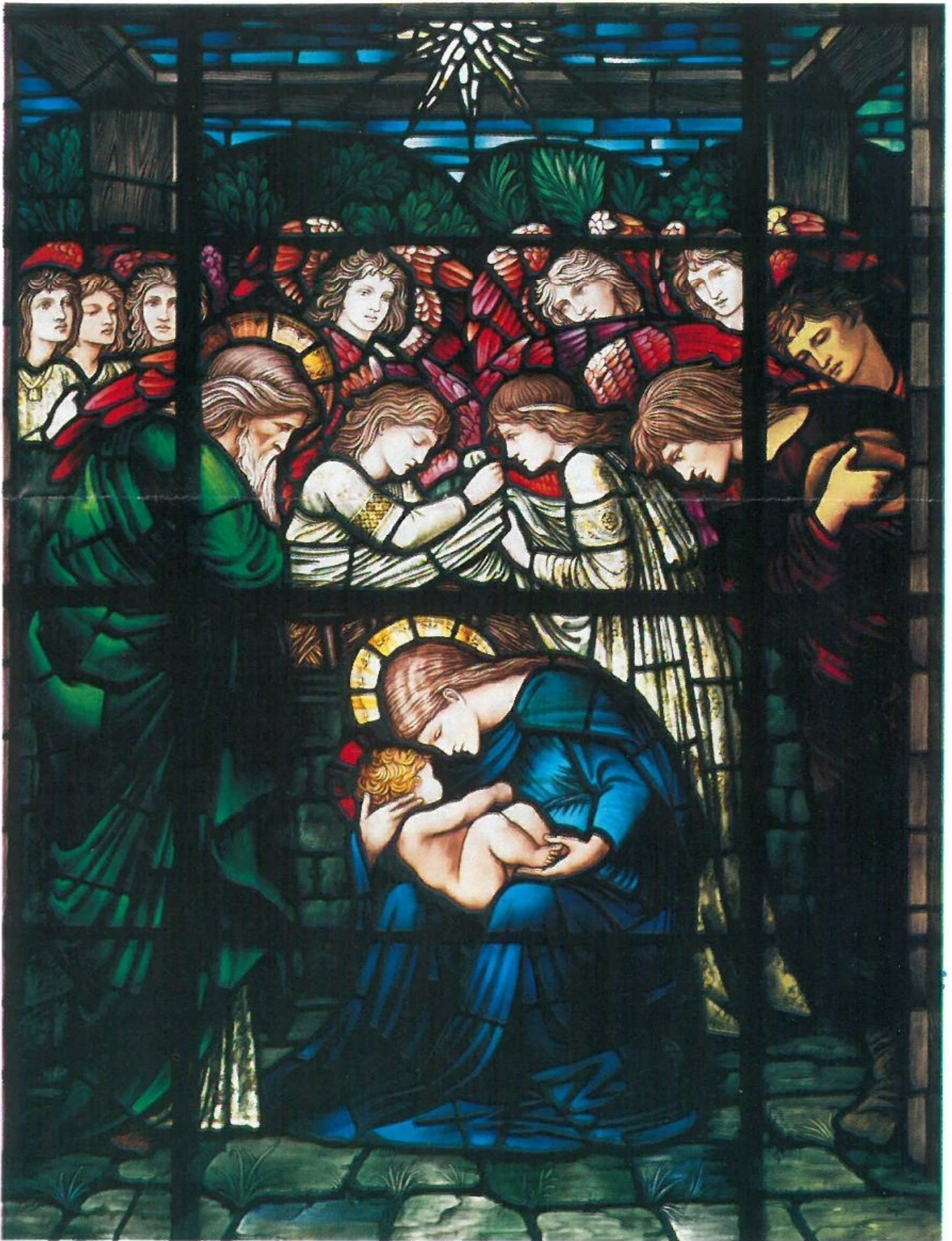


The Carmelite News

NOVEMBER 1992



HELLO AGAIN. Isn't it odd how some tiny details of life stick clearly in the memory? I can distinctly remember my father telling me (some years ago now) that time seems to go faster in the second half of life. I was about thirty then, but now I know what he meant. The ink hardly seems to be dry on the last Newsletter and here I am writing the next one, looking forward to Christmas and beyond that to the great feast of the Epiphany. But first things first. The two saints of Carmel for this issue have their joint feastday in Advent, so let's start with them.

SAINTS OF CARMEL (7)

Pierre Berthelot was born in Honfleur in Normandy (France) on 12th December 1600. As a young man he left home to go to sea, voyaging to Spain, England, newly discovered America, but chiefly to the East Indies (1619) - to Java, where he was captured by Dutch pirates, and Malacca where he settled down after his release, and finally - in 1629 - he arrived in Goa. Some of his excellent charts from these voyages are preserved in the British Museum in London. Because of his outstanding skill in navigation and his wide knowledge of the East Indies he soon came to the attention of the Portuguese authorities in Goa and in September 1629 he was appointed as chief pilot to a fleet being sent to relieve Malacca which was then being besieged by forces of the Sultan of Archén, an Islamic kingdom on the huge island of Sumatra. For his part in the triumphal defeat of the Archén forces (noted also, as we shall see, by the Archén authorities who had long memories) he was confirmed for life as Chief Pilot and Cosmographer of the Indies to the Portuguese Viceroy of Goa. It was while he was in Goa that he first encountered the Discalced Carmelites who had recently opened a new priory

The salvation of the just
comes from the Lord.
He is their strength
in time of need.

there. He chose Fr. Philip of the Trinity ODC as his spiritual advisor and under his direction and encouragement left the sea (or so he thought) and became a Discalced Carmelite friar in 1635 (making his profession in 1636), taking the name Dionysius (we would say Denis) of the Nativity. He soon established a reputation as a model of all the virtues, and in August 1638 he was ordained a priest, intending to work evangelising the indigenous Goan peoples. However, he was selected (obviously for his maritime skills and his knowledge of the Malayan language) to go as spiritual adviser to Francesco de Souza de Castro who was to lead a delicate diplomatic mission on behalf of Pedro de Silva, the Portuguese Viceroy of Goa, to the new Sultan of Archén in Sumatra. As a spiritual companion on this difficult and potentially dangerous mission Fr. Denis chose one Brother Redemptus, a fellow Discalced Carmelite from the house in Goa.

Br. Redemptus had been born as Tomás Rodrigues da la Cunha in 1598 in Poredes (in Portugal). While still very young he had enlisted on ship in the service of the crown and found himself in the East Indies. For some time he had been seeking guidance about a more spiritual life, and he encountered the Discalced Carmelites at Tatta (now in Sindh Province, Pakistan). He was impressed by their simplicity, their apostolic work among the indigenous peoples of the area and their devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. He entered the order there, taking the name Redemptus of the Cross. He made his profession as a Brother. Almost at once he was moved, first to Duc and then shortly to Goa where

he served as sacristan for many years. It was there that he met Fr. Denis when he entered in 1635. As soon as they met they struck up a deep spiritual friendship, like David and Jonathan, encouraging one another on the way of perfection and striving each to emulate the other in generosity towards God, Our Lady and their brethren.

Together Fr. Denis and Br. Redemptus set sail on their mission on 25th September 1638, reaching Archén on 25th October. The embassy was received with honour and apparent rejoicing, but once inside the city they were all made prisoner. The children and two women in the Ambassador's party were sold as slaves (later rescued by some Jesuit missionaries to whom they related the events that follow): all the men (some 70 in number) were imprisoned. As outstanding members of the group Denis and Redemptus were singled out for special treatment. The Sultan attempted to make them renounce their faith and become muslims, but gross ill-treatment and even torture failed to move them and with the others they were finally executed by the sword, Redemptus first and Denis, after encouraging the others, last, on 29th November 1638. Both died calling on the names of Jesus and Mary. They were beatified by Pope Leo XIII in June 1900. Their martyrdom is celebrated on 29th November by both branches of the Carmelite family, who thank God for the lives and exemplary deaths of **Blessed Denis and Redemptus**.

Almighty and Eternal God, who in your wondrous providence led Bl. Denis and Redemptus through the perils of the sea to the palm of martyrdom, grant through their intercession that in the midst of earthly vicissitudes and worldly desires we who are weak may be strengthened to remain steadfast, even unto death, in the praise of your Name. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

A SENSE OF HUMOUR

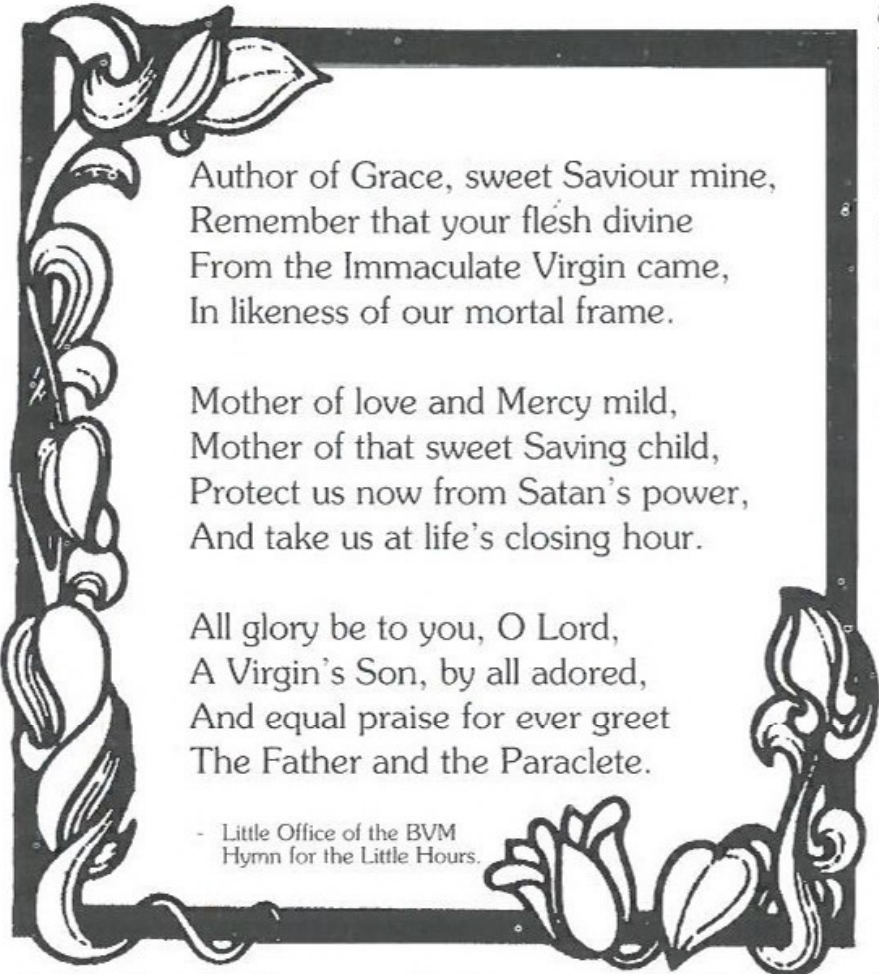
Bishop James Black (1st Bishop of Paisley, near Glasgow in Scotland, 1948-68) was well known for his sense of humour. On one occasion he arrived in solemn procession to the foot of the sanctuary steps in St. Mirin's Cathedral to find the marble gates firmly closed. Before the MC could organise a posse of acolytes to go forward and open them with symmetrical dignity, the bishop's voice was heard from the back of the procession to say: "When I say 'three', jump."

THE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS

Anyone growing up today would think Christmas is about feasting and presents, about holly, singing carols, Christmas trees, and giving the kids a good time. But all this has been wished on us by commercial interests and sentimental story tellers like Charles Dickens. And it is not even about good will to all men (even if that includes all women). What it is about is something much more important - and important for adults rather than for children. And the place to find out what it is all about is in the Good Book.

The Gospels present four versions of the chief events in the ministry of Jesus. But they are not simply history: they don't all include the same material, and where a story occurs in more than one gospel the details often differ and may even appear contradictory. The gospels are only historical in the sense that the four accounts of the ministry of Jesus take their origin in words that Jesus spoke and deeds that he performed. The recounting of those words and deeds underwent considerable adaptation between the time of Jesus' ministry and the time when they were written

Lo! the Infant Saviour lies,
He appears in lowly guise,
Yet by faith we read the words:-
King of kings and Lord of lords.

A decorative border with floral and scrollwork motifs surrounds the text. It features stylized leaves and flowers, particularly prominent in the top-left and bottom-right corners.

Author of Grace, sweet Saviour mine,
Remember that your flesh divine
From the Immaculate Virgin came,
In likeness of our mortal frame.

Mother of love and Mercy mild,
Mother of that sweet Saving child,
Protect us now from Satan's power,
And take us at life's closing hour.

All glory be to you, O Lord,
A Virgin's Son, by all adored,
And equal praise for ever greet
The Father and the Paraclete.

- Little Office of the BVM
Hymn for the Little Hours.

down - thirty to fifty years after the events. The witnesses, when preaching about Jesus, knew (since they were preaching AFTER the resurrection) how the story ended: they knew that Jesus was the Son of God, and that knowledge affected their telling about what they saw and heard. And there was further selection, synthesis and explanation added when the gospel writers committed these accounts to writing in the form we have today. The result is that the gospel accounts of the ministry of Jesus are not necessarily literal accounts of what Jesus actually did and said.

This three stage history for the gospels [(i) the ministry of Jesus itself, (ii) the preaching by the apostles about the Ministry of Jesus, and (iii) the writing down of the preaching to form the gospels we have] is the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. It was first clearly stated in the Pontifical Biblical Commission's **Instruction on the Historical Truth of the Gospels** as far back as 1964. This official document

affirms that: "The truth of the story is not at all affected by the fact that the Evangelists relate the words and deeds of the Lord in a different order and express his sayings not literally but differently, while preserving their sense." And the 3-stage history of the gospels tells us why they may differ. It means that when dealing with the reports of the **ministry** of Jesus the scholars must seek to determine as well as they can what the historical events behind the accounts actually were: to establish what actually happened or what actually was said, or not said, by Jesus himself. The apostles recognised

Jesus as the Son of God at the **resurrection**, and so the first preaching told and retold the story of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of the Lord. Later, attention shifted to the ministry of Jesus as foreshadowing the Passion, Death and Resurrection. So when Mark wrote his gospel, the first to be written, he felt that the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan at the beginning of Jesus' ministry revealed who Jesus was. So he started with the **baptism** as "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God." In Mark's view of Jesus the Resurrection simply revealed clearly what was really already there in a veiled way. He was not interested in what Jesus said or did before the baptism.

Later reflection asked the question "Was the voice of the Father at the baptism *adopting* Jesus as Son, or *revealing and confirming* something already true?" So Matthew and Luke intended in their Gospel to establish that Jesus was the Son of God (as prophesied in the Old Testament) from the first instant of his

conception. Thus his very birth is part of the story of salvation. It is in itself Good News.

Unfortunately, they did not know anything about it. There were no living witnesses available for them to ask, and the earlier preaching - as the Church's teaching clearly states - was concerned only with the ministry, Passion, Death and Resurrection. The stories of the birth (our Christmas stories) do not come from any actual historical events but are rather Matthew and Luke meditating

on the Old Testament prophecies and, based on those Old Testament passages, painting word pictures which reveal their (and the Church's) conviction that this child is indeed the Son of God, fully divine and fully human in himself. And because Matthew and Luke had different audiences in mind, they painted their pictures with different details drawn from different Old Testament texts.

St. Matthew was concerned to show that this divine child was the Messiah, the chosen one of God, the Saviour, that Matthew's own people, the Jews, had been expecting for ages. So he selected details that linked the child to Moses and King David. Thus the virginal conception echoes words from Isaiah 7; the place of birth (Bethlehem) echoes Micah 5; The Flight into Egypt echoes Hosea 11 and the Return echoes Exodus 4. The Massacre of the Innocents echoes Jeremiah 31, the Wise Men from the East with their gifts echoes Isaiah 60 and Psalm 72, and their star echoes a rabbinical *midrash* (= scholars' elaboration and explanation) of 1 Kings 10; and lots more. Don't take my word for it - get

the Good Book off the shelf and check it out yourself. So St. Matthew's first two chapters were not written as a film script or for a radio documentary. They are a poetic way of telling his Jewish readers - who would have known their Scriptures better than we know ours, alas - that this child is a new Moses, a new liberator, a

new Davidic King greater even than Solomon in all his glory, who will completely restore and save God's people.

St. Luke, with a different audience in mind and a special

interest in the poor and the lowly, uses other details to paint his picture. He uses echoes of Daniel 9, Malachi 3, Zechariah 9, Joel 2, Zephaniah 3, Exodus 24, Numbers 9, 2 Samuel 6, Isaiah 9 and 19, and lots more.

So these two stories, which seem at first sight to be telling about actual events, but which share only a few details in common, are not contradictory or "difficult to reconcile" because neither is claiming to be history or biography. They are both profound, serious (and yes, very learned) meditations on who this child is. He is, they tell us, God-with-us, God who shares our nature, who will later redeem us, restore us, transform us, lift us up and lead us to glory with the Father.

So really it is better to read the stories in words than to try to draw pictures of them which will only make them seem contradictory, seem to be about actual stables, kings, shepherds, stars and angels, all surrounded with tinsel and glitter, holly and snow, robins and logs, all sharing time with turkeys and puddings and the kids having a good time. Christmas is too serious a celebration to be left to the interests of commerce to

FORTHCOMING NOVENAS

To the Infant of Prague

25th Dec. to 2nd Jan.

* * *

For Reconciliation

17th - 25th January

* * *

To St. Jude

12th - 20th February

organise. Rather it recalls the Good News (i.e., Gospel) of Salvation in Jesus Christ. So celebrate, let the kids have a good time but remember often through all the drink and the indigestion, that it is really about God's love and our salvation. And through it also we honour Our Lady, whose "Yes" to God made a real birth possible! All praise to God who loves us, and to his blessed Mother who brought him to us at the first Christmas.

[For the serious minded: if you would like to read more about our understanding of the Christmas stories there are two short paperback books I can recommend, and they are both in print and available from your booksellers: **1.** "An Adult Christ at Christmas" by Raymond E. Brown, (50 pages, £3.50) published by the Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, U.S. **2.** *The First Christmas: what really happened* by H.J. Richards (128 pages, £3.50) published by Mowbray's, London and Oxford.]

Well, that was all very serious (as Christmas should be!) and a bit hard-going, so let's finish with another smile.

ANOTHER SMILE

A bishop (actually it was an Archbishop) was going to visit a parish for a school visit in Advent. As his car approached the Church it passed a butcher's shop and the bishop spied a row of absolutely magnificent hams hanging in the window, and he thought one of those would be just what he wanted as a present for the convent whose sisters ran his household. He called to his chauffeur to stop, but the chauffeur insisted they were already late because of the traffic problems they had had, but that they would have time to stop on the way back. So the bishop agreed

to buy it after their visit to the school. But the Nativity play at the school lasted a bit longer than they had expected and it was close to closing time when they reached the butcher's shop to find the window empty and the butcher about to close the door for the day. Stopping hastily the chauffeur dashed up to the door and breathlessly asked if there was a ham the bishop could buy. The butcher beckoned him into the shop and said in a whisper: "You tell the bishop that if he'll move the parish priest I'll give him the whole pig."

THE TAIL-END

Well, I didn't get to the Epiphany after all, but I must mention the pictures on the Newsletter and the Novena leaflet. They are two of four windows (the others next time) in Winchester Cathedral. They were designed by Edward Burne-Jones in late Pre-Raphaelite style: with great attention to accuracy of detail, an historical look, and a strange, timeless feeling as though the figures had stood still like this for ever and will never move again.

On the Newsletter is the nativity scene, and on the Novena leaflet is the arrival of the three wise men. I will say something about the Epiphany next year - if God spares me, as one of our brethren says.

Have a good and holy Christmas. God bless you, and may Our Lady cover you with the mantle of her mothering.

A handwritten signature in red ink that reads "David J. Fox" with "O. Carm." written below it.

David J. Fox, O. Carm

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