# GOOD NEWS
## AUSTRALIA

Editors: Paul A. Porter and Robert C. Cooper

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# The Lord's Prayer #2

**by Paul Porter**

### "Hallowed be thy name . . ."

A boy once asked his ageing father: "When is a man rich enough? When he has $100,000?" "No," replied the old man. "500,000?" asked the son. "No," said the father. "One million?" "No." "Two million?" "No.?"

"Well," said the boy, "when **is** a man rich enough?" "When he has a little more than he has now, and that is **never**," came the reply.

The dilemma of the rich is the dilemma of us all. Faced with the knowledge of our death and ultimate anonymity, we seek to focus our lives on a cause that will survive and define us. But infinite needs are not readily satisfied.

James Fowler tells of a popular, overworked surgeon who briefly revealed his private thoughts in a chance, hospital corridor meeting with his minister:

> He talked of the pressures of his life, the professional burdens he carried, and the family strains he lived with. After a time his clergyman put to him a frank question: "Doctor," he said, "who are you when you're not an M.D.?" Stunned, but only for a moment, the surgeon replied, "By God, I'm **always** an M.D.!" (*Stages of Faith* [1981] 20).

The problem we face is that the central concerns of our lives are rarely **ultimate** concerns. For various reasons, we assume that success, power, prestige, wealth, fame and the like are ends in themselves. Having elevated these to central life-defining value, we worship at an altar on which sits the faintly smiling image of our own ego.

True worship, on the other hand, brings us into contact with God Himself. According to C.S. Lewis, encounters of this sort disclose Someone who is "alive, pulling at the other end of the cord, perhaps approaching at infinite speed, the hunter, king, husband" (*Miracles* [1947], 114).

"There comes a moment," Mr Lewis continues, "when the children who have been playing at burglars hush suddenly: was that a **real** footstep in the hall? There comes a moment when people who have been dabbling in religion ('man's search for God!') suddenly draw back. Supposing we really found Him? We never meant it to come to **that**! Worse still, supposing He had found us!" (*Ibid.*)

God's name is hallowed with the acceptance that life's central pursuits are sacred, not secular. Whereas the Greeks lived in order to know and the Romans knew in order to live, Christians pursue knowledge and life itself in order to worship. □

## Roller Coasters

**by Robert Cooper**

**"Roller coasters."** The very name conjures up thoughts of Disneyland, Loona Park, Wonderland, Dream World and Magic Mountain. Roller coasters represent a touch of fantasy spiced with reality. Dizzy, mad, wondrous, visionary magic spiced with the knowledge that what goes up must come down.

Roller coasters are metaphors of life, demonstrations of gravity and more painfully, perhaps, suggest truths about stocks and shares.

An acquaintance of mine recently lost $200 million. Philosophically, he gestured toward his brand-new Ferrari and wryly acknowledged that he was down to his last $100 million. I sympathetically suggested that the next time he planned to lose the odd million he might use my services as a garbologist!

Roller-coaster economics "beared" the market mood. Paper transactions suddenly seemed less secure and less smart. There was a whiff of the Apocalypse in the air. Man's transitory control of his world was re-affirmed as merely transitory.

It has ever been so. Old Testament characters such as Lot, Jacob, David and Saul, ( to name a few), all soared only to fall. Empires such as Babylon, Greece, Rome and even Britain have similarly waxed and waned.

Yet, as the Old Testament and more particularly the New Testament shows, the depths of the roller-coaster ride need not be terminal. Many months on, various Western economies have not collapsed; indeed some seem strengthened either because of or in spite of the Crash.

Two thousand years ago, the hopes of the world plunged with the death of Christ. And yet, a little over 24 hours later, his resurrection meant the roller coaster had reached a new height. In spite of the ups-and-downs of humankind, one day we will rise again. Permanently.

# God, I'm angry

**Bruce Wilson**

Can you recall when last you were really angry with someone?

Freud regards repression as the activity of pushing unpleasant conscious thoughts and feelings into the unconscious. In my experience a great number of Christians repress their anger because they believe anger, all anger, is morally wrong. That is to say, they use up a lot of their psychic energy to push angry thoughts and feelings down into their unconscious mind. One consequence is they do not think of themselves as angry people at all. For by definition what exists in the unconscious is not conscious. So if I repress my anger I don't seem to have any. My anger appears non-existent to me.

In my pastoral ministry over the years I have found that repressed sexuality and repressed anger cause more Christians to be emotionally disturbed than anything else. But repressed anger is the worst and hardest to deal with. Of course it is not only Christians who become emotionally unstable through repressed anger, but it is a problem heightened in Christians by teaching which explicitly or implicitly sees all anger as sin.

Even the largest, strongest water storage dams have flood gates. Without flood gates continued heavy rains would either overwhelm the dam wall or create side channels to allow the escape of excess. Repression is no solution to our bad thoughts and feelings or to good thoughts and feelings which, through wrong teaching, we deem bad. This is true of sex and anger. Repression is like trying to dam an unstoppable flood. One of two things will occur, both disastrous.

If we repress our anger one possibility is that the time will come when the dam wall of the self will collapse in breakdown. Not long ago this happened to a friend of mine in his mid twenties. He collapsed into uncontrollable tears at a public seminar. He had no idea what was wrong with him (the cause was unconscious, to him). He came from a Christian family where **overt** anger was never expressed. Whether or not he'd been explicitly taught that God hated all anger, this is what he had come to believe as a result of family modelling. I was expecting the breakdown and had tried, unsuccessfully, to avert it. His clearest symptom was a perpetually flat, monotonous voice. If you'd got him to say 'Peter Piper picked a pickled pepper' it would have sounded like the start of a funeral sermon. Absence of intonation was a sign of the enormous energy he put into flattening out his angry thoughts and feelings. Shortly after the collapse in the seminar he began hallucinating uncontrollably. The dam had truly burst in disaster.

## Anger in marriage

Another possible consequence of repressed anger is that the walled-up emotion will break through into uncontrolled side channels. Another person I know who was repressing anger nearly caused his marriage to founder. Because he thought all anger was sin, he was never overtly angry with his wife. He repressed his anger but as more and more anger built up he became colder and colder, more and more distant. With little relating going on in the marriage his wife felt very unloved. She got angry about this and showed it. Thus provoked he, of course, became angrier but (unconsciously) repressed it, thus becoming even more cold and distant. A very vicious circle thus developed.

Flattened emotions and flat voices are signs of repressed anger. Recently I was interviewing someone for a job. Every time I asked a question I had to strain to the limit to hear the interviewee's answer. A fan was operating in the room so I turned it down to the lowest possible speed so I could hear. Then I asked my next question. In replying this person lowered his voice even further. I still had to strain my ears to the limit. I turned the fan completely off. He lowered his voi again. After a long, quiet conversation it turned out that this man was incredibly angry with a person in his childhood. He had never admitted this to himself before. His quiet voice was just one symptom of repressed anger. He has since discovered he had been flattening out his whole emotional life through using up enormous quantities of psychic energy to keep his anger out of consciousness.

One could go on and on with examples of the dangers of repressed anger, examples of even more serious symptoms — paranoia, alcoholism, sexual impotence. But if repression is such a disastrous way of dealing with anger then how should we deal with it? Do we just "let it all hang out"? Blow up, be nasty, rage just when we feel like it?

## Anger - good and bad

Of course not. Anger can be a most, perhaps **the** most, destructive of our emotions. Anger lies behind war, rape, murder, child bashing and a thousand oth horrors. But not all anger is bad. Before we try to see how we can deal with bad anger we must understand good anger. Seeing all anger as bad is one reason many Christians choose the path of repression.

Paradoxically, anger and love often come close together, which is why we speak about (and experience?) love-hate relationships. Jesus Christ was often angry. If all anger is wrong Jesus was quite a sinner. The cleansing of the temple at Jerusalem is an obvious example but a more profound one is the 'Woe to you scribes and pharisees' chapter of St Matthew's Gospel, (Ch 23).

How would you feel if Jesus said this to you?

> Woe to you scribes and pharisees, you hypocrites!
> You are like whitewashed tombs, which look
> beautiful on the outside but on the inside are
> full of dead men's bones and everything unclean.
> Matt 23:27.

If you were on the receiving end of this would you feel someone was being calm and polite to you?

And what about this one? I can think of a few Chris-

tian evangelists who so load people up with repression and grey, stifling legalism that Jesus might say the same about their smooth tones and slick tongues:

> Woe to you scribes and pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. Matt 23:15.

Jesus is certainly angry, so is he a sinner? Of course not! Like all the self-righteously religious, nothing will ever get through to them but toughness. Those who are conscious of their sin and hypocrisy (hypocrisy = virtues nod to vice) do not need anger but gentleness. Which is why Jesus shows love to prostitutes, thieves, traitors and adulterers by being gentle. He shows love to the scribes and pharisees by being angry. This is good, it comes from love, just as Desmond Tutu's anger against the South African Government is good and comes from love.

## Anger and love

My friend who held back his anger from his wife, who became cold and detached, was failing to love. He needed to get his anger out to her, work it through, so he could love her. This non-relating chill was a cruel, bad expression of his anger. Most of us seldom get angry, whether it is bad anger or good anger, except with someone we love. With other people we simply don't care enough to get angry.

God himself gets angry. At least that's what the scriptures teach. I've never counted them but there are hundreds of references to God's anger or wrath in the Bible. We live in a time when it is theologically and spiritually out of fashion to speak of God's wrath. We have reacted against the fire and brimstone preaching of an earlier era. There is not space here to write much about God's wrath. I will leave that to another article in the near future, but I myself cannot see how we can comprehend God's love without God's anger. This love without anger reduces God's love to simpering, pale sentimentality. It dissolves God's justice, his hatred of cruelty and tyranny. If all anger is sin then, so far as the Bible teaches, God must be a great sinner.

We must learn to discern good anger from bad anger. Good anger needs expression. But what about bad anger? Of course, in the complex world of human relationships good and bad anger are usually mixed together and even bad anger can be turned to good under God "who works all things together for good".

A clergyman I know was in a very bad mood at an evening service. He has a bit of a temper and on this occasion it really got the better of him. In the middle of the service he told everybody to go home and left. It could have ended his ministry and I can think of other, similar examples which have indeed ruined a ministry totally. This was bad anger badly handled. But it was turned to good. During the course of the next week he visited every person present at the service, apologised and talked through what had happened. It is little wonder that his church has one of the largest congregations and one of the spiritually deepest I know.

## Projected anger

Bad anger can take many forms. A common form is anger really directed at something we hate in ourselves but actually projected onto others or another. Almost all gossip and backbiting falls into this category. We try to lose our hated selves by climbing over the backs of others.

Bad anger may be pure selfishness. When my son was a small boy we had guests for dinner. Our adult conversation was continually interrupted by my son's coughing and crying. Heartily sick of his coughing and whining I went to the medicine cupboard, got some cough mixture, stamped into his bedroom, switched on the light, sat the mostly asleep boy up and pushed a spoonful of the mixture against his lips. With one taste of the vile stuff he swung his arm at the spoon spraying cough mixture all over me, the wall and the bedclothes. Although he was still mostly asleep, I smacked him. The selfishness of initial bad anger had become the selfishness of fiery, final bad anger.

Well, what does one do? After behaving like a little brat myself I eventually calmed down, took him in my arms and whispered over and over again "Daddy is a very bad boy, Daddy sorry". A very simple example of a very ancient and trustworthy method — repentance, confession and (hopefully with human beings, certainly with God) forgiveness.

## Working through angers

It is better to blow up than repress. But it is better to find other ways of expressing anger, good, bad or a mixture, than either blowing up or repressing. We have expressed our anger well if we have come closer afterwards to the person with whom we are angry. We have expressed it badly if we are even further away from each other.

To express anger well we need to choose our time and our words carefully. Even when I am sure my anger is just and good, when I express it I always find that it is actually a mixture — good and just, and bad and unjust. The trouble is often poor communication. I perceive motives and intentions in another which are not really there or not all that's there. Likewise the other with me.

Some people give a list of rules for expressing anger. Rules like:

- never hit below the belt
- never say something you'd regret afterwards
- never sulk in your anger
- always keep angry letters in your desk drawer for a week

As principles, these and similar rules can be helpful. But I find one question covers them all: "What is God thinking about my anger?" This always leads to God's way of dealing with us and therefore the ideal way we should deal with each other — repentance, confession, forgiveness. I also find St Paul's words to be of the Spirit:

> In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Eph 4:26,27.

*(Bruce Wilson is a Founder of Eremos Institue and Assistant Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn.)*

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# Cranks and Crackpots 5

**by Paul Porter**

Once there were two famous people who were made to look rather stupid. One was an oxford mathematician, and the other was a very powerful Middle-Eastern ruler.

The Oxford man was Lewis Carroll. Most of us are familiar with his characters in **Alice in Wonderland**. Some of these characters, I suspect, are deliberate caricatures of the sorts of people Carroll rubbed shoulders with every day at the university. Just two examples:

You have this marvellous white rabbit with his pocket watch, running around full of self-importance and crying out: "Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be too late!" Lewis Carroll probably met lots of these types at Oxford.

And then you have the Cheshire Cat with his permanently frozen grin. English universities, (in my biased opinion), are still a favourite watering hole for Cheshire Cats. Cheshire Cats are painfully polite animals — always smiling, but you are never quite sure if they really mean it!

Well, apart from writing books and teaching maths at Oxford, Lewis Carroll liked to play with little kids. And one day, a group of them invited him to a party. So, just for the fun of it, he decided to enter their house unannounced, crawling on his hands and knees and barking like a dog! The only problem was that he went to the wrong address (very embarrassing).

Now, there was also this Middle-Eastern king. His name was Nebuchadnezzar, and he ruled the Neo-Babylonian empire twenty-five hundred years ago. He was an immensely powerful man, but he had one outstanding weakness. Like most rulers in history, he was easily swept away by his own importance.

According to one of the tales in the Book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar finally snapped, and for quite some time he went around on all fours, eating grass like an ox. And then, one day, the king's sanity finally returned, and he was back again — back on his own two feet and back on his throne. The king had changed, and there were other changes in him too. He was a humbler man. A better man. And a better king. □

# XXXX

**by David Waterworth**

For the benefit of those who do not live in Queensland, "XXXX" or "Fourex" is the name of a popular beer. No, I am not advertising this particular beverage. I just thought it might get your attention.

The joke is told that this beer got its name because some people couldn't spell. They couldn't write "beer" so they just used "XXXX".

I wonder sometimes if we treat God a little like this. We don't understand Him so we substitute.

The Jews of Jesus' day didn't understand God. They saw Him as a celestial book-keeper who added up the credits and the debits. They weren't sure, so they did what all insecure people do: they went on making up more and more rules. They were so concerned about rules and regulations that they lost sight of people.

Into their midst came a Man who proclaimed that God's kingdom had come. Perhaps they thought he was going to give them some new rules. But they found him objectionable. This Man made friends with people who broke their rules. How could he possibly know anything about God's rules, which must be so much stricter than theirs?

Jesus proclaimed by his words and actions that people are more important than rules and regulations. He ate with prostitutes. Their well-to-do clients were offended and accused him of evil. He befriended politicians and people smeared him. He healed the demon-possessed and people accused him of being in league with Satan. Among his followers were tax collectors, terrorists, cheats and law breakers. In the eyes of the law they were sick. Jesus loved them better.

"God" could no longer be written "XXXX". By the power of his resurrection, Jesus declared himself the Son of God. Perhaps God could be misunderstood when prophets wrote about Him, but how could he be misunderstood when He sent His Son? In Jesus we have a clear expression of what God is like.

And so, we no longer need to ask: "What is God like?", "Will he accept me?" or "How would He treat me if He were here?" These questions find their answer in the gospel record of the life of Jesus.

When Jesus was confronted with the paralytic sinner on the mat, he gently healed and forgave him. This is how he will treat all who come to him in need. But when Jesus found the buyers and sellers in the Temple, he drove them out with a whip. This is how he will treat those who commercialize the Christian faith.

**G-O-D** is much more easily spelled **J-E-S-U-S**. Look to him if you would know God.

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# Learning to Groan Quietly #2

by Ron Allen

OUR TEXT reveals that Ezekiel's personal tragedy signalled a greater one that was soon to overtake all the people. More than this, God's instruction to the prophet, to groan quietly, was also a sign that the people were to do likewise when the "delight of their eyes" was taken away. The loss of the temple would break the nation's heart. However devastated they might feel because of this, they were to grieve quietly just as Ezekiel had done.

The Jews of the exile believed that God would never allow his temple to be destroyed. Surely the covenant promise precluded such a possibility! God needed the temple and he needed Israel! Similarly there are some modern saints who are often quite sure what God can and cannot do. "God won't let anything happen to me. I am doing His work; supporting his program." Why do people think this way? Perhaps it is because they really do not want God to control their lives. They would rather be in control of him. They want him kept in a box, where he must behave himself. When disaster strikes, as it is bound to do sooner or later, they are dismayed because God is out of his box—out of control. He has not behaved according to plan.

When the Babylonians destroyed the Jewish temple, it was a new chapter in God's self-revelation. It was a shocking revelation. God absolutely surprised the Jews. So it is in our day. God is full of surprises. He seldom works according to our plan. Those who are learning to groan quietly understand that God is the centre of life and not they. Elsewhere in Ezekiel, it is written, "Not for your sakes do I this, but for my holy name's sake".

Throughout his book, Ezekiel is referred to as "Son of Man". It is a phrase which emphasizes the creatureliness of man as he is contrasted with God his maker. It is when God acts totally out of harmony with our expectations that we best appreciate what it is to be human—to depend on God. "The way of man is not in himself."

It is clear from the scripture we are considering that God had plans for Israel which he meant to be served by means of the national tragedy. The loss of the temple would occasion repentance and a return to wholehearted worship. God made Ezekiel's sorrow a sermon to Israel so they would understand the sorrow that would strike them. In his heartache Ezekiel was bound into God's purpose for Israel. Only by allowing his pain to be woven into the purposes of God could Ezekiel groan quietly. Similarly, the Jews would see that the razing of the temple had meaning for them when they grasped the fact that God intended to use it for their good.

Here we observe the real significance of groaning quietly. Although it is proper for God's people to protest the evil of suffering, the Christian protest will never exactly match the world's. Why? Because the man of God, while resisting the outrage of suffering with all his might, also knows that God is able to weave the worst calamity into the fabric of his plan to bless the world. In pain, it is possible for the Christian to affirm two realities: first, the reality of evil with all its attendance woes, and second, the reality of God who is sovereign over evil even though it is by definition against him. In other words, by groaning, the Christian affirms his solidarity with all humanity in its difficulty. But by groaning quietly he affirms solidarity with God. To fall short of both these affirmations is to fail of attaining to suffering with "purpose". □

## Study Starters

**Roger and Pat Jones**

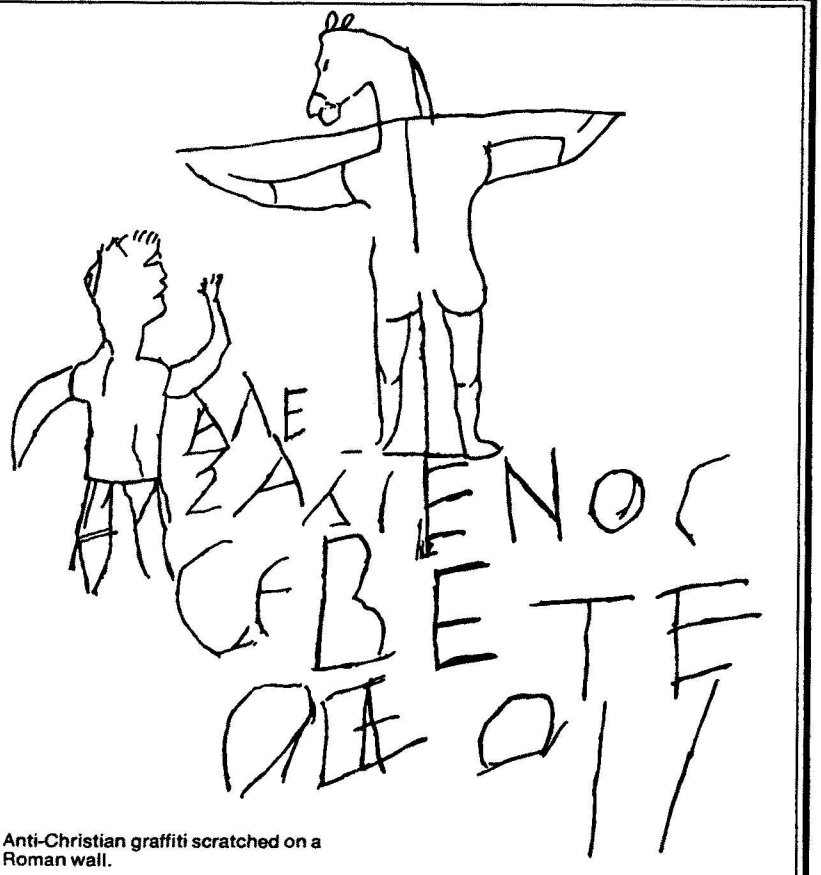
*(Roger & Pat write from Bemboka, NSW)*

A series of mini studies to help you trace the good news of salvation through the Scriptures. Look up the marginal references pertaining to the starting text and just wend your way leisurely through the Bible. Read the verses before and after each text to gain an appreciation of its setting. Also each text on the way will have its own series of references. You may care to explore these byways of the Bible and find perchance some of the hidden treasures of God's Word.

Refresh your memory of the Ten Commandments by reading Exodus 20:1-17 and also Deuteronomy 5:6-21. Re-read the second commandment Exodus 20:4-6 — finally homing in on verse 6. Notice how this verse speaks of "mercy to thousands etc." This is God offering His grace — it is the gospel. Did you ever realise the gospel was in the ten commandments? Now start your journey through the Bible using all the marginal references you can find pertaining to Exodus 20:6 and Deuteronomy 5:10.

# The Writing on the Wall

by Paul Porter



Anti-Christian graffiti scratched on a Roman wall.

**"Asians Out!"** Traditionally the vehicle of popular humour, graffiti in the 1980s is no longer a joke. Armed with felt-nib pens and aerosol cans, Australia's graffiti artists are costing the country millions of dollars every year. In New South Wales alone, the State Rail estimates annual damage at $12 million.

Police believe there are as many as 400 different gangs of graffitists operating around Sydney. Each gang can have as many as 100 members. Some have already paid the ultimate price for their thrills. In a recent 12-month period, six people aged from 13 to 22 died on Sydney trains. Graffiti has wreaked havoc in Australian universities, secondary schools, public transport systems, historic buildings and monuments, and is spreading rapidly through Australia's large urban centres. It is an open secret that the new Parliament House in Canberra will be prime target for tomorrow's graffitists.

According to a recent report, graffiti in our country is becoming more violent, more abundant, more offensive and more difficult to remove. Especially savage are inscriptions found in women's public toilets. Australia's educational institutes are the worst offenders, with graffiti spilling over from the toilets into council property, bus shelters, railway stations and trains. A graffiti message recently discovered in Sydney reads: "Spray Cans: Another Terrorist Weapon."

Aldous Huxley seems to have anticipated the mood of our modern graffitists. In 1936 he wrote:

The time is not far off when the whole population and not merely a few exceptionally intelligent individuals will consciously realize the fundamental unlivableness of life under the present regime. And what then?... The revolution that will then break out will not be communistic — there will be no need for such a revolution... and besides, nobody will believe in the betterment of humanity or in anything else whatever. It will be a nihilist revolution. Destruction for destruction's sake. Hate, universal hate, and an aimless and therefore complete and thorough smashing up of everything.

Our picture shows the most famous graffito of all time. This crude third-century drawing from Rome depicts a boy with one hand raised in an attitude of worship before a crucified figure with an ass's head. Beneath are scribbled the mocking words: "Alexamenus worships his god."

Nobody knows who Alexamenus was. Clearly he was faithful to Christ. Did he ever see the drawing? Was he ever beaten up at school?

For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the Power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Corinthians 1: 22-24). □

## Down Capers #8

Stan Down slumped into the bean-bag by the fire and gazed vacantly as if he'd just come third in a duel.

"What's the matter with you tonight — more wife troubles?" Mum Down ventured.

It was a poorly-kept secret that Stan and Ida Down had begun drifting apart when they bought a water-bed soon after they were married. But since they had traded it in they seemed much happier so Mum Down was puzzled by Stan's gloom.

"Why don't you jog around the block?" she suggested.

"Why?" Stan drolled. "I'm already here."

"Well maybe you need a more balanced diet?" Mum tested.

"Diet!" Stan shouted. "I already have a balanced diet. I always have fish and chips."

"Then what's troubling you?"

Stan took a deep breath and said, "Well, the doctor says Ida's going to have a nipper."

"That's marvellous," exalted Mum, "where is she?"

"She doesn't want to come out of the bedroom," Stan said. "She's very depressed. We're thinking of getting an abortion."

"Oh! No!" Mum objected. "Whatever for?"

"Well, you know we're saving up for our own house. We can't afford extra expense right now."

"But that's criminal," Mum blurted out. "Me and Father can help like we've always done. A life is more important than money. Besides, don't you remember that Christmas play we went to last year — you remember, all the actors were trying to get Joseph and Mary to agree to an abortion? One actor reminded them they were just too poor to have a baby, and another said it might help to hide the shame of it all — they being only engaged and all that . . . And then another actor offered to go to a friend in the Nazareth ghetto where a contact could arrange an abortion in Caesarea, because that's where the Romans had a thriving clinic for it. Don't you remember all that? What would happen to us if Jesus had been aborted?"

Mum Down paused for breath. "Surely God cares about the unborn," she continued, driving her point home. "The gospel STARTED with a helpless foetus."

"I hadn't thought of it like that," Stan finally admitted. "You should have a talk to Ida. I'm sure she would want to do just the same as Mary. Her Mum has a picture of Mary and the baby Jesus above their fire-place."