gender. It is also to be a *non-violent* community, that forswears the sword and prays for its enemies. And it is to be a *reconciling* community, one that practises forgiveness in all its relationships, that cares for the poor and seeks justice for the oppressed, and that lives sustainably in the midst of God's good creation as testament to its eventual liberation and restoration.

If the Christian church today aspired to be more like the radical community Jesus imagined, Alfred Loisy's wry observation would lose its sardonic bite. The church would no longer be viewed as a counterpoint to Jesus' vision of God's fair reign but as concrete evidence for it. It would be seen as the instrument of God's kingdom, the very means by which God's reign is progressively, and collaboratively, implemented in the world, a world which otherwise would never understand what the "rule of God and his justice" is really all about.^{xxii}

i *Much depends on how one interprets Matt 16:18-19, and Jesus' understanding of Israel in general.*

ii Mark 1:14-15.

iii Matt 12:28/Luke 11:20, cf. Luke 9:1-2; 10:9-10.

iv Cf. also 1 Cor 4:20; Heb 6:5.

v For both senses, compare Daniel 4:3 and 2:44.

vi Psalm 47:3; 93:1-2.

vii See, e.g., Exod 15:18; 1 Sam 8:7; 12:12; Isaiah 6:5; 33:22; Jer 8:19; Micah 2:13.

viii Isaiah 11:9; Hob 2:14. An immense number of OT passages describe the future reign of God.

ix Mark 1:15.

x Mark 3:27.

xi See Isaiah 35:5-6, cf. 26:19; 29:18; 42:7; 58:8; 61:1. See also Luke 4:18-19; Matt 11:2-6/Luke 7:22-23; Matt 15:29-32.

xii Mark 6:34-44; 8:1-9.

xiii Mark 4:36-41; 6:47-51.

xiv See, for example, Mark 4:10-12, 26,30; Matt 13:24, 31, 33, 38, 43, 44-45, 47; 18:23, etc.

xv Mark 2:15-17; Matt 11:19; Luke 15:1-2; 19:1-10.

xvi Mark 4:10-12.

xvii Cf. Luke 17:20-21.

xviii Cf. Mark 4:3, 23; 8:18.

xix Matt 13:44-46.

xx Matt 6:10 (which is the best definition of the kingdom of God available)

xxi Matt 6:33

xxii Matt 6:33

PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.

Mark 4: 30-32. NRSV. 1989.

The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.

Matthew 13:33. NRSV. 1989.

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Matthew 13:44. NRSV. 1989

For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who sent out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, ... noon, ... three o'clock, ... and five o'clock (he did the same). When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' When those hired at five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. ... (When the earlier groups complained he said) 'Are you envious because I am generous?' So the last will be first and the first will be last.

Matthew 20: 1-16. NRSV 1990.

JESUS AND FEMINISM by Nicola Hoggard Creegan

The Da Vinci Code has brought to the fore the question of feminism and God. Do we need a divine feminine? And how do we deal with Jesus, a male Saviour, if we are searching for a lost feminine divinity?

Patriarchy and violence against women have prevailed in history, both inside and outside the church. The status of women within the church has always waxed and waned, as sacred space has been contested. Even now, although we have a surface egalitarianism in parts of the church, there is a deep layer of cultural patriarchy which is inscrutable.

Feminism then, has forced us to look again at doctrines and theology and ways of speaking that have been taken for granted. The mandate for this liberation, though, has come out of the Scriptures themselves. That which is capable of motivation for oppression is also the source of emancipation. This has been true in the past. Franciscans, Protestants, Zwinglians, Anabaptists and slaves, all took the text seriously and argued for liberation within its context.

Thus in spite of the church's collusion with patriarchy, I would argue that women are better off within the church than they are outside it - because of Jesus. I am also convinced that Gen 3:16 is reassuring, predicting rather than applauding the ongoing suppression of women in history.

*I will make your pains in
childbearing very severe;
with pain you will give birth to children.
Your desire will be for your husband,
and he will rule over you.*

If taken more generally this text speaks to the puzzling acquiescence of women to male domination even in our own times. There is no conspiracy. There is a puzzling inevitability about it, predicted, right there in the text. This disharmony, this bias against the calling and preaching authority of women is anticipated at the heart of the foundational story of origins.

So I tell my students who are often terribly upset about the word "feminist" that feminism is like farming. Farming of course is good. But Gen 3:17-19 says:

*Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat of it
all the days of your life.*

*It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.*

*By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground ...*

Yet nobody ever suggests we should leave the thistles there because they were predicted in Genesis. Men have always thought it right and proper that both men and women, sometimes especially women, should work to keep the thistles out. Feminism suggests that we should do the same with regard to Genesis 3:16.

Scripture then, has enormous depth. A part of the key to understanding it is the development of subtlety in theological language. The Da Vinci Code builds a drama that is wrong not only historically, but in terms of its basic understanding of Christian doctrine. Christology has always demanded that Christ was truly human, and if truly human he *could* have married Mary Magdalene. Feminist theology has long emphasized and pondered the humanity of Jesus the Saviour.

Earliest careful attempts at feminist theology argued that Jesus treated women differently from men of his day. The narratives show this so unobtrusively that it has taken thousands of years for us to see this. He talked to the woman at the well, argued with the Syrophonaecian woman, and applauded the faith of Mary, and of the woman who anointed him before death. Jesus was a feminist.

Similar arguments look at otherwise hidden aspects of the narrative. Women announced the resurrection, women accompanied Jesus on the road to Calvary. Peter who would lead the church, betrayed him. Women are noticed for the first time as having significance. Yet it was all there, all the time, in the text itself.

At another level, though, Jesus is seen as the wisdom of God. Concerned about the maleness of Christ, and asking can women be saved by a male Saviour, women have noticed that Wisdom is feminine, that Proverbs 8 speaks in the feminine: "Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice?... I was formed long ages ago, at the very beginning, when the world

came to be." This parallels the prologue to John 1:1ff, where Jesus as the incarnation of logos is with God in the beginning. Logos /wisdom. Jesus is the incarnation of the wisdom of God - hence the connection with the feminine.

Yet another conversation surrounds the assertion that Jesus is a woman, or Jesus is black. At some level it is possible to say Jesus is black, or that a woman died on the cross. We abide in Jesus. Jesus abides in us. He is the vine. We are the branches. The solidarity and interconnection and representation are so strong and so important that these things can be said.

So the Church has thought about feminist issues. It has hardly kept the feminine divine a secret in the last quarter century. Images of the feminine are associated even with the second person of the trinity. This all stops short, however, of being about the male and female God. God is neither male nor female in Judaism and Christianity. Only error promotes the maleness of God, or the femininity of God. These categories are too particular for God. Feminine gods moreover have not always been benign. One wonders about the feminine divine behind the Priory. Yet God's fullness, expressed through human words, should use both male and female metaphors.

Nevertheless, at the end of the day one might ask, having been through the Da Vinci phenomenon, "Why do we need the church?" Surely secular society gives a much less problematic road to gender equality. The movie makes the point particularly clear. Tell the truth about Mary Magdalene and the oppressive power of the church will be silenced. Oppression is a slippery phenomenon. In the society at large, while there is more gender equality, that is mostly only for well-educated white women. While gender equality grows, socioeconomic inequality also grows. Where poverty abounds so will all manner of hardships for women. Gender disharmony takes on new forms and goes underground. You meet it in the woman battered to death by her husband. It is present in the statistics on poverty in solo mothers. The church is the only place that keeps alive the really radical grammars of the gospel -that the first shall be last, that the worker who arrives at the eleventh hour will be included, that in Christ there is no male nor female, that the weak things of the earth will overcome the strong. It is not just that this is what is promised in the end times, but that this is the deep truth of the universe - from which all genuine spirituality flows. When we act in accordance with these radical grammars we have God on our side. In all the morass of competing ways of understanding rights and civil society these grammars have enormous appeal.

Truth is discoverable by ordinary people. It can't be kept hidden by any secret society. The greatest discrediting of the Church would be if the Spirit of Christ were not present today in the church at all, if people didn't experience these grammars as true.

We need to face up to an undomesticated Jesus, what one might call a real idealist, a committed radical, in any case a profound person who proposed a solution to the human dilemma ... centred around the ideal of God's rule ("the kingdom of God"), the main theological category Jesus created.

James M. Robinson

The whole message of the Gospel is this:
Become like Jesus.

Henri Nouwen

JESUS AND JUSTICE by John Franklin

The spiritual formation of Jesus of Nazareth was profoundly Hebrew. This seemed to have escaped the notice of those who heard his manifesto for ministry in the Nazareth synagogue. He announced that the Spirit of the Lord was upon him to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and to let the oppressed go free.¹ To illustrate what that might mean, he pulled examples from the faith heritage that he shared with his listeners.

The poor and the oppressed that he referred to were not Jews! He reminded his audience that Elijah bypassed the widows of Israel and went to the aid of a widow in Sidon, and Elisha bypassed the lepers in Israel and healed Naaman the Syrian. Aware of the implications of what he was saying, "...all in the synagogue were filled with rage." They drove him out to the brow of the town's hill in order to throw him off the top. Shades of things to come. With the Spirit of the Lord upon him, Jesus was to reach out to those on the edge in acts of justice and mercy and cause further offence.

Ironically, it would have been in Nazareth's synagogue school that Jesus learned his people's heritage of torah and prophets. His matchless obedience to God will have been shaped by texts like Micah's profound summary of what obedience to God requires: to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God.² And as the one who knew God more than any other, he would have understood what Jeremiah was saying in reference to his ancestor, King Josiah: "He defended the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? says the Lord."³

In the life and ministry of Jesus, we have living witness that one who knows God and obeys God, is one who is active in justice and mercy; a justice and mercy that humbly references credit to the Spirit of God, the agent of change.

The author of John's gospel makes this plain. He is writing to a congregation in what we might call a Nicodemus situation. Many are faithful to their Jewish heritage and yet captivated with the Jesus movement. The time has come to get off the fence and decide one way or the other.⁴

The Jesus movement contained people that the old faith had no room for, like Samaritan women. So you can hear the gasp of recognition, validation and affirmation from the likes of Samaritan women (not to mention other Gentiles) at the first public reading of the gospel. "That's us! We're in the story!"

In the story we see how obedience to the God of justice and mercy is profoundly counter-cultural. Jesus, contrary to all that was permissible and socially acceptable, dares to talk to a Samaritan woman, alone! A Jewish man chooses to spend time with an unchaperoned woman, and an infidel at that! In justice and in mercy, he is setting a 'prisoner' free and a whole community is affected. We are told that the disciples were "astonished".

How just are our dealings with people who are 'different', and how do we unthinkingly conform to social custom?

Mercifully liberating people from society's unjust attitudes is how Jesus' ministry begins in John's gospel; and it is not without humour.⁵ Jesus' mother is at a wedding in the village of Cana, possibly helping with the preparations (given her concerns a little later). As these things go, Jesus and the boys get invited too. After the proceedings are well underway, Mary tells Jesus, "They have no more wine." While Jesus is protesting that it is none of their business, mother has other ideas. She tells the servants to "Do whatever he tells you." We may hesitate to call it a set-up, but the result is that Jesus' ministry is launched. And it is not about keeping guests happy with over 600 litres of gold medal wine. This is a shame-based culture. Regardless of how justifiable the catering failure might have been, this family would have had to live with the humiliation and contempt of running out of wine for generations to come. In justice, Jesus stands against social attitudes and in mercy, guarantees the bride and groom a happy day.

How do we unthinkingly endorse unjust social attitudes and what conscious acts of mercy await us?

A little later in John's gospel, Jesus outrages the authorities by healing a man and instructing him to pick up his mat and get going on the Sabbath!⁶ Here is a man oppressed by his disability, his attitude, and the Temple's incompetent health care system - the Bethzatha pool by the Sheep Gate where all the blind, lame and paralysed congregated in the hope that they would be cured if they got into the pool fast enough after an angel stirred up the water. With a mercy that is little short of ruthless, Jesus catapults the man into a newness of life that he is not able, or too scared, to fully own.

But in the bigger context, Jesus, acting justly, is challenging the life-diminishing hold of 'religion' on people's lives. Jesus, in justice, exposes the oppression of a religious system that values obedience to rules over a liberating act of healing. When Jesus is confronted by the authorities, after the healed man has identified him, he provocatively tells them that regardless of Sabbath regulations, "My Father is still working, and I also am working." So besides telling a man to carry his mat on the Sabbath, Jesus is in double trouble for calling God his Father.

How just are our religious systems? Do they generate life or frustrate it? And what acts of mercy would get us into trouble with the system?

As we continue to look in John's gospel, we see Jesus doing justice and mercy, defending the cause of the poor and needy by feeding five thousand hungry people, rescuing his sea-borne disciples in a storm, protecting a woman caught in adultery, healing a man blind from birth, defending Mary from criticism when she anoints his feet with expensive perfume, and teaching people where the real bread of life is to be found. And having done nothing but act in justice and mercy, he has all the merciless forces of injustice confronting him as he faces the cross.

Having highlighted only three particular instances in the gospel of John, an invitation emerges. What do we see if we read all four gospels asking, how is Jesus humbly doing justice, and loving mercy? How in any gospel text do we see Jesus defending the cause of the poor and needy?

Then, what does the Lord require of us? It is hardly acts of social and religious conformity. It is the radical stance of acting in justice and mercy in humble cooperation with God often in the most every-day circumstances. And how do we show that we know God? By our knowledge of scripture and our spiritual maturity? We look to Jesus, one with the Father, knowing God intimately, and see him defending the poor and needy. "Is not this to know me? says the Lord."

The challenge to our on-going spiritual formation is that it be thoroughly Hebrew and Jesus-like.

1. Luke 4:16-30
2. Micah 6:8
3. Jeremiah 22:16
4. John 3:1-10
5. John 2:1-12
6. John 5:1-18

SOME VERY CRUNCHY SAYING OF JESUS

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.
Matthew 10:34-37

Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.
Luke 14:26

If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.
Matthew 5:29-30

Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.
Matthew 8:21

Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.
Matthew 12:32

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.

Mark 10:25

Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.
Matthew 22:21

GRACE

Grace clothes herself
with a towel
bends like a servant
washes grimy feet
cleanses

Grace sits in the dust
with the stooped and shamed
listens to their cry
speaks their language
understands

Grace watches for the return
of far-country strayers
leaps with joy at the first sight
runs to welcome
celebrates

Grace walks in dark places
where dreams die and hopes fade
wraps loving arms around
comforts broken hearts
restores

Grace knows the path I take
the heaviness and the gift
gives strength for the load
hears the unspoken prayer
accompanies

Barbara Sampson

NICENE CREED *by Susan Wilson*

Introduction

The Early Church began and took shape in a world where there were many beliefs; much like our world today. These beliefs and philosophies influenced the early communities. Also, like today, there were a number of theological disagreements amongst the various Church communities. The most significant argument was around the question:

* How is Jesus related to God?

The Emperor Constantine called a council of all the bishops in 325 CE; Constantine was not a baptised Christian but he did preside over the council. Over one sixth of all bishops attended the council in Nicaea. The mandate of those present was to find agreement amongst different theological understandings. The Nicene Creed (with amendments at the Council of Constantinople in 381 CE), is a summary of what is important for Christians to believe. As we shall see, the creed is also an argument against a number of heresies.

A closer look at the Creed

*We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.*

This statement opposes a Gnostic teaching which was pervasive in the early Church. The Gnostics believed there was an evil god who created the material world and a good God who created the spiritual world. For Gnostics the created world was evil; the goal of the human person was to escape from the bonds of the material world and become spirit. The creed asserts there is only one God who is the creator of all.

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.*

The Arian heresy was one of the main reasons a council was called at Nicaea. Arius was a presbyter in Alexandria. He believed he was protecting the traditional notion of one God from innovation. Remember, unlike Judaism and Christianity, most other religions in this time had many gods. To remain faithful to tradition, Arius argued that Jesus was created by God the Father and therefore had a beginning. He qualifies this by saying the Son was begotten before the rest of creation. However, the creed affirms Jesus is one in being with the Father. We can see, in the creed, the understanding of God as Trinity taking shape.

*For us human beings and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, , and was made human.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.*

There are two important considerations in this section.

A heresy, similar to Gnosticism, which is called Docetism, argued that Jesus only appeared to be human. Docetists believed Jesus remained spirit because the material world is evil. The stress on *incarnate from the Virgin Mary* (i.e. a human mother), refutes this error. Against the Arians the creed says that Jesus was fully God; against the Docetists (and the Gnostics) the creed affirms Jesus was fully human.

Mentioning Pontius Pilate as the governor who had Jesus crucified gives an historic time when Jesus lived and died. In archaic and ancient religions, it was not unusual for a god to be born into human life, be killed and come back to life. However, these events always occurred at the mythical beginning of time. The story of Jesus is set in history. The specific historical detail is another counter to Docetism. Jesus' death was real because he was truly human.

*On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.*

While affirming faith in the resurrection of Jesus, this also affirms the connection of the Church with the Hebrew Scriptures. We find a hope here for justice and God's reign.

*We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of Life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.*

The beginning of the creed speaks of God the Father creator of all; next Jesus is described as the one through whom all was made and now the Holy Spirit is the giver of life. This gives further shape to an understanding of God as Trinity and the creative and life-giving role of the Trinity. Again there is a connection with the Old Testament as the Spirit has spoken through the Prophets.

*We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.*

Mentioning one baptism is significant. From 303 CE, the Church was severely persecuted under the Emperor Diocletian. Christians were killed and their writings destroyed. A number of Christians denied their faith in order to avoid death. These Christians were called *traditores* which means those who handed over the scriptures to be destroyed. The persecution ended when Constantine became Emperor of the Western Roman Empire in 312 CE. In 313 CE he issued the Edict of Milan which made Christianity lawful.

Those who had denied their faith were forgiven and allowed to return to their Church communities. However a group in North Africa, who came to be known as the Donatists, believed clerics who had abandoned their faith could not be forgiven and the sacraments these clerics administered were invalid. Therefore the Donatists re-baptised people who had been baptised by either priests the Donatists believed to be *traditores* or baptised by priests ordained by a bishop believed to be a *traditore*. This was another major disagreement in the early church. The Ecumenical council agreed that baptism is from God (rather than the person performing the ritual) and one baptism was all that was needed.

The resurrection of the body and life everlasting is a reminder that Christianity is about God becoming human. It is not merely 'spiritual' because we are bodily people. Salvation is salvation of all of creation and our hope is, at the end of time, all creation will be renewed.

Finally

You may be asking: So what? Does it matter what disagreements were in the early Church?

I think it does. Many of the arguments and misunderstandings in the early Church are repeated in different forms today. While none of us call ourselves gnostic, for example, some of us do see the world as evil and the spiritual as the place of salvation. It makes a difference if we believe that God created the heavens and earth and therefore that the material world is part of God's good creation. We will see ourselves as people who are concerned with the care of God's creation.

Like the early Church, we are bombarded with a multitude of different beliefs, values and spiritualities. The Nicene Creed can be a map to help us negotiate our way.

WHO ARE YOU LORD TO ME?

Who are you wanting to be to me now Lord,
In this quiet and waiting place.
If I am waiting here quietly for you,
Then who are you to me now?

"I am the One who wants to draw you,
From the reservoirs there at your core,
Love and patience, gentleness, joy and understanding,
That get pushed aside in the busyness and hurt of life."

"I am the One who keeps you in touch with you,
And so more real and open and honest and quiet with me.
I am the One who offers you my perspective
As you sit and wait and focus upon me."

"I am wanting to be the quietner of your soul,
So you can live unfrazzled and at peace
In the midst of busyness with people
And the uncertainty of unknowing."

Margaret Dunn

RHYTHMS OF GRACE

From the hustle and the bustle
Of our over-crowded days,
From the noise and hectic clamour
Of our anxious, frantic ways,
Lord we come to find your perfect rest
In that hidden, secret place,
And to live our lives in harmony
With the rhythm of your grace.

From the striving and the straining
Of our self-directed lives,
From the rushing and the pushing,
Of our self-appointed times
Lord we ask that you would meet
with us
In that hidden, secret place
And show us how to work with you,
To the rhythm of your grace.

Distracted and fragmented now,
How we long for centredness.
Defeated and exhausted too,
How we yearn for quietness.
Lord we come to you, unfilled again
To that hidden, secret place,
And find the living water there,
In the rhythm of your grace.

Tony Horsfall

INVITATIONS TO RELATIONSHIP

John and his community of believers presents significantly different angles on Jesus to the writers of the other three ("synoptic") Gospels. Their Gospel reflects deep thought about who Jesus is and his connection with Yahweh, the Lord. Jesus is viewed through prisms of rich metaphors such as 'bread from heaven' and 'the water of life' and his relationship not only to God but to the Holy Spirit as 'advocate'. Seeing God as three 'persona', three ways of being God's self, begins to take shape here.

It's a very devotional Gospel which invites enriching relationships with Jesus as the expected way of life for disciples and their communities of faith.

Jesus identifying with Yahweh, the Lord:

We are familiar with the "I am" sayings: bread of life (John 6:35), the good shepherd (John 10:11 & 14), the light of the world (John 8:12), the gate for the sheep (John 10:7), resurrection and life (John 11:25), the way, truth and life (John 14:6), the true vine (John 15:1).

Less familiar are these significant words: John 4:26 Jesus said to her. "I am, the one who is speaking to you"; John 6:20 "It is I (Greek I am); do not be afraid"; John 8:58 "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am"; John 18:8 "I told you that I am". Also, in John 17's high priestly prayer "As you Father, are in me and I am in you".

It's such a strong theme interwoven throughout the whole gospel that one is left with the impression that encounter with the Living One, with I Am, is at the heart of Christian faith and discipleship. Anything less is inadequate.

Nourishment and Refreshment:

So too is nourishment and refreshment. "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever, and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. ... Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them." (John 6:51, 53-56).

Beyond the Sacred Page:

"Beyond the sacred page we seek thee Lord,
my spirit pants for thee
O living word".

Mary Lathbury's hymn gets so well Jesus' comment in John 5:39, "You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify of me". As the living and present one he's always just beyond the sacred page, never trapped by it but often opened to us by it. He is never less than the Gospels record, always fresh and startling as he meets us on the beaches of our lives, nourishing us again and again as he asks "Do you love me? Feed my sheep." (John 21).

THE FOCUS SHARPENS

Other New Testament writers, after time for reflection, no doubt, have a sharpened focus on their encounters with Jesus. Here are some of their insights:

St Paul

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me". Galatians 2:19-20.

"... we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength." 1 Corinthians 1:23-25.

"(Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, ... all things have been created through him and for him. ... For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross." Colossians 1:15ff.

"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit." 2 Corinthians 3:17-18.

Letter to the Hebrews

"... in these last days God has spoken to us by a Son, who he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word." 1:2-3.

"... let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God." 12:1-2.

St Peter

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ... Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy ..." 1:3ff.

St Jude

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. 1:24-25.

MYSTERY

Human skin stretched taut
over divinity
hands that created the universe
squeezed into baby fingers

All the riches of heaven
poured out
in a lavish display
of emptying

God's Son
Joseph's pride and joy
Lamb of God given to parents
too poor to bring a lamb for offering

He once served by angels
now bent low to serve with towel
and basin
washing muddy feet
and stained reputations

This mystery
wrapped in love and human flesh
is named Immanuel
God breathes among us

Barbara Sampson

Jesus Stills the Storm

And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. A windstorm arose on the sea, so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him up, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm. They were amazed, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?"

Matthew 8:23-27. NRSV. 1990.

A CONFESSION by *Anselm Gruen*

To sum up my confession of Jesus, I would want to say that for me Jesus is the one who gives God a human face. When God disappears in my theorizing, he shines out again for me in the figure of Jesus as a human God, as a God who encounters me as one to whom I can speak, as a God who raises me up, frees me, redeems me, forgives me, gives me breadth, freedom and love. Jesus is the one who frees me from the pressure to achieve great things spiritually. On his cross, Jesus 'crossed out' all human ideas of a spiritual way. On the cross he also 'crossed out' all my ideas of God and myself, in order to open me up to the mystery of life.

For me, Jesus is the message that I am accepted unconditionally by God. And for me Jesus is the guarantee that love drives out all fear. Jesus has lived out God's love for me so convincingly that I may cast aside all fear of incurring guilt, of failure and damnation. For me Jesus is the visible manifestation of the message that "God is love and whoever abides in love abides in God and God abides in him. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 3:16, 18). For me Jesus is the love of God incarnate. When it permeates me I am whole, redeemed and free. That is the hope that inspires me. That is the foundation on which I believe. That is the love by which I live.

Images of Jesus. 2002 p.183.

L'ARCHE KAPITI COMMUNITY by *Marg Schrader*

The setting, a living room in Pararaparumu; the occasion, Holy week; the people, 15 of us, all with disabilities of some sort, 8 of us with intellectual disabilities. We had met as a community of L'Arche Kapiti to wash each other's feet. I sat between Emmett and Victor. Rod explained what we were to do and then the bowl was passed between us. Emmet, a wonderful young man who said to me "I don't want my feet washed, I just had a shower", sounded quite biblical to me. I tried to explain what this was about but said it was fine if he did not want to do it. When he had watched the others he chose to have his feet washed and then to wash mine. Oh so gently. Then he put his hands firmly on my head and prayed "Good woman God, Good woman God". I wasn't sure whether it was a prayer of thanksgiving or of intercession, but I felt blessed.

Then it was my turn to wash Victor's feet. Victor, who gifts us with amazing love and a wonderful laugh, lives with multiple handicaps and spends his day in his wheel chair, being fed and cared for by our gifted assistants, old and young. I gently washed his feet and prayed for him and the bowl went on. When I thought we had finished Laura, one of the house leaders, said "Victor you haven't washed anyone's feet yet!" Then "Father Rod, you need your feet washed!" Rod walked past me and with a grin and said, "This the third time tonight!"

We placed the bowl on Victor's lap and Rod on a chair in front of him; then we lifted Rod's legs up into the bowl and with Laura each taking one of Victor's hands gently assisted him in washing Rod's feet. His mother recently told me that when he was a little fellow at mass when the host was raised he would scream with delight. He continues to do this today to the delight of the parish.

A gentle reminder of so many of Jesus' words about the little ones and "who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Because of the ecumenical nature of L'Arche, foot washing is the central symbol.

A second story, a week before Christmas in the parish hall. After a wonderful pageant with Akiko, our Japanese assistant playing Mary, and all the core members taking part, we sang Silent Night in 8 languages, the first language of those with us. I was overwhelmed as I stood and sang the first verse in Japanese and watched Akiko's face glowing with joy, and then the next as I watched Monika as we tried our best with Czech. These young adults come from all over the world to live amongst our people. Most are Christian but some feed deeply from the well of their own faiths. What an amazingly rich group of people.

Our Identity and Mission Statement excites me.

"We are people with and without learning difficulties, sharing life in communities of faith. Mutual relationships and trust in God are at the heart of our life together. We seek to build a world that recognizes the unique value of every person and our need of one another."

The challenge given to us as a community last year was to become a prophetic, eucharistic community for all our churches. I was struck as if by a thunderbolt as to the profundity of that call.

What does it mean? How do we live that out? What a rag-tag bunch of followers we are and what a huge call, and yet it burns in our hearts.

There will be a weekend experience of L'Arche in Auckland 3rd -5th August and a conversation with L'Arche from 2-4PM on the Sunday. Details p.58.
ssheehan@orcon.net.nz 09 849 4918

COMING HOME TO THE COSMOS: Spiritual Directors International Conference 2007

by Sheila Pritchard

Talk about expanding horizons! The SDI conference in Vancouver, Canada in April this year was an inspiration in many different ways. Having a mathematical cosmologist as the keynote speaker is not what you might expect for a spiritual directors' conference! But Dr Brian Swimme was superb. His passion for the story of the Universe opened us up to new levels of awe and wonder. His scientific background enabled him to communicate millions of years of intricate creativity and beauty in a way that seamlessly linked science and spirituality. Powerpoint photography on two large screens also gave all 580 of us a visual feast.

After each of Brian's sessions the conference spiritual director, Alexandra Kovats, led us in contemplative reflection on his material to allow time for prayerful processing. (Mind you I feel I need several months more processing time!)

As well as the three keynote sessions there were 45 workshops on offer! Each of us could choose three. I personally took advantage of the interfaith ethos of the conference to explore some traditions less known to me for example: *How do you know it's God? Discernment from the Jewish mystical perspective*. The workshops covered an amazing array of areas of interest: *Spiritual direction with children, Sufi psychology, Thomas Merton, Biblical archetypes, Death and dying, Working with survivors of suicide, Cosmic desire...* to give you just a very small sample! The two evenings offered more choices for those who still had energy. I joined in singing chants from various traditions on one night and thoroughly enjoyed a dance and movement workshop the next. It was great to have two New Zealanders offering evening options: Peggy Dawson on *Nurturing Touch* and Anne Hadfield on *Turangawaewae: Coming Home to the Cosmos in a South Pacific Context*.

Networking is always a special part of a conference especially an international one. I think I heard someone say that there were 50 countries represented though numerically the vast majority would have been from North America. During a lunch break those of us from the Asia Pacific region got together to share ideas for possible future regional events. There were 18 of us representing Singapore, Japan, the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand.

A public meeting was co-ordinated with the conference so that local people could come and hear an interfaith panel speak and answer questions about spiritual direction as it is understood in each tradition. It was well attended and an inclusive and insightful evening. The interfaith ethos was also evident in the opening and closing rituals where people from various faith traditions led us in their ways of worship.

The size of the group made the conference a huge logistical challenge for those who organised it. They managed superbly and the volunteer effort was impressive. There are only two paid personnel in the whole SDI organization. At the "Membership Moments" (aka: AGM and reports!) session on the final day committee members modelled a genuine and joyful servant heart in the way they spoke about their roles.

For me it was well worth all it took to attend but even if you never have that opportunity look up the website: www.sdiworld.org where you will find many ways to enter into some of what SDI has to offer.

BOOK REVIEWS

CREATIVE IDEAS FOR QUIET DAYS

Resources and Liturgies for Retreats and Days of Reflection by Sue Pickering.
Published by Canterbury Press 2006 132 pp. NZ\$44.95. Available from Epworth, Wellington.
Reviewed by Anna Johnstone

I love rock pools. Love it when patient watching is rewarded with surprises of life in the stillness. An opportunity available for a limited time before the tide again covers the secret places. So Sue's introduction, Pools of provision from God, where she deftly weaves the treasures of rock pools with Quiet Days, delighted me so much that I wanted to rush out to share it with others, thinking that if only they saw this truth, they would 'get' what Quiet Days are all about, and sign up for the soonest one they could find!

After reading the intro, I'm already sold on the book, confirming first impressions as I picked it up, appreciating how good it looks, how good it feels in the hand. The images on the cover agreeing with the adjective in the title.

The book is divided into three parts, Getting started, Themed resources for Quiet Days, and Prayers and blessings for use in closing worship.

Part One asks why we should bother setting time apart. Looking at Jesus as our model, Sue asks, "How can we, dare we, think we can manage life's considerable demands without the sort of focused contemplative time with the Creator and Sustainer of all things, which Jesus knew he needed and made sure he took."

So, this first section sets the scene, convincing the reader of the need for and benefit of Quiet Days, and covering the practical issues involved in holding one. Sue explains the use of the imagination in praying with Scripture, and from her experience as an Anglican Parish priest and Spiritual Director, offers wise counsel for facilitators.

Part 2, comprising 12 themed resources, each of which may be used as a complete Quiet Day, includes opening worship, talks, photocopiable reflection sheets, and guided meditations. Titles are interest-grabbing, and include Retreat and advance, Crampons and crevasses, The foolishness of God, Greed and Grace, and Mosaics of mercy. Some themes are very thought-provoking, powerful and moving, and Sue is not afraid to ask us to face our failings.

Part 3 offers some beautiful prayers and blessings for use in closing worship in each theme.

In the Foreword, Margaret Silf writes: "If you have ever thought about offering a quiet day in your community or parish, but have taken fright at the thought of what it might entail, this book can take away your anxieties, and give you, in their place, a treasury of ideas and encouragement." Those with experience will also welcome and benefit from this resource, appreciating the depth of spiritual riches and the opportunity to add their own creative flavour.

This is an exciting first book from Sue Pickering. Let's hope there are many more to come!

JESUS AND THE EYEWITNESSES: THE GOSPELS AS EYE WITNESS TESTIMONY

Richard Bauckham. Grand Rapids:

Wm B. Eerdmans, 2006. 538 pp.

Reviewed by Chris Marshall

Richard Bauckham is a prolific New Testament scholar with the annoying habit of disputing some of the most cherished assumptions of modern gospel scholarship. In an earlier book, for example, he challenged the taken-for-granted assumption that the gospels were written to address the distinctive needs of particular Christian communities, which in turn means that each gospel can be used as a window into the internal life of its author's own community. Rejecting this view, Bauckham insisted that the gospels were always intended by their authors for wide circulation within the network of early Christian churches who, for all their differences, shared many common concerns. Now, in this compelling *tour de force*, Bauckham takes aim at yet another sacred cow of 20th century scholarship, the presumption that the gospel traditions passed through a long phase of oral transmission prior to the writing of the first gospel, during which time they were transmitted by anonymous Christian communities who shaped and reshaped them according to their communal needs. Critical scholars have differed in their judgments about how much the traditions were *modified* in this process. Some have postulated a high degree of creativity in the oral phase; others have imagined a much more conservative tendency. But almost all scholars have accepted the notion of a lengthy gap between the time of Jesus and the activity of the gospel writers, a period when oral transmission was an essentially collective and anonymous procedure.

What is wrong with this picture, Bauckham spells out, is that it overlooks the crucial and ongoing role played by individual eyewitnesses in the formation and preservation of the traditions. Bauckham insists that these eye witnesses continued to exercise a controlling influence over the traditions throughout the oral period; that the gospel writers, in keeping with best practice standards of Greco-Roman historians and biographers, favoured eyewitness testimony above all else in compiling their narratives; and that it is actually possible to identify, often by name, just who these eyewitnesses were. Also new is the way in which Bauckham grounds his analysis in the latest scholarship on Hellenistic historiography, on the characteristics of oral tradition and contemporary methods for doing oral history, on the psychology and reliability of recollective memory, and on the epistemology of testimony. He also offers a fresh analysis of the well-known statements by Papias and other ecclesiastical figures relating to the origins of the four gospels. Given such impressive learning and his amazing attention to detail, the case Bauckham builds cannot be easily dismissed. He has thrown a proverbial spanner into the workings of conventional gospel criticism, making the habitual scepticism of many scholars in the field look like what it really is, a reflex reaction stemming from questionable, and in some cases discredited, presuppositions.

Running to over 500 pages, the book is full of fascinating insights. Bauckham asks, for example, why it is that about half the individual characters in the gospel narratives are personally named. There is no demonstrable tendency to add fictional names to the New Testament traditions, and a comparison with a data base of all recorded Jewish names from the period reveals that the distribution of names in the gospels conforms to the prevailing Palestinian (but not Diaspora) Jewish pattern. The answer Bauckham gives is that these named individuals were well-known members of the earliest Palestinian Christian communities and that it was their personal testimony that accounts for the stories associated with them in the gospel narratives. This also accounts for why certain key players in the passion narrative (such as the man who supplied the donkey for Jesus' entry to Jerusalem, or the woman who anointed Jesus' feet, or the disciple who lopped off the ear of high priest's servant) remain *unnamed* in the earliest versions of that story. They too were members of the Jerusalem church, but in their case their anonymity is deliberately preserved so as to protect them from retribution from the high-priestly authorities. It was only when this threat was no longer existent that the names of some of these characters could be included in retellings of the story, as they are in the Gospel of John.

Eyewitness testimony was the source, Bauckham argues, not only for individual episodes and sayings in the gospels but also for the full course of Jesus' ministry. Here special importance attached to those who were "eyewitnesses and servants of the word from the beginning" (Luke 1:2), people who could vouchsafe the overall shape and direction of Jesus' activity from start to finish. The Twelve were most important in this respect, although other accredited disciples also played a role. In a remarkable piece of detective work, Bauckham pinpoints textual clues in the opening and closing sections of three of the gospels which indicate, by means of the literary device of *inclusio*, who the most important of such eyewitnesses were for each writer. For Mark it was Peter (Bauckham rehabilitates the case for seeing Peter as Mark's principal informant); for Luke it was, along with Peter,

a group of named women disciples; for John it was the Beloved Disciple (whom Bauckham considers to be John the Elder rather than John the Apostle).

Employing his own version of *inclusio*, Bauckham opens and closes his book with a discussion of the implications of factoring in eyewitness testimony for the so-called Quest for the Historical Jesus. The gospels do not present us with direct access to the unadorned historical figure of Jesus, as is now universally recognised. But nor do they merely depict the falsely historicized Christ of faith. Instead they portray the "Jesus of testimony", Jesus as others bore witness to him. It is the category of testimony based on first-hand memory, Bauckham proposes, that enables us to read the gospels appropriately both as history and as theology. From an historical point of view, the testimony of the gospel writers invites a response of trust rather than scepticism, for it is of the nature of testimony to elicit trust (even if not uncritically). All historiography, in fact all knowledge, is ultimately dependent on the need to trust the testimony of others. It is simply not possible to live in the real world or to communicate with other human beings on the basis of the principle of radical doubt; human beings necessarily live by faith. To view the gospels as testimony, therefore, is to underscore their trust-worthiness as historical reports. It is also to recognise their theological value, for testimony is the only appropriate genre for communicating divine disclosure. The gospels are concerned not simply to narrate bare facts about Jesus but to attest to his perceived significance as a unique revelation of God.

It remains to be seen whether Bauckham's stunning analysis will persuade his peers in the scholarly guild. Arguably nothing will dissuade some from their die-hard scepticism, for it is rooted in something deeper than the evidence. But, if nothing else, Bauckham's book will serve to show just how few of the assured results of modern gospel criticism are really all that assured after all.

MAKING HEART-BREAD

Matthew Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, Dennis Linn.
Paulist Press. 2006. 32 pp. US\$ 16.95.

Reviewed by Beverly Williams-Hawkins MDiv and Jonathan Leeroy who live in Austin, Texas, USA.

I am a lover of children's literature but by no means an expert on kids' books. Indeed, the fine distinction, expert on children's literature is reserved for the primary readers of children's literature, children. Hence my need for expert testimony and employment of my grandson as co-reviewer.

Jonathan likes books, and he enjoys reading, but he is an eight-year-old boy full of boundless energy and easily attracted to the entire goings on around him. So it was not lost on me that the Linn's delightfully thoughtful story quickly gained and held Jonathan's attention throughout his reading aloud to me. In fact, one of the things that Jonathan liked about the book is that "there's a story in the story". I too enjoyed the embedded story and found it opened the door for us to share our sadness about war in the conversation that ensued.

Jonathan is not a child of many words. So I took note of how easy it was for him to share his impressions of the book. One insight he shared that seems particularly salient for children is that "making heart bread makes it easier for kids to tell a grown up what they are thinking in their mind and what they are feeling in their heart". Another astute observation was that the book was "made by a family for other families". Jonathan's insights capture the crux of the Linn's objectives for this book: fostering spiritual bonds within families, helping families help their children to be nurtured by their love, and healing from the hurts of their days. As stated by the authors in "A Note to Parents" the Linn's write: "This story is about the most helpful process we know for family spirituality". (p 26).

As an adult and spiritual director I appreciated the diversity of the drawings. Because not all characters looked alike I could easily visualise myself and Jonathan making heart bread. My one concern is that the depth of this story is not revealed in either the title or the sleeve notes. Making Heart-Bread teaches a simple reflective process for holding love and healing hurts. Could there be a more valuable resource for spiritual directors of children or adults?

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SGM NEWS

Andrew Pritchard

Martyred Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero of El Salvador (1917-1980), in a poem *Prophets of a Future Not Our Own* writes ...

"It helps now and then to step back and take a long view. The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision. ...

This is what we are about: We plant the seeds that will one day grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities. ...

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future not our own."

I wonder what Spiritual Growth Ministries will be doing and look like 20 years from now. If we were to ask that question of people involved with SGM today I wonder how many different visions of the future we would get!

I think that it is true 'the future is not our own'; we may not see ourselves as prophets. But ...

We do plant seeds that will one day grow ... seeds of encouragement, seeds of opportunity to listen and respond to God through contemplative prayer and contemplative action. Seeds of formation in people's lives resourcing them to accompany others in spiritual direction and supervision.

A recent example of seed planting and watering has been the Workshop in the Art of Facilitating Retreats run in Dunedin in April. A retreat for high-school students, a local quiet day, a residential retreat and a parish-based retreat in daily life are some of the seeds in various states of germination following that workshop.

While we were in Dunedin Sue Pickering and I visited Sr Mary Concannon. She was in good spirits and we had to time our visit carefully to catch her at home! ... a clear indicator that she continues to lead a fruitful life despite the limitations of a wheelchair. In her role as the first Coordinator of the Formation Programme Mary certainly planted seeds in our lives and the lives of many others that are continuing to bear fruit. Thank-you Mary.

So what else is news?

Carole Hunt, our efficient and long-serving Administrator has moved and is moving. Carole and Richard moved from Plimmerton via a rented house in Paremata and will soon relocate to Whitby. We have kept a mail redirection going so that the old address, phone and email are all still valid for SGM. We will make the change to their new permanent address when the 2008 Programme comes out at the end of the year. Meantime, the office and administration continues to flow smoothly and efficiently.

Sue Pickering is writing a second book and in order to make space for this Sue has relinquished some of her work as Coordinator of the Formation Programme, specifically the overseeing of the work of the second-year participants and those 'beyonds' who are extending their formation into a third year. I have picked up this 'package' of work. Sue continues to have oversight and responsibility for the Formation Programme.

Thirty first-year participants will soon be gathering at Waikanae for the week long 'live-in' event that is such a key part of the formation programme. Several of the study modules of the Programme are being reviewed and revised this year and some new supervisors, markers and workshop presenters have been added as participant numbers grow.

The Conference of Spiritual Directors' International, held in April in Vancouver, was attended by several New Zealanders. Sheila Pritchard was one of them. As a member of our Formation Advisory Group Sheila represented us at the Leadership Institute, a pre-conference event for providers of spiritual direction formation, and will report to our September Advisory Group meeting. It will be great, as always, to join with other spiritual directors from throughout New Zealand at the bi-annual Association of Christian Spiritual Directors conference to be held in Wellington at the end of July. Dr Janet Ruffing RSM, spiritual director, author and Professor in Spirituality and Spiritual Direction will be the keynote speaker. So, thank-you, fellow-prophets in a future not our own ... we have much to be thankful for, let's encourage one another to continue to plant, water, give, pray and watch the growth!

RESOURCES

BOOKS

William Barclay. *The Mind of Jesus*. SCM Press. 1960. pp 190.

Richard Bauckham. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses - the Gospels as Eye Witness Testimony*. Eerdmans 2006. pp 538.

Marcus Borg. *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time. The historical Jesus and the heart of contemporary faith*. Harper. 1995. pp 150.

Frederick Buechner. *The Faces Of Jesus - a Life Story*. Paraclete Press. 2005. pp 97.

John Dominic Crossan. *Jesus-A Revolutionary Biography*. Harper 1994. pp207. Reflects the more radical material from the Jesus Seminar movement.

James D. G. Dunn. *Jesus Remembered. Volume 1 of Christianity in the Making*. Eerdmans. 2003. pp1019.

Anselm Gruen. *Images of Jesus*. Continuum. 2002. pp183. \$36.95. A fresh and original look at 50 Gospel images of Jesus.

E. Glenn Hinson. *A Serious Call to a Contemplative Lifestyle. Revised Edition*. Smyth & Helwys Publishing. Georgia. 1995. pp90.

Roy W. Hoover. ed. *Profiles of Jesus*. Polebridge Press. California 2002. pp256. Fellows of the Jesus Seminar pool their 12 years of work on the Gospels.

Tony Horsfall. *Rhythms of Grace Finding intimacy with God in a busy life*. Kingsway Pub. 2004. pp187. Tony aims to help readers get away from drivenness and into the rhythms of grace-filled living.

Margaret Magdalen. *Jesus Man of Prayer*. Hodder pb. 1987

Ron O'Grady. *Christ For All People. Celebrating a World of Christian Art*. Pace Publishing. Auckland. 2001. pp 159. An excellent presentation of recent Christian art from around the world, including New Zealand and the Pacific.

Michael O'Laughlin ed. *Jesus A Gospel based on the writings of Henri Nouwen*. Orbis Books. 2001 pp150. "A unique retelling of the story of Jesus through the words of Henri Nouwen and the art of Rembrandt."

Raymond Pelly & Peter Stuart. *A Religious Atheist? Critical Essays on the work of Lloyd Geering*. Otago University Press. 2006. \$39.99.

Graham Stanton. *Gospel Truth? New light on Jesus and the Gospels*. Harper & Collins. 1995. pp215.

N. T. Wright. *Who Was Jesus?* SPCK 1992. pp107.

N.T. Wright. The Original Jesus - the life and vision of a revolutionary. Eerdmans 1996. pp160.
 N.T. Wright. The challenge of Jesus. Rediscovering who Jesus was and is. Inter Varsity Press. 1999. pp202

Philip Yancey. The Jesus I Never Knew. Marshall Pickering. 1995. pp286.

Philip Yancey. PRAYER Does it make any difference? Hodder pb. 2006. pp 344.

MORE BOOKS

All in Kinder Library, Auckland

Janet Hodgson. The Faith We See. Working with images of Christ. Published by Inspire, Peterborough, UK. 2006. PB. pp 123.

Amy-Jill Levine. The Historical Jesus in Context. Princeton University Publishing. 2006.

Mark Yaconelli. Contemplative Youth Ministry. Practicing the Presence of Jesus. Zondervan. 2006. pp 251.

EVENTS

Spiritual Directors' Formation
 Programme 2008-2009. Click [here](#) for more information.

Silent Seven Day SGM Retreat
 Houghton's Bush Camp, Muriwai, Auckland. 5pm Sunday August 26th -1pm Sunday September 2nd, 2007. Team leader Warren Deason. Full details and costs available on this [website](#), in the SGM printed Programme for 2007, or from Carole Hunt on sgm@clear.net.nz or 04 233-0714.

A Weekend Experience of L'Arche
 Consider the Lilies ... A weekend in Auckland Friday 3rd August (6pm) -3pm Sunday 5th August 2007 at Waipapa Marae, University of Auckland. Led by Eileen Glass and Rev. Marg. Schrader with music led by Fr Chris Skinner.

Plus: A Conversation with L'Arche
 Sunday 5 August 2-4pm at Waipapa Marae, University of Auckland. Details for both events from Stephanie Sheehan at 09 849-4918 or ssheehan@orcon.net.nz

Interactive Drawing
 Interactive Drawing Therapy Ltd is offering courses in interactive drawing therapy throughout New Zealand. IDT is highly regarded by a range of helping professions including spiritual direction and retreat leading. Details of their courses, dates and fees are available at IDT Ltd, P.O. Box 47419, Ponsonby, Auckland, NZ, Phone/Fax 09 376-4789, Email idt3@pl.net and www.InteractiveDrawingTherapy.com

WEBSITES

Websites relating to Jesus abound. Google lists 155 000 000 references to him so there is no shortage of material to work on! Just type in the name "Jesus" to Google or any other search engine and there will be plenty to explore from his Jewishness to his divinity, from films about him, books and discussions ranging from the traditional orthodox understandings to the current theories.

For a website of resources, courses and comment try www.wesleyministrynetwork.com

CONTRIBUTORS

Nicola Hoggan Creegan lectures in theology at the Henderson campus of the Bible College of New Zealand.

Margaret Dunn is a quilter, spiritual director and grandmother living at Albany.

John Franklin is a spiritual director, ministry supervisor, preacher, eucharistic celebrant, university researcher, husband, father, friend, gardener and musician.

Colin Gibson is Emeritus Professor of English at Otago University and is a hymn and song writer. He edits the journal Word and Worship.

John Heberton works for Anglican Youth Ministries and lives in Mt Maunganui.

Tony Horsfall is a training consultant, Myers Briggs practitioner and writer living in Yorkshire, UK.

Anna Johnstone is a writer and photographer living in Glenfield.

Elizabeth Julian is a Mercy Sister working as an Adult Educator at the Wellington Catholic Education Centre teaching Scripture, Theology and Spirituality.

Jacqui Lewis is a Christchurch artist.

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Barbara Sampson is a Salvation Army officer and spiritual director living in Upper Hutt. Until recently she was the author of *Words of Life*, a book of daily Bible readings with an international circulation. She is now involved with pastoral care for Salvation Army officers around New Zealand.

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Derek Tovey is a lecturer in New Testament at St John's College, and within the School of Theology, University of Auckland. The Gospel of John is his main area of research interest.

Susan Wilson teaches theology and Scripture by Distance Learning at the Wellington Catholic Education Centre.

WHO ARE YOU?

When you take time to listen
 When you take off the masks
 To become vulnerable too
 You have the ears of Jesus

When you see a hurting soul
 When you can find beauty in ugliness
 believing in goodness despite suffering
 You see with the eyes of Jesus

When you give words of hope and life
 When you set down wise boundaries
 and risk upsetting the status quo
 You speak the words of Jesus

When you act out of deep compassion
 to love another without judgement
 When you respond to injustice
 You have the heart of Jesus

When you reach out to embrace the world
 When you walk in the light of the truth
 Reflecting it back to others
 You are Jesus in the flesh.

Val Roberts

A BLESSING

The amazing grace
 of the Master,
 Jesus Christ,
 the extravagant love
 of God,
 the intimate friendship
 of the
 Holy Spirit,
 be with all of you.

2 Corinthians 13:13.
The Message