

THAW

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Canon Jim Irvine,

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(Click on the figure of Francis)

Editor: Harold Macdonald

hgmacton@mts.net

links:

www.tssf.org

www.franciscans.com

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In This issue

A critical assessment of two articles by our own TSSF professed member, the Rt. Rev. Mark Macdonald, bishop of Alaska. He writes in "Ministry Matters" published in Anglican Church House, Sam Carriere editor and another earlier article published in the 2000 edition of "First Peoples Theology Journal". Then we have an Advent poem from none other than Archdemon Weir Shivering of Chesterfield Bay, called "Come as Ice" And finally, a set of Advent Reflections in response to Nativity stories from Luke, Matthew and John. I wish you all a blessed Christmas and an Advent of renewal.

HOW THE GOSPEL CAME TO NORTH AMERICA.

Mark Macdonald, bishop of the diocese of Alaska, has written two articles being reviewed in this issue of Thaw! The first article was published recently in the Canadian journal "Ministry Matters". The second article by Bishop Mark Macdonald, TSSF., appeared in the first volume of "First Peoples Theology Journal" published in the year 2000, six years earlier.. The later article is more concerned with a history of

exploration and exploitation, the earlier is a bit more concerned with theology. Both articles can be obtained through the Anglican Church website. Both articles are concerned with indigenization of the Gospel within the forms, languages customs of aboriginal communities. . Neither gives much power to the Gospel captured, as it were, by the European culture(s) in which it took form.

We'll take these articles in the biblical order, the last first, the essay on the Gospel coming to North America.

The governing truth which shapes ""The Gospel Comes to North America" is that the settlers, the European immigrants, were thought to have "discovered" North America. Hello Columbus. Hello Jacques Cartier. Hello Champlain. In spite of the rhetoric, most Canadians outside the First Nations, still think this way. They believe the land is Canadian because their forebearers were the first to lay claim to it "legally". Exceptions would be lands which were ceded to Indian peoples by treaty. The bishop calls this "The Doctrine of Discovery".

According this narrative, the European explorers "discovered" and laid claim to North America, driving out the aboriginal peoples by peaceful and warlike means until the last of them were marched off to reserves, in the late 19th century; Big Bear being the last of the great Indian leaders to succumb. In this version of events, the path of history is strewn with broken promises and exploitation. Despite the efforts of the Churches to humanize the process by education and ordination of native persons, the process led to the dismal and lethal situation of aboriginal peoples which confronts us, the "settlers", today.

Bishop Macdonald sees hope. Despite the fact that the authoritarian regime of the Churches destroyed local culture and language, pockets of aboriginal spirituality are coming to life under the kind tutelage of the Spirit.

Without minimizing the tragic truths of this politically correct tale of victimization, one might say that this history partakes of a romanticism which we noted in Tom Harpur's book "The Pagan Christ" last month. As in many victim stories, the motif is that those closest to the land, the original people, Eden-like, (*The People of the Land") are simple but good, while the invaders from the sophisticated urban cultures of Europe are complex but evil. There is a longing among some aboriginal thinkers, like Mark Macdonald, for a return to the purity of simple ways, a rejection of "assimilation" into the culture of the "settlers" the invaders. As if it were better to be poor and pure on a reserve, than prosperous and assimilated in a modern city.

There is another way of telling the story of European settlement which one finds in Harold Innis' seminal book, "The History of the Fur Trade in Canada". Innis proposes that the reason for the success of exploration in Canada, depended on the success of the fur trade; and the latter succeeded because of the unquenchable thirst of

Indian people for the artifacts obtained by trading animal pelts. There were, for instance, iron pots which could be placed over fires. After pots and pans came rifles and traps. Indian men and women couldn't get enough of the things of the better equipped European culture which came to their doorsteps. Jesus Christ, priests, church, bible, sacraments did not seem a price to pay but another gift to be acquired. This reading of history I would call not "The Doctrine of Discovery" but "The Doctrine of Practical Usage".

Today the two histories, offer very different promises for the future of the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada. The romantic story would point young people into their past, unclear though it is; towards the recovery of lost language, towards a spirituality of holy ground, (towards Casinos?), towards the spirit of the Eagle, or the Wolf. The other would lead them through education for the job market; into professional life. (Does that not sound familiar?) Many Indian men and women have become lawyers who ironically protect the right not to enter the upward mobility of the reigning culture. There are traps in assimilation, to be sure: but the romantic view can lead only to disaster. Recently John Ibbitson, a sympathetic columnist in the *Globe and Mail*, urged Indian teens on the reserves to abandon their schools at once and head to the cities, because their chance of graduating on the reserve was so small. A future of alcohol, drugs, boredom and suicide, looms for them on the reserve. Mr. Ibbitson is speaking "The Doctrine of Practical Usage".

In his article, "The Church and the Peoples of the Land" written six years earlier Bishop Macdonald writes somewhat more as a theologian and less as an historian. He writes such powerful statements as this: "... the joyful and divine reality (of the Gospel) is that the message is greater than the intent of the messenger. ... Though the Church's presentation of the Gospel was crafted to subdue, oppress, and at times, eliminate the Peoples of the Land, the Gospel actually has become a call for liberation". And he writes eloquently of the desire of the Spirit to enter local communities, in this case, aboriginal communities, to raise up in the form of their customs, language and values a new expression of the Word of God.

The bishop of Alaska cannot know the story of Canadian dealings with the problems of Indian communities. He might not know how dismal has been our attempts to bring creative change. He might not know how much money and time has been wasted in unsuccessful attempts to bring even clean water to aboriginal communities in the north or how impossible decent life has become on the northern reserves of the country. He might not know the weight of dependency descended on native people from the patriarchal Indian Act, which must be changed but cannot be changed. He might not know that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, exempted Aboriginal peoples so that women do not have property rights, (so-called) as do men on reserves. Resistance to change comes from the Indian people themselves.

The way forward is long and hard; and perhaps impossible. But I speak as a pupil of "The Doctrine of Practical Usage". Indigenous religion becomes a faint consolation under a permanent boil-water order or in moldy housing or in the idleness of lonely northern communities.

COME AS ICE

By The Ven Weir Shivering

Do not give me roses
E'en without the thorn
the good that God disposes
must be a winter storm
for God both once and thrice
must come as ice.

Do not give me comfort
the sun-drenched holiday
where beach and surf comport
where naked children play
but let God roll the frozen dice
and come as ice.

Let God's breath be frigid
Pure and sharp and cold
Until the sea is rigid
Hard as burnished gold
Be not kind or nice
God, come as ice.

ADVENT REFLECTIONS ON CHRISTMAS READINGS,

Luke 1:26-38

This is not only a story about the angel Gabriel and Mary. It is a story about living in the Spirit. We are in this story. It is also about us.

So when we are perplexed it is because the Lord has come close and is greeting us. Something new is about to happen to us. The Lord is with us. Think now about those things which have perplexed you and which you have put out of your mind. And think: I am being addressed. An angel is saying to me, "greetings favored one".

Luke 1:39-45

Mary is called by God. But so are you and so am I. We are called in our baptism, and repeatedly in grace given to us daily. Like Mary, we celebrate our call. We are glad to pray daily; we look forward to meeting with others at the table of the

Lord. We confront issues in our lives with the words, "Be it unto me according to your word.". We visit others and tell them of our calling. Or do we?

Luke 2:1-7

Like Mary we are not worried about trivialities. We accept simple beginnings. Small things are good enough for starting points. We ask for nothing except that God gives us places to begin. A new child is born. A loved one expresses a need. A little door opens in a relationship. We have divested ourselves of fan-fare. So we see it happen and we go through. Think of your small moments of invitation into healing and helping.

Luke 2:8-14

We are often afraid, more frequently than we would like to admit. A new job, a new office. We don't even know where to find the bathroom. We have to learn our new situation and learning takes time and we are afraid. So we are patient. We are quiet. Gradually we begin to notice. To find our way. Lord, give us patience with people, new situations, conversations. Listen. It takes time. It will come. Be still. The terrible sight of a host of angels will turn into the quietness of a manger and the beauty of a birth. Be still, be patient it will come to pass

Luke 2:15-20

Go and see. The Christian must get off his or her duff. Faith without works is dead. Turn off the TV and get on the phone, "Are you alright?" you ask. "I was wondering about you". "Did anyone change the altar hangings for Advent Sunday? Go and see. Is my nephew in Afghanistan OK? Pray. Encourage his or her relatives. The Lord tells us many things but we have to go and see. Is there some going in your life which beckons?

Matthew 2:1-11

This lesson is about treasures; first the treasure of the birth of Jesus. Not to be shared with enemies or those who care not. This is a treasure only for those who will bring treasures. God gives treasure, we respond with treasure. We value God and Jesus beyond all price. We are honoured to come into His Presence. In the church there may be squeaky shoes, weird hats, people talking loudly about the weather, but behind all that there is something so wonderful that your soul falls silent in adoration. Is that not so?

John 1:1-14

The One who calls me, who comes to me, is the Creator of heaven and earth. God is the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity and is also with the person of a contrite heart. I feel two things at once: I am so small in God's presence. And yet I am

lifted up by God's coming to me, by name, in my need. The Maker of all is at my side. The Word is made flesh for me.