

CARMEL CONTACT

from the Australian Carmelites

No. 39, November 1998

Christmas – Crib and Cross

Twelve months ago I was with many other Carmelites in Westminster Cathedral, celebrating the declaration of St Thérèse of Lisieux as a Doctor of the Church. I reflected in that Christmas *Carmel Contact* how she might feel about the pomp and ceremony, her lighthearted feeling that if God wanted the solemnity of this big event then that would be great.

Today I'm sitting at a typewriter in the Wentworthville priory, thinking about another Carmelite nun – German, philosopher and university lecturer, a gentle humour about her unpracticality, prayed for a world in flames – and wondering how I'm going to relate her to the Christmas theme. Easy enough to relate Thérèse to Christmas the last two years – but Edith Stein? Jewish Catholic (1922) – became a Carmelite (1933) – murdered in Auschwitz death camp (1942) – known, certainly, maybe mainly through the controversy of her beatification as a martyr in 1987 and perhaps through current newspaper articles as her canonisation (11 October 1998) gets closer: what to do? Controversy and Christmas don't seem to mix.

They do of course. That first Christmas: no room in the inn, scholars following a star, an aging

prince fearful of a rival, a Jewish family in flight from killers. Edith's journey: Orthodox Judaism to atheism to Catholicism, family rift, thinker, a Jewish woman in flight from killers, captured and killed.

She says in her essay *Mystery of Christmas* that 'whoever belongs to Christ ought to live the whole life of Christ: ought to attain the maturity of Christ and finally should set out on the way of the cross, towards Gethsemane and Golgotha'. Edith Stein knew that it is Crib and Cross, because she knew the reality of the Word incarnate, the truly human life of Jesus, the journey that is at once joy and sorrow.

Perhaps it's the serious scholar who can see both light and darkness in Christmas. But it's the lov-

ing woman who never judges who says that 'for the Christian no one is a stranger, our neighbour is everyone who is before us and has extreme need of us; it doesn't matter whether they're relatives or not, disagreeable or not, morally worthy of help or not' (*Mystery of Christmas*). We sing about Good King Wenceslaus and the poor man he helped: Edith knows that Christmas is Wenceslaus in action: more, Jesus – God's way of being human in action, for 'Christ's love knows no bounds, is never ending, does not draw back before ugliness and filth' (*Mystery of Christmas*).

I don't quite know where I am with Edith just as I didn't quite know where I was with Thérèse this time last year. With Thérèse then, I think you and I found the joy. With Edith now, I think you and I are finding the trust, the realism, the openness. Thérèse: a bubbling joy, a direct approach. Edith: a quiet joy, a pondering.

Maybe as you read this you get your own picture of Edith – woman, Jew, scholar, Catholic, Carmelite, real; maybe you will see with Edith, Christmas is God's love in action: unconditional and total and passionate – and always.

Bernard Shah, O.Carm.

Fr Agung Wahyundianto



I am an Indonesian Carmelite. I was born on 26 August 1968 in Surabaya. Although I come from a Moslem country my parents are Catholic. I have one brother and two sisters.

When I was a child, I never thought that one day I would be a priest living in a religious order. Until I was sixteen, I wanted to become a member of the Indonesian Navy (as my father). But after finishing my study in Junior School, I decided to enter the St Vincentius a Paulo Minor Seminary. As a seminarian, I had a dream to become a Jesuit or a Trappist (Gee.. How contradictory?). Until

one day there a Carmelite priest gave a retreat for us and, suddenly, I realized that I found the 'middle way', the Carmel. I had never met the Carmelite before and I was quite impressed with their 'elegant habits'. After that I started to learn more about the Carmel by reading and visiting their monastery. Gradually I found that this is the Order that I want to join. Not because it fulfilled my 'Jesuit-Trappist' dreaming, but it was the brotherhood of Carmel that ultimately drew me to them.

In 1990 I entered the Novitiate together with 24 other candidates. In 1993 I finished my Bachelor of Theology at Widya Sasana Institute of Philosophy and Theology in Malang and, in 1995, I finished my Masters degree in Theology. During this formation period, I realized more the many gifts and charisms of the Carmelite Order. There was one thing I felt strongly in this Order, namely the spirit of hospitality and prayer.

I was ordained on 3 October 1996. After my 'honeymoon', the province sent me as chaplain to a

small parish in Batu. I like to work among young people so sometimes I give retreats for high school students. I worked quite happily in the parish but my plan is not God's plan. Seeing my 'hobby', my province decided to send me to this country to study Pastoral Theology. They hope after finishing my Master degree, I will return to Indonesia and work for young people. At first, I felt nervous and hesitated, because I had never been overseas. I thought that 'western' people were individualistic and lacking a sense of hospitality. But when I met the Aussies and lived with Carmelites in this country, I realised that my thought was absolutely wrong. I am happy living with my new brothers here. I found the spirit of Carmel both in the Carmelites and from the people in here. This experience convinced me that, as an Order, our spirits are of warmth, compassion, hospitality and friendship. I want to keep these spirits in my life because I must if I really want to follow in the footsteps of the loving and compassionate Christ as a Carmelite. I hope.

Can dreams come true?

There has always been a special relationship between the members of the international Carmelite family. Like any family, we try to keep in touch with each other. We share each others joys and sorrows. When one part of the family is in need, all try to share the burden.

You have already read about Father Hilarius and Father Agung, two of our Indonesian Carmelites who have been given the opportunity to do post-graduate studies here in Australia. To realise this dream, the Australian and Indonesian Carmelites have shared the travelling, living and education expenses involved up to now.

Next year we hope that two more Indonesian Carmelites and one Indian Carmelite may also be able to come to Australia for further studies.

For many years Australian members of the Carmelite

family, like you, supported the Australian mission in Sumbul. You built a church, provided grain and farm machinery, helped pay for courses so that farmers could learn how to produce better crops, supported the three Carmelites who worked there: Fathers Anthony Scerri and Paul Gurr and Brother Tim Goosens. Our mission fund, supported by you, helped train lay pastoral workers for the many outlying mission stations which the Carmelites could only visit a couple of times a year.

Later, again with your support, we helped build the first Catholic University in Indonesia. We provided books, helped students from poor families to get an education and supported Father Anthony Scerri in his role as vice-chancellor.

For the last year or so we have been supporting Agung and Hilarius in their studies in Australia. The Asian economic crisis earlier this year means that it is

Fr Hilarius Beslon Pandiangan



I was born on December 22th 1965 in Palipi, North Sumatera (Indonesia). *Beslon* is my surname, and *Pandiangan* is my family name. *Hilarius* is my baptism name. Not long after my first birthday, my parents moved to Sidikalang (still in North Sumatera), where Fr Paul Gurr (now Jamberoo, NSW) has worked for several years.

In 1983 I finished my secondary schooling in Sidikalang. Then, from July 1983 to May 1988 I became a seminarian in Minor Seminary, Pematangsiantar. While I lived in the Seminary, I got to know both the Franciscans

and the Carmelites. In my experience the Franciscans were a very good Order, but the Carmelites touched my heart. I really didn't know which one of Jesus's footsteps I should follow. In the long term acquiring devotion to the Mother of Rosary has helped me. In July 18th 1988 I became a Carmelite novice in Malang, East Java. The next step was the simple profession in July 8th 1990 and then solemn profession in August 15th 1995.

I have previously completed degrees in philosophy and theology at Widya Sasana Institute of Philosophy and Theology, Malang: BA in 1993 with an essay, *The Concepts of God in the Batak's Religion*, and my Masters degree in 1996 with a thesis, *Mystical Life and the Carmelite Apostolic Mission Based on the Life of Blessed Titus Brandsma*.

October 5th 1996 was the most important day in my life. It was my ordination day. I do realise that it's just the first stage of profound steps in my priesthood. To this I

found my motto:

'O Jesus, my Love... my vocation, at last I have found it... My Vocation is Love! Yes I have found my place in the Church and it is You, O my God, who has given me this place; in the heart of the Church, my Mother, I shall be Love. Thus I shall be everything, and my dream will be realised' (Thérèse of Lisieux).

At the end of January 1998 I arrived in Australia. I was surprised by everything in this multicultural country. Not only the fantastic weather and your nice people, but also your high prices of everything sometimes make me feel very inferior if I want to buy it.

Now I am studying in the field of spirituality here. Although we are not sure how our Indonesian Carmelite Province can support my study, they sent me here to prepare myself to become a formator for Carmelite novices in Indonesia. Now I am doing my Master of Spirituality at Melbourne College of Divinity. Hopefully I might finish it in two years, while improving my English.

increasingly difficult to meet the expenses involved. Currency exchange rates between the Indonesian rupiah and the Australian dollar are at an all time low. Our Indonesian Carmelites are finding it very hard to share the expenses with us, but they also know how important it is that they have well-trained Carmelites who can share their knowledge with other Carmelites and people at home.

It costs an average of \$12,000 for each student each year, including course fees, books (av \$30 each), food, clothing, medical and transport costs. A significant part of these expenses is the intensive English course (\$4,200).

In spite of the difficulties, the Indonesian Carmelites remain hopeful that, with our help, they can send two more to study here next year. Our Indian Carmelites are sending Father Joseph Adapoor here next year for further study. In time, Carmelites from Vietnam and the Philippines will also come to Australia to study here.

We would like to set up a special fund to make this possible for these other members of our Carmelite family. We would like to call it the V.I.I.P. (Vietnam, Indonesia, India, the Philippines) Carmelite Students Fund.

Can you help us look after our brothers from Vietnam, Indonesia, India and the Philippines? Your support will not only provide further education for them, through them many others will be touched by your generosity.

There is a form on the last page of this issue of Carmel Contact which you can use.

Thank you for your generosity and support.



Fr David Hofman, O.Carm.

Reflection

One of the most enduring and useful images of Christian life is that of the pilgrimage. The image conveys the sense that every Christian is on a spiritual journey of growth and discovery from the time of baptism. The image is soundly based in Scripture, and describes the variety of ways in which faith matures and changes as the experience of God touches human life.

The journey of faith undertaken by Abraham and Sarah in the Book of Genesis, the desert experience of Moses and the people of Israel in the Book of Exodus, and the portrayal of Jesus making his way to Jerusalem, are three examples of movement and change as a constant and consistent factor of Christian spiritual life.

There is another image connected to the idea of a pilgrim or wayfarer in the Hebrew Scriptures (or Old Testament), and in the New Testament. This is the belief that not only during the journey or pilgrimage, but even when settled, the Christian will always be a transient visitor, or a stranger, a resident alien,

even in places thought of as home. The Hebrew for this is *ger* (plural *gerîm*). Abraham is 'a stranger and an alien' (Gen. 23.4); and Moses is 'an alien residing in a foreign land' (Ex. 2.22). God says to the people: 'You shall not wrong or oppress a



resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt' (Ex. 22.21).

In the New testament, the Greek *paroikos* (plural, *paroikoi*) expresses the same idea. In Stephen's speech the word is used twice: 'resident

aliens' (Acts 7.6), and 'resident alien' (Acts 7.29). In the Letter to the Ephesians, Paul states that through Christ Jesus 'you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God' (Eph. 2.19). The First Letter of Peter calls the Christians 'aliens and exiles' (1 Pet. 2.11). The early Church also used these words to describe Christians.

The words have been taken over into daily Christian practice. They are the origin of the traditional terms used to describe communities of Christians and those who make up those communities: *parish* and *parishioners*.

The scriptural origins of *pilgrim* and *parish* remind us that Christian faith is a journey to wholeness. Christians can never be completely at home in this world, but will always be moving towards new life in the Trinity. The *pilgrim* and the *parish* witness to this new life of love by recognizing and welcoming Christ in the stranger, the refugee, the exile and the marginalized.

V.I.I.P. CARMELITE STUDENTS FUND

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