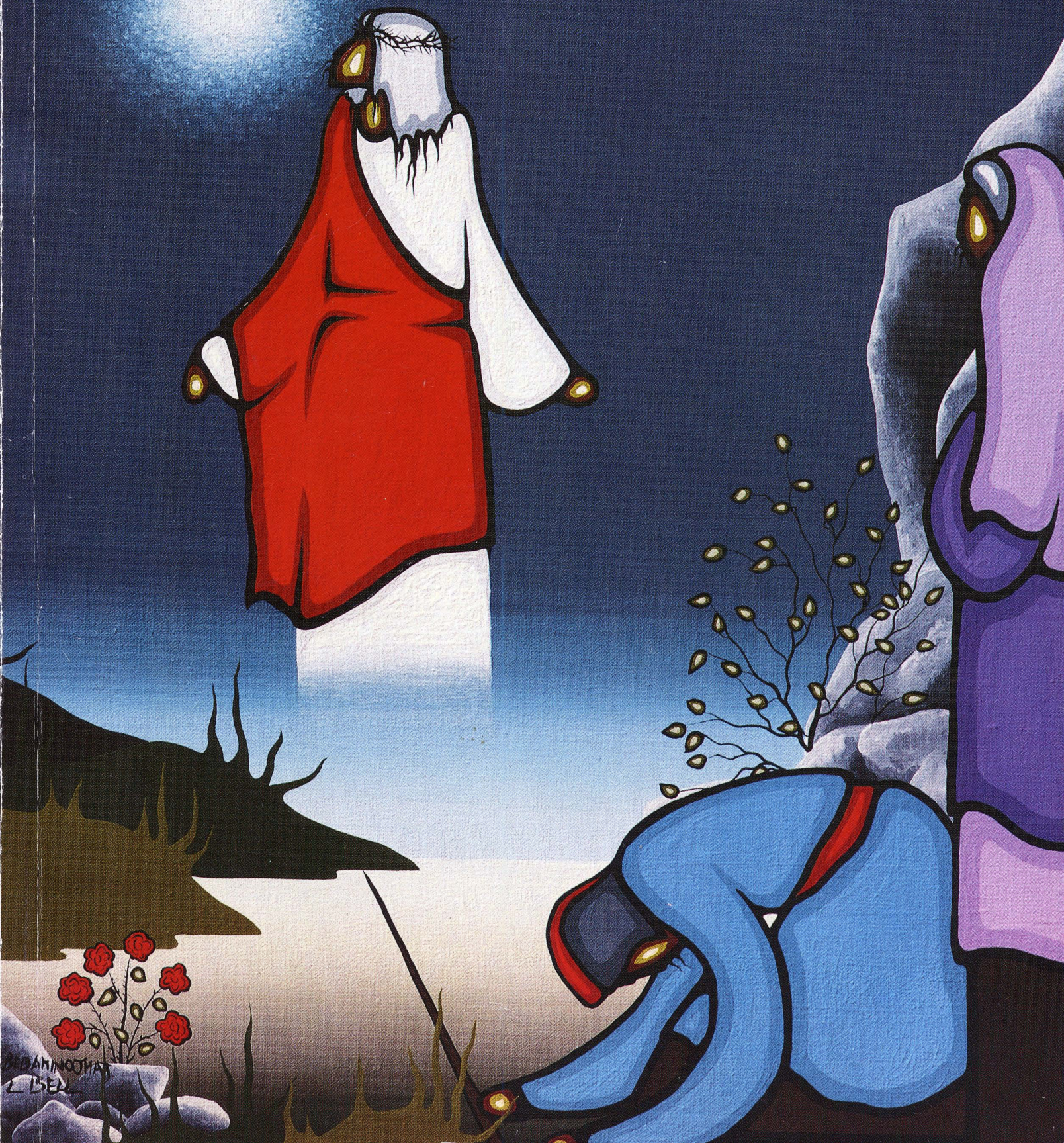


# *BEEDAHBUN*

First Light of Dawn



BEEDAHBUN  
L. BELL



*BEEDAHBUN*  
First Light of Dawn



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# *BEEDAHBUN*

## First Light of Dawn

George P. Leach and Greg J. Humbert

Featuring the paintings of

Leland Bell

Native Artist

TOMIKO PUBLICATIONS

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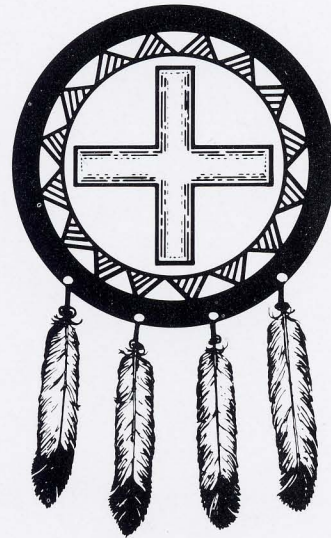
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Dedicated to

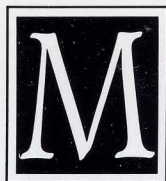
Bishop Alexander Carter

who was affectionately given the name  
*Beedahbun*  
“First Light of Dawn”

by the Native People during  
a special Naming Ceremony

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*Megwetch* is the *Anishnabek* word which means "thank you". Consequently, as we acknowledge our indebtedness to the people who made this book possible, the first word must go to the First Nations of Canada, our Native People.

We thank the *Anishnabek* for the beauty and depth of their spiritual heritage and culture. Without it there would be nothing to write about, nothing to share. We are very much aware that this presentation only scratches the surface of the richness of these Original Peoples. We are humbled to know that in this dialogue, we the authors, have learned as much from them as we had ever hoped to give.

We especially thank Leland Bell whose artistic presentations of the Stations of the Cross were the very catalyst for this project. He was a very co-operative and helpful artist, always articulate and indeed patient with us.

We are grateful to Father Dick MacDonald sj, who as pastor had these paintings commissioned for the Immaculate Conception Church in West Bay on Manitoulin Island. Our gratitude is also extended to Father Len Fischer sj, the present pastor, who has cooperated along with his parishioners in giving us permission to reproduce the paintings.

We thank Mr. Jack Chiang for his photographs of the paintings.

We are blessed with a number of good friends who believed enough in this book to encourage us and help us in a myriad of ways. *Megwetch* to Henry Andrews, Mary Campeau, Bernie Carroll sj, Ken Clark, Dominic Eshkakogan, Dan MacDonald, Lillian McGregor, Milton McWatch, Marilyn Meraw csj, Ihor Osakiwsky, Rick Prashaw pp, Mary Recollet, Faith Ann Sherlock csj, and Sabrina Yung.

We thank the Jesuits of the Upper Canada Province whose foresight and vision continue to invest considerable energy and manpower to cooperate in the development of a fully Native Church. Another *megwetch* goes out to those diocesan priests who equally cooperate in this apostolic venture.

Finally we offer special thanksgiving to God whose love sustains us. We pray that this little work brings glory to the divine majesty.

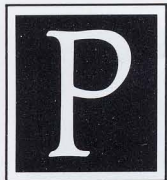




The tender mercy of our God  
who from on high will bring  
the rising Sun  
to visit us,  
to give light to those who live in darkness  
and the shadow of death  
and to guide our feet  
into the way of peace.

*Luke 1:78-79*





## REFACE

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A new edition of the Stations of the Cross is no less surprising than a new love song. No one tires of the flowers in spring, their delicate beauty and pristine fragility. Yes, some things grow in value as time goes by - good wine, a beautiful painting, the wisdom of an Elder. So it is with the Stations of the Cross. They possess a myriad of forms, a rich history, a cultural style often jealously guarded.

Yet, the Way of the Cross is not the way of the slick advertising campaigns that try in vain to puff themselves up with a veneer of authenticity. No, only what is truly important to us remains part of our heritage; only what has lasting value is retained. Our homes are testaments to this, filled with comforting clutter; anything irrelevant soon lays discarded on the trash heap.

As a form of devotion the Stations of the Cross have been part of the Church for a long time.

They are stations, places to halt. They connote an imperative: stop and think, spend some time on this mystery. A mystery saturated with memory, challenging us to empathize with the divine-human person who loved enough to suffer and die for us.

Every Christian dreams of making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, but not every Christian has the wherewithal to get there. When devotion to the Passion of Christ became widespread in the 12th and 13th century, the veterans of the Crusades erected tableaux in their home countries to represent the various places surrounding the last moments of Christ's life. Some of these moments were taken from scripture; others were derived from the piety and tradition of the people.

The first composite Stations of the Cross fashioned outside of Palestine were erected at the Church of Saint Stefano in Bologna in the 5th Century. However, they didn't come into general use until the 15th century.



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Originally there was considerable variety in the number and titles of the Stations used, ranging from the five stations placed in the Bologna church, to seven in Antwerp, with sometimes as many as thirty or more in other locations. The number of falls often varied from one to seven. It was not until the 16th century that the fourteen traditional Stations as we know them began to appear in devotional books and in churches.

In our post Vatican II Church artists and mystics have continued to create new interpretations to this archetypal representation of the Love that doesn't back down, that doesn't quit. Many of them have added a fifteenth Station— "The Resurrection".

The purpose for this new book is threefold. The authors wish to offer you some new insights and spiritual nourishment from the Paschal mystery. We wish also to make this a practical example of inculturation, that is, the blending of the culture of a people (in this case, the *Anishnabek* People) and their Christian faith. As the sun rises on the *Anishnabek* Christian it sets on a stringent evangelical faith enforced with a European cultural empiricism. Finally, we wish to introduce you to Native art.

Therefore we present for your enjoyment and edification *Beedahbun: First Light of Dawn*, as seen through the penetrating talent of a young Native artist, Mr. Leland Bell. There is nothing so new as something old rediscovered.





Ernest Benedict presents  
Pope John Paul II with the  
eagle feather at Martyrs Shrine,  
Midland, Ontario,  
September, 1984.

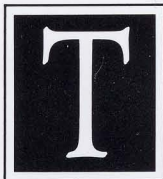


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*"Thus the one faith is expressed in different ways. There can be no question of adulterating the word of God or of emptying the Cross of its power, but rather of Christ animating the very centre of all culture. Thus, not only is Christianity relevant to the Indian peoples, but Christ, in the members of his Body, is himself Indian."*

*Pope John Paul II \* Papal Visit to Canada*





## HE ANISHNABEK

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It didn't quite happen in the way that I might have expected. No, I was much more familiar with a guarded, maybe even pseudo-reverent approach to gift giving. Most gifts bought by my parents were shown to me, prefaced with the remark "Now don't touch that! You can look but mind you don't get too close." A gift that might be destined for someone very important would never have been shown to me at all; I would only have heard about these gifts, treated as sacred vessels which lay hidden in some sanctuary of safety (usually my mother's bedroom) until they could be given to the recipient.

It surprised me then that this was not the case with the handicrafts which the Ojibway People had made for Pope John Paul II when he visited Canada in September of 1984. Their gifts were a gift from the People, the *Anishnabek* (as they call themselves); they were in a very real sense the property of everyone. The whole community was the giver.

This innate spiritual quality of the People of the Ojibway First Nation was brought home to me quite vividly one beautiful fall day. The students and teachers of Sacred Heart School, Espanola, Ontario assembled in the school gym to see a special surprise. The Native Elders carried a box into the room with a certain informal ritual. We would be given the opportunity to see the gifts that had been prepared for the Pope.

Among them was the Eagle feather. The eagle is the thunderbird, symbol of knowledge and direction, caretaker of the things of the spirit and the spirituality of the People of the First Nations. It is the bird that soars so high, it alone is capable of being the great messenger to God, hovering between all people and their Creator. On its wings it carries the prayers and hopes of the people. Pope John Paul II is also a messenger to the Great Spirit, the giver of life. He too brings our prayers to God. He would be given an eagle feather as a symbol of this. This was the highest honor that the Native People could bestow upon him.



Then the Elders explained, "Do you not also wish to have your prayers and your hopes brought to the good God? Don't you have some message that you want the Holy Father to bring to our loving Creator? Well, we will give you an opportunity. Think of a special prayer and then when you come forward to view the gifts pass your hand over the eagle feather. Yes, so when we give the feather to the Holy Father, your prayers will also be handed over to him."

It was a great lesson for me — and an effective one I hasten to add. A few weeks later, on September 15, 1984 as I watched the live television coverage of this historic meeting between Pope John Paul II and the Native People at the Martyrs Shrine in Midland, Ontario, I observed elder Ernest Benedict present "our" eagle feather to the Pope. I was transfixed.

The cloudy day mixed with intermittent drizzle did not dampen the enthusiasm of those gathered together on the hill overlooking Huronia. If anything, it instilled a feeling of closeness not unlike the traditional gathering together of the people that might well have taken place in a longhouse similar to the reconstructed model that the Pope had visited moments before.

Ernest Benedict, his hair adorned with long, meticulous braids reaching down and resting on his shoulders, approached the Pope. He did it with a pride and dignity which reached back to his great irrefutably indigenous traditions. A prayer shawl draped over his left arm, the eagle feather raised high in the air with his right hand, he began to speak in a prayerful, prophetic style exhibiting the confidence of a shaman.

"We who are sheltered by the great tree of peace have placed the eagle at the top of the tree. The eagle has great courage beyond any other creature and his travels are above us all. We believe that it is entirely fitting that this feather from the wings that have brushed against the sky, shall be awarded to you for your supreme courage and spiritual achievement. As you proclaim the heavenly message we remember that the Master has given his blood for the world. You also have shed your blood; that has been noted on the feather. These are my words."



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All who watched were moved by the simplicity and power of these words. They were not hollow. On the contrary they seemed to possess magnetic force, drawing different cultures to the centre of a bond held in common as if all that was unnecessary or dissonant was equally dissolveable. Moments like this can melt discord and build solidarity.

As a viewer watching this spectacle from the comfort of my living room, I felt I belonged to this important event.

And isn't this precisely what our lives are all about?

Faith is that gift which cries out for belonging.

In this often abrupt and unmanageable world where our hearts seem adrift in chaos, we long for safety and refuge. We long to gather under the teepee, in the longhouse, in a friend's living room, a sanctuary somewhere. We long for meaning; we long to belong. As depicted in the painting of Creation by Michaelangelo which adorns the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, God, the Creator Spirit, has continuously reached out to us. Time and time again we see a God head over heels in love with us. It was a love bound for consummation, intimacy, union. And the form it took was the Incarnation — God loved us so much that he became one of us; indeed, it is the ultimate compliment.

#### SAINT JEAN DE BREBEUF

As history would have it, Saint Jean de Brebeuf had a dream.

Born in Normandy, Brebeuf became a Jesuit at Rouen, France in 1617. His health was so affected by tuberculosis that he could neither study nor teach for the customary period demanded by the rigorous Jesuit training. So he offered himself for the Canadian Missions and sailed in 1625. His dream was to bring this good news of Jesus Christ to the Huron nation. This dream necessitated that he speak the language and become acquainted with the culture of the people with whom he was a guest. With it came the need for innovation and creativity, and consequently the story, not only of the birth of Christ, but also the birth of the Huron Carol.

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*'Twas in the moon of winter time,  
When all the birds had fled,  
That mighty Gitchi Manitou  
Send angel choirs instead;  
Before their light their stars grew dim,  
And wondr'ing hunters heard the hymn:  
Jesus, your King is born, Jesus is born,  
In excelsis gloria!*

*Within a lodge of broken bark  
The tender babe was found,  
A ragged robe of rabbit skin  
Enwrapped his beauty round;  
But as the hunter braves drew nigh  
The angel song rang loud and high:  
Jesus, your King is born, Jesus is born,  
In excelsis gloria!*

*O children of the forest free  
O sons of Manitou,  
The holy child of earth and heav'n  
Is born today for you.  
Come, kneel before the radiant boy,  
Who brings you beauty, peace and joy:  
Jesus, your King is born, Jesus is born,  
In excelsis gloria!*

It takes little effort to imagine the scene. Gathered together in a longhouse smelling of birchbark and smoke, huddled around the warmth of a fire, Brebeuf begins to tell a story. He begins with confidence for he knows that this same story has captured the imagination and hearts of many generations and cultures before him. He is equally confident in changing some of the elements of the story. What is most important is that this new audience understands.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John had done the same; their gospels were rearranged to fit the needs and peculiarities of their particular communities. It was a stroke of genius. Or was it inspiration? Their gospels took into account the audience who would be listening to or reading them. The Native People were no different.



The Huron natives were farmers. They did not possess any domesticated animals, but in fact lived mainly on corn, beans, and squash. It was these same vegetables which they had generously taught the Jesuits to grow for their own survival in this frontier land.

So what then if the Hurons did not know about mangers from which animals could eat and in which the baby Jesus could be laid. Brebeuf would speak of Jesus being placed to sleep in a dugout canoe. The Huron people would certainly understand this.

So what then if the Hurons were not familiar with shepherds watching their flocks by night, Brebeuf need only impress the miracle of the sheep that could give up their pelts (wool) without also giving up their lives. Such miracles of nature impressed a people who were naturally spiritual.

So what if the Huron society was matriarchal, and the Jews patriarchal; it could be adapted.

The following passage was probably first written some time during the 17th century. It is attributed to Jean de Brebeuf and taken from a Huron passage copied in the 1740s by Jesuit Father Pierre Potier:

“Once, a leader called Augustus Caesar made his wishes known throughout the country. He said, ‘I wish that the number of people in every village would be counted. I wish to be sure in the spirit of my mind that my people will have their names recorded where they live.’

“Bethlehem is the name of the village where Joseph came from, as his mother’s father used to live there. Now he went there with his wife. He wished that as soon as their names would be put with the others, they would prepare all that was necessary for Mary was about to give birth.

“Behold, she gave birth to a son, bound him up and had to place him inside a dugout canoe. For those who had come to be counted had taken all the spaces in every longhouse.

“Now in a field there were many together. They were the ones who take care of the animals whose pelt is passed on to others. They were frightened when a skydweller



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appeared like a sun in their midst. Rays of sunshine beamed outwards from his body. They were so seized with fear that their scalps moved . . . ”

#### INCULTURATION

Today the dream continues. It extends far beyond the birth narrative of Jesus. It encompasses the whole gospel, the passion and death of Jesus, his Resurrection and the life of the Church — the *ecclesia*, the *Anishnabek* — the People.

Not without cost. Throughout the intervening years there have been mistakes, some regrettable. The path that some missionaries took brought a modicum of spiritual and cultural indigestion. Cultural identity was sometimes suppressed; spiritual traditions were misunderstood and often denied. An injustice was perpetrated. But even these difficult moments of evangelization are themselves experiences of Salvation History. Reflection demonstrates that the process itself contains elements of the mystery of death and resurrection. We cannot hold on to the hurts of the past; inculturation begins with healing.

The Creator Spirit gives life to all peoples. Their discovery of this personal relationship overflows in their desires to express it. The *Anishnabek* have a right to a rite. They will worship the Creator as Indigenous Peoples, bringing their own customs and traditions, using their own signs and symbols.

The missionaries (men and women who serve in another culture) have come to this realization along with the Native People themselves. Like John the Baptist before them, today's missionaries believe that the Native spiritual leadership must grow as theirs must diminish. They have learned, albeit gradually, that missionary activity is a call to receive as well as to give, to listen more than to speak; it is a blessing to witness the faith of People of the First Nations in its indigenous form.

The study of anthropology and the other scientific disciplines continue to reaffirm the hypothesis that each culture has a unique world view and uses particular symbols to express this world view. In fact cultures are



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defined by their symbols. Symbols give meaning, direction and identity to a people. Symbols either evoke emotional responses from people, or are created from significant feelings that rise to the surface of consciousness.

The Second Vatican Council with its stress on incarnational theology, gave an opening to what would later be known as "inculturation". In many ways this is not new to the mission of evangelization. It is merely being rediscovered or revisited. The task of every age and every culture is to make the Gospel relevant to them, to make the Gospel speak to them. How can the power of these words, more precisely the Word, become powerful again today for us? This is the question the Church directs to itself time and time again in order to remain a penetrating presence in the world. Science, modernization, a consumer society and all the other factors which affect our times, do not disprove religion; they merely make it irrelevant from time to time.

There have been many movements in the history of Christian religion, therefore, which have sought to make faith relevant again, which have revitalized into a dynamic force what could have become a petrified fossil of a Church. Monasticism renewed the ascetic life and saved the faith from the upheaval of the barbarian invasions. The Reformation itself no doubt saved the Church from a decadent despotism that threatened the faith from the very centre of its life. Vatican II gave "fresh air" to a Church that had turned in on itself. A radical Council (from the latin *radix* = root), the Church looked to the foundations of faith, i.e. to its very roots for renewal and new relevance. Fearless it walked out of the sanctuary into the world, to challenge the laity to become more than hypnotic Christians, to reshape a ritual in the vernacular, to speak of the personal action of God's grace as taking place in a community, to demand an apostolic faith, hope and charity, to become a Church that would encompass justice.

The *Pastoral Constitution of the Church In The Modern World* immediately stated its affinity and solidarity with the whole human family. The purpose of this document was to address all people, especially in their living situations. This document was not afraid to identify the accomplishments and failures, the hopes and the struggles.









The Feast  
 Leland Bell  
 acrylic on canvass  
 122 cm x 60 cm

*Anishinabe Spiritual Centre  
 Espanola, Ontario*



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“The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and the hope, the grief and the anguish of the followers of Christ. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts.” (*Gaudium et Spes*, #1)

As a pastoral letter, this document was especially sensitive not to exclude any people who felt attracted to the Gospel. And in a very real way it wanted to heal any insensitivity on the part of the Church in the past. “The Church has been sent to all ages and nations and, therefore, is not tied exclusively and indissolubly to any race or nation, to any one particular way of life, or to any customary practices, ancient or modern. The Church is faithful to its traditions and is at the same time conscious of its universal mission; it can, then, enter into communion with different forms of culture, thereby enriching both itself and the cultures themselves.” (*Gaudium et Spes*, #58)

This new dialogue between the Church and the modern world, between the gospel and cultures was bound to make room for local expressions of worship and theology.

The Latin American “theology of liberation” emerged out of Medellin, Colombia. This was probably the first modern attempt since Vatican II at inculturation, at initiating a serious dialogue between the indigenous peoples and the Church. All of a sudden the cultural experience of the native peasant population was accepted with vital importance. It was not long before the fruit of this dialogue became evident in many aspects of their daily Christian lives, not least of which were the base communities that began to spring up all over Latin America.

Again, in 1969 when Pope Paul VI visited Kampala, Uganda, he insisted that “a certain pluralism is not only legitimate, but desirable. And in this sense you may and you must have an African Christianity.”

Consequently inculturation is not a simple encounter between the gospel and a new culture. The gospel comes to this culture as already embodied in a particular culture. The encounter, therefore, is really between two cultures. This leaves little room for paternalism; much room for



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respect. A dialogue between equals consequently creates a process. There are no short cuts! As in any relationship, it will involve give and take, trial and error. Such dialogue should never be engaged naively. Let us not hold back for lack of courage.

This process has begun in the heart and spirit of the *Anishnabek*. The symbols, colors and rituals of these Native People used in the liturgy of the Church have initiated a creative dialogue between cultures.

#### THE SWEETGRASS CEREMONY

The *Anishnabek* have a ceremony of purification which is a case in point. It is a ceremony which evokes an experience of natural mysticism, one which contains rituals and symbols rich in meaning. In it their prayers are borne to heaven.

As a symbol of purification, the cedar branch is much more endemic to the *Anishnabek*. However, the sweetgrass has gained a national acceptance for this ceremony, having been used originally by the Prairie Native Peoples. Sweetgrass grows wild throughout North America, more readily available to be stored and used throughout the winter months. It looks much like regular grass, growing anywhere from 24" to 30" in height. The Native People pick it once a year and then cure it by heat. When used for handicrafts the single straight blades are employed. When used for the sweetgrass ceremony the blades are braided much like the braids in the hair of man and woman and meant to signify the hair of Mother Earth.

Well named, it possesses a natural sweet fragrance. When ignited it burns slowly releasing a pleasant aroma rather like incense. The chief or elder waves the smoke in the direction of the people gathered and by doing so purifies the people and the meeting place. Prayers of invocation and petition are also offered at the same time.

The sweetgrass ceremony readily emphasizes and portrays the mood of the liturgy at the beginning of the Eucharist as well as reinforcing the cultural spiritual consciousness of the *Anishnabek*. On occasion this ceremony has been inserted into the Roman Catholic liturgy as a means of blessing the assembly. It can



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substitute for, or enhance the Penitential rite. After pausing to recall our sins we desire forgiveness and purification so that we may be ready with open hearts to listen more worthily to the Word of God.

It was a ceremony proudly shared with Pope John Paul II when he visited the Martyrs' Shrine in Midland, Ontario in the fall of 1984.

#### LELAND BELL

The paintings and artistic talent of Mr. Leland Bell are another meaningful presentation of inculturation at work.

Although baptized a Catholic on the Wikwemikong Reserve, he would call himself a Native Traditionalist. In fact one could readily say that he is a bridge between his Christian roots and his Native roots. In a very real sense, he belongs to neither of them. He is searching. In dialogue, he seeks knowledge. Being born of Indian parents, baptized a Catholic and raised in Toronto, there came a time in his life when he had to find himself and his roots.

Leland relates, "I don't believe I possess the complete truth. I have a set of words that I use for my own purposes, to be able to speak to people properly so I can respect them. I try not to use the word 'truth'. I use the word 'knowledge' instead. I have some knowledge that may lead to the truth.

"I communicate with my heart easily by expressing very universal things. In other words, I paint about things that everybody else knows about, like caring, compassion, the idea of unity, strength, humility — those kind of very human situations."

Although he readily admits that he searches for life and truth in his *Medewin* philosophy and culture, his search leads him to respect all of nature and all cultures. To know everything, he says, is rather presumptuous; it would mean having had personal contact with each tree, each bird, each person that exists on the face of the earth. As a result, the best we can say is that we are all in the process of learning. In order to continue this search we must



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be open to everything and everyone; we must see our unity with all of life. What unites us is much more important than what divides us. Consequently our call is to respect one another.

“The key, as I became more and more involved in my own tradition, is to see that most traditions are basically the same. The basic ideas — we all believe in God or the Creator. And then from there the ritual differs a little. The different things that I have learned about Indian teachings, *Anishnabek* teachings, relating say to the creation story, they are the same as in many other cultures. What becomes important, then, is that you begin to think of yourself as a human being.

“Of course, you are always going to have a physical part of your existence. Spiritually we are all the same, but physically we belong to social structures and institutions. We also want to be unique and we want to express some form of self-determination. We desire our own perspective. I don't see anything wrong with wanting my own cultural perspective. However, I do become afraid when one culture or perspective tries to dominate another.

“But when I get into paint, all the things that I have learned like the naming ceremony, the teaching ceremony, the pipe ceremony, sweat lodge, purification ceremony, all the naming ceremonies, all the people that I have met in the past ten years — while I'm sitting there painting they all become one; I am brought into eternity.”

#### THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS

The Stations of the Cross posed a particular challenge to him. He was forced to resolve some kind of conflict that arose in his mind concerning his artistic integrity. He had chosen not to paint subjects dealing with violence. This subject matter was filled with suffering and sorrow. He wondered how he could say these things using his symbols, remaining faithful to his own vision. Leland was becoming aware of the natural tension or demands of inculturation, even if he didn't quite put it in those terms.



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"I wanted to try to say something from my point of view, but I also wanted to respect the other tradition. I didn't want to tell them something that might not be acceptable to them.

"I found the balance in Love. With the Stations it was a great time of healing, a great time of purification. That's my cultural perspective. But it was a great time of purification for people then as well as now. A time of cleansing, of people reaffirming their commitment to their Creator. We are responsible. It was Peter who denied Jesus three times. It wasn't just the Jews who crucified Jesus, it was the Christian people too."

Color and form are the medium of the painter. Leland Bell is quite conscious of color and form. In the Stations he used these to balance out any of the violence that may present itself in the subject matter. His aim was clear: each of the paintings of the Stations should possess a sense of serenity about it. "But in all of my paintings, I try to bring that across anyway, that serenity, that harmony, that simplicity."

As color and form are the medium of painting, so ritual (which is fundamentally another application of color and form) is the medium of spirituality. It is one thing to "do" painting or to "do" ritual, but it is quite another thing to feel the experience of these realities. It is difficult at times to really believe that we are communicating with God. We tend to separate ourselves from that idea. In many ways we second guess our God. We say to ourselves, "How can I, strange as I am, unworthy as I am, as pitiful as I am, dare to talk to God?"

But Leland insists that we must communicate with the Creator. By means of the vision quest and the fasting we actually can talk to God. We shouldn't be afraid to approach the Creator.

"This is my interpretation," Leland continues. "So a lot of the time the paintings are like that. They involve that part of myself and the conscious effects of colors as they are used in lines and shapes and composition — everything about the painting. Besides this artistic part, there is always the hidden motives behind the painting, what you might call spirituality. Then there are the cultural parts of it."



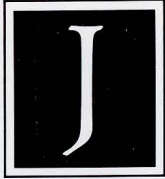
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Native people seem to be shy by nature. They are reserved and speak sparingly. Maybe it is because they value the word more than we do; maybe they do not want to profane something that holds such lasting weight. It is a strange phenomenon that there are few Native poets or writers among them. Their images seem best expressed with the brush and other handicrafts.

Leland Bell speaks best with his paintings. These paintings show us a way. They come from a vision. They are a way of the vision, one which leads surely to *Beedahbun, First Light of Dawn*.

Rest with them.





## JESUS DIBAKONA TCHI NIBOD

(Jesus Is Condemned To Death)

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### THE FIRST STATION

“When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people met in council to bring about the death of Jesus. They had him bound, and led him away to hand him over to Pilate, the governor.

Jesus, then, was brought before the governor, and the governor put to him this question, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ Jesus replied, ‘It is you who say it.’ But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders he refused to answer at all. Pilate then said to him, ‘Do you not hear how many charges they have brought against you?’ But to the governor’s complete amazement, he offered no reply to any of the charges.

At festival time it was the governor’s practice to release a prisoner for the people, anyone they chose. Now there was at that time a notorious prisoner whose name was Barabbas. So when the crowd gathered, Pilate said to them, ‘Which do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?’ For Pilate knew it was out of jealousy that they handed him over.

Now as he was seated in the chair of judgement, his wife sent him a message, ‘Have nothing to do with this man; I have been upset all day by a dream I had about him.’

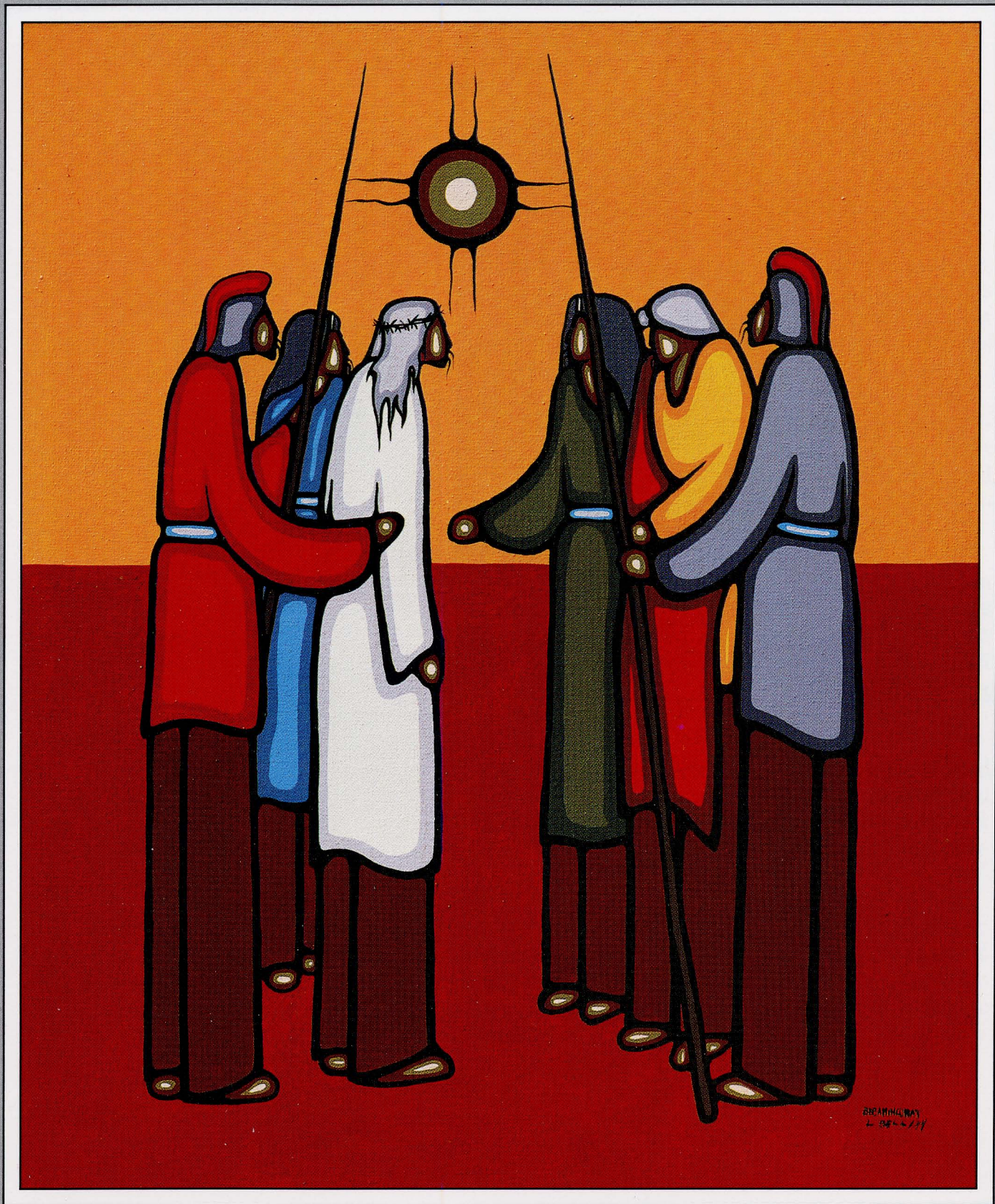
The chief priests and the elders, however, had persuaded the crowd to demand the release of Barabbas and the execution of Jesus. So when the governor spoke and asked them, ‘Which of the two do you want me to release for you?’ they said, ‘Barabbas’. ‘But in this case,’ Pilate said to them, ‘what am I to do with Jesus who is called the Christ?’ They all said ‘Let him be crucified!’ ”

(Matt. 27:11-23)

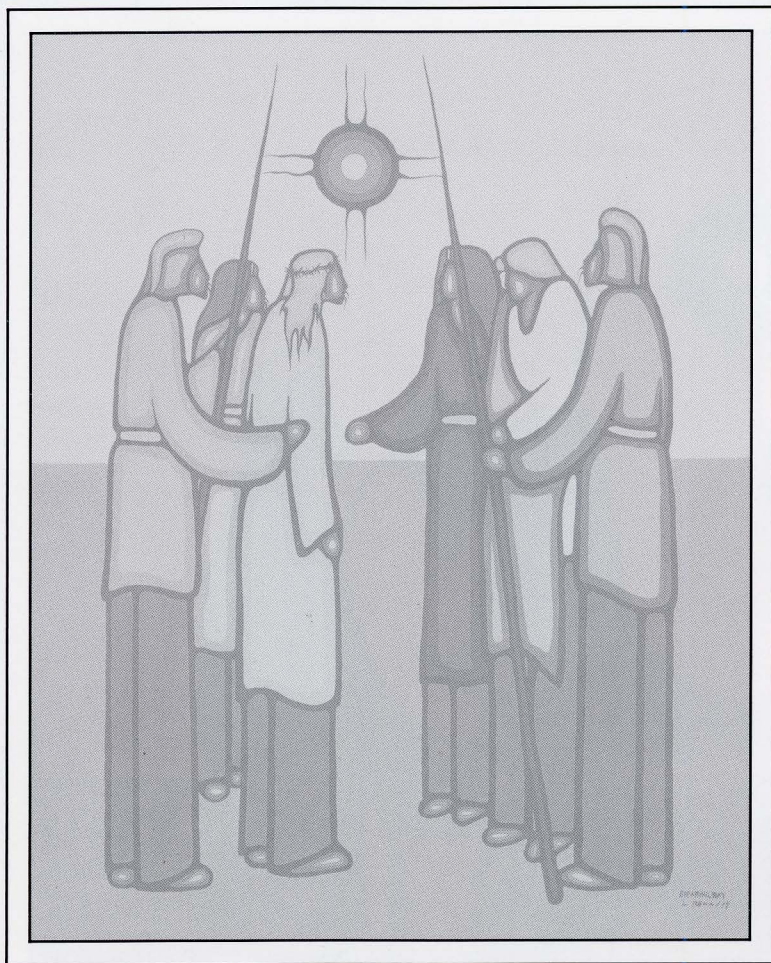
*“No one has a right to pass judgement. There is only one being who can pass judgement – that is the Creator. We attempt to have justice in the world by using laws, but even justice is often an imitation, second guessing of the Creator.”*

*Leland Bell*









Jesus Is Condemned To Death  
Leland Bell  
acrylic on canvass  
50 cm x 45 cm

*Immaculate Conception Parish Church  
West Bay, Manitoulin Island*





## JESUS DIBAKONA TCHI NIBOD

(Jesus Is Condemned To Death)

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Jesus has been falsely accused. He has spoken the truth, taught a 'way of peace' and helped people. His whole life has challenged the "Old Law". His "New Way" calls for forgiveness, not an 'eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'

"Turn the other cheek," He tells his followers (Matt.5:39). But the religious leaders realize that this preaching calls for an inner change, a *metanoia*. Fear wells up in them; prejudice arises and they seek ways to remove Him and keep the status quo.

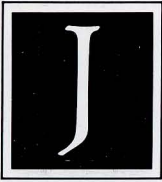
Don't fear and anxiety emerge in us when we see unfair situations? My friend is rejected unjustly; a class ostracizes a student; someone laughs at a handicapped person. How do I feel? What do I think? Will I react angrily or act positively?

Christ stands silently accused. As one Native person posed: "As Christ is ready to die for us, what are we ready to do for Him?" When do we speak or act for the less fortunate person? When do we intervene in an unjust situation? Being a guilty bystander causes deeper confusion.

Action for justice creates freedom and love. Christ acted out of His deepest, inner self. He retained a peace and dignity flowing from His deep union with God, the Creator Spirit. His suffering molded Him into a person of compassion.

Our suffering (or at least our solidarity with those who suffer) is Christ's school for compassion. Our efforts to alleviate suffering and bring about justice invite us to stand with Christ, unjustly condemned, from time to time.





## ESUS OD ODAPINAN O TCHIBAIATIGOMAN

(Jesus Is Picking Up His Cross)

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### THE SECOND STATION

“They then took charge of Jesus, and carrying his own cross he went out of the city to the place of the skull or, as it was called in Hebrew, Golgatha . . .”

(John 19:17)

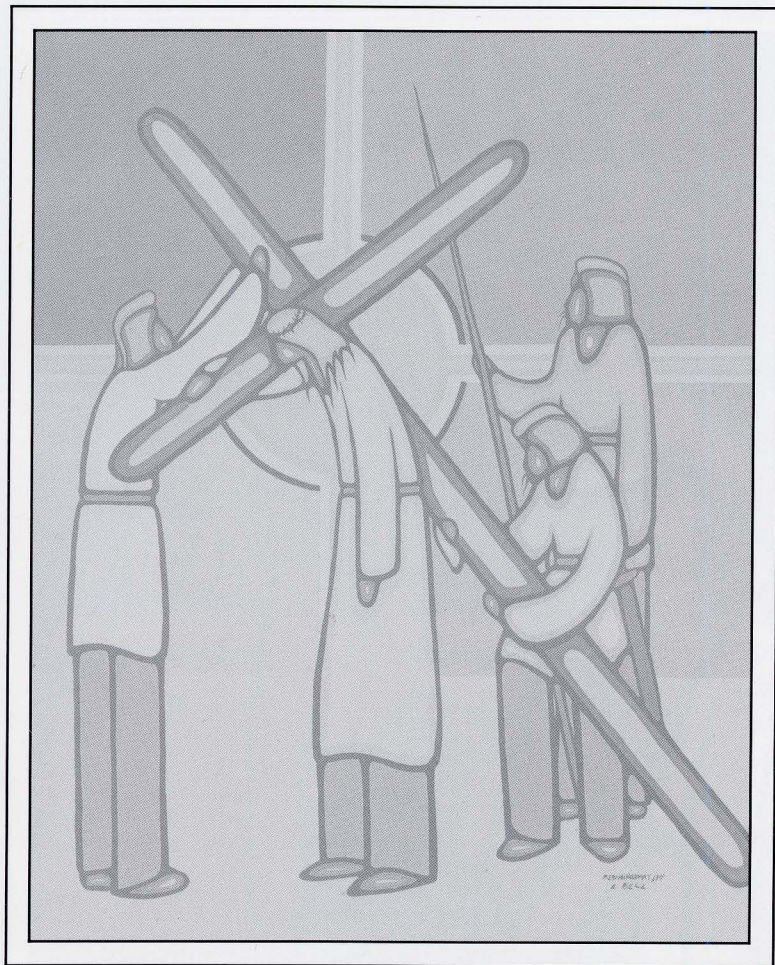
*“Jesus accepts the cross and the responsibility of the cross – the suffering. He takes that on for the people. In our tradition the sun is the grandfather, the Creator. The blue circle is broken and the color is coming out of it to show that Jesus is not alone, even though he takes the burden alone.”*

*Leland Bell*









Jesus Is Picking Up His Cross  
Leland Bell  
acrylic on canvass  
50 cm x 45 cm

*Immaculate Conception Parish Church  
West Bay, Manitoulin Island*





## JESUS OD ODAPINAN O TCHIBAIATIGOMAN

(Jesus Is Picking Up His Cross)

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The condemned man must carry His own cross. Jesus has a heavy, wooden cross to carry. He is weak from the scourging, the mocking and yelling. His crown presses on His head.

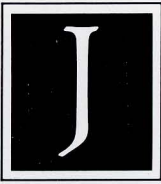
With this deep suffering the soldier passes Jesus the cross. He accepts the cross as a sign of the acceptance of the responsibility to suffer. He takes on this suffering for the People. He offers Himself to God for humanity.

Like Christ, we meet sufferings in life. From a common cold to terminal cancer the human person suffers. Some sufferings pass, others end in death. But ultimately we must carry our cross of suffering. As one Native person said: "Life has its crosses and those who come through are like the stone that has been shaped and ground into a near perfect shape. Carrying our cross purifies us and makes us become more like Jesus."

Different kinds of crosses come to different people. Physical illness burdens some; mental disorder disturbs others; emotional upheaval and psychological pain rack a number but everyone carries some kind of cross. A family disturbance, a sibling rivalry, an on-the-job squabble or deep differences can pose a heavy cross.

How do we cope with these painful moments? Will we actually meet Christ in this time of suffering? Will we face ourselves? We do have a degree of freedom. We can choose to enter this mystery of suffering and carry our cross. Friendships and solitude will give us the inner strength, the conviction of Christ.





# ESUS PANGISHIN TCHIBAIATIGO-MIKANANG

(Jesus Falls On The Road Of The Cross)

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## THE THIRD STATION

*The three falls of Jesus Christ on his way of the Cross are an ancient tradition of the Church of Jerusalem.*

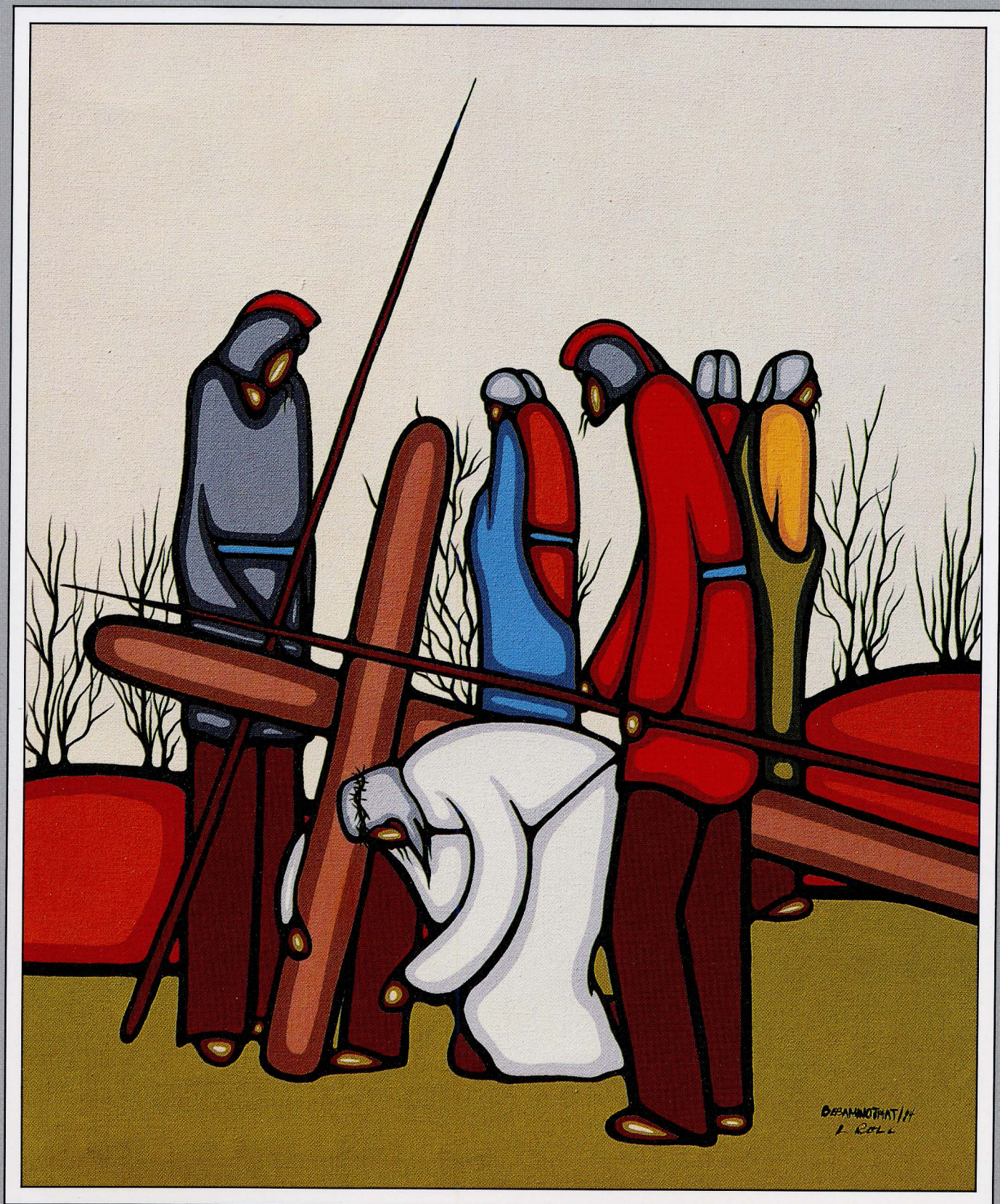
“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, after which he was very hungry, and the tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to turn into loaves.’ But he replied, ‘Scripture says: Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ”

(Matt. 4:1-4)

*“Sometimes you may feel what you are doing has meaning, but everybody else around you just ignores you. This painting shows that there is often very little understanding of why the suffering is taking place.”*

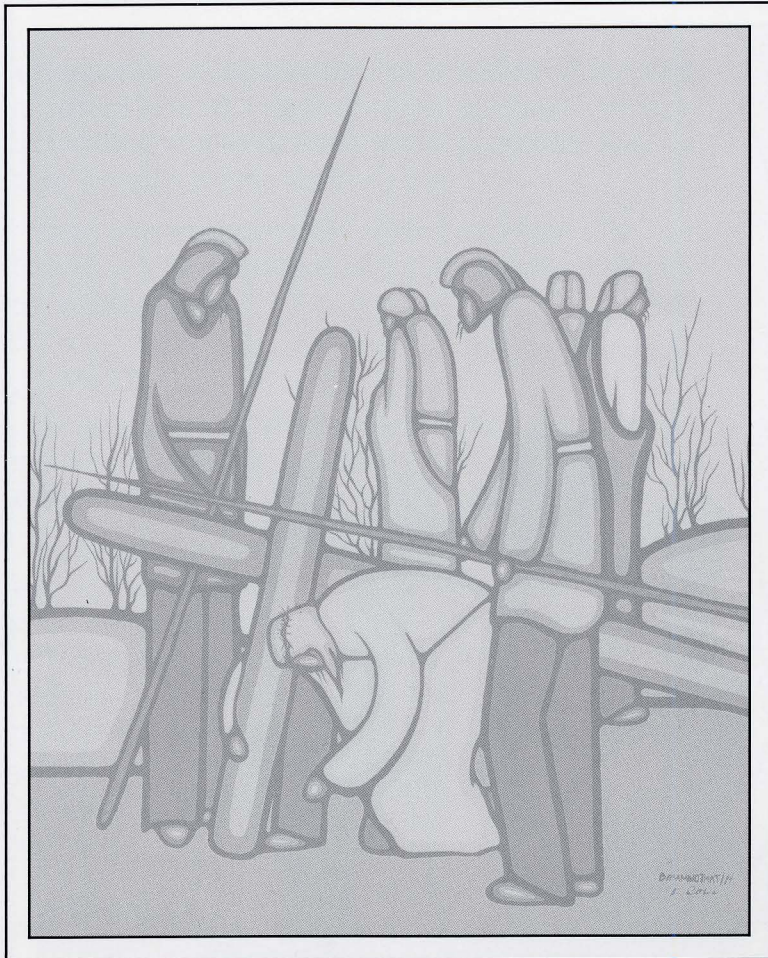
*Leland Bell*





DEANMOYAT/H  
L. ROLL





Jesus Falls On The Road Of The Cross  
Leland Bell  
acrylic on canvass  
50 cm x 45 cm

*Immaculate Conception Parish Church  
West Bay, Manitoulin Island*





## JESUS PANGISHIN TCHIBAIATIGO-MIKANANG

(Jesus Falls On The Road Of The Cross)

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Jesus falls under the weight of the cross. His weakened body cannot go further. His knees hit the ground. Weary, tired, discouraged . . . does this 'fall' mean that it's all over? Is this suffering really an act of love?

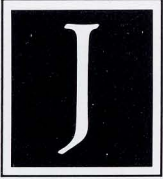
A loving man endures unjust suffering. Why? Some would say that it's unfair; others would cry out for revenge. But this movement challenges each one of us. What happens when we fall, when we make a mistake? As one Native man prayed: "Lord, when I fall, please hand me the cross that I may use it to climb to my feet."

Of course the fall is not the crucial dimension, but rather the rising up to continue His journey. Sometimes a good person, a man or woman committed to Christ, thinks that they will never have to suffer. But Jesus said: "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let them renounce themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Matt. 16:24)

Moving forward in, with and through the suffering makes us like Christ. We become His people, not masochistic but Christian. Our suffering is not good in itself, but united with Christ becomes redemptive for ourselves and others. We become co-redeemers with Christ. We may feel like He did, but we rise with him and continue our journey of life.

Each time we fall and rise we enter the mystery of death and resurrection. We live the paschal mystery of Christ in ourselves, our family and among our friends. "Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again." We proclaim this by our very lives on the Christian path of spirituality.





## ESUS O NAGISHKAWAN OGIN KESHKENDAMINIDJIN

(Jesus Meets One Who Is Very Sorrowful)

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### THE FOURTH STATION

“Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, ‘You see this child: he is destined for the fall and the rising of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is rejected — and a sword will pierce your own soul too — so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare.’ ”

(Luke 2:34)

*“I have something definitely in mind when I did the mother and the flowers. I did it to show life. Motherhood is like the earth; it supports life. And this mother, like all mothers, understands when she sees her child suffering. Not pity, understanding. The moustaches are there to symbolize communication, that there is more to the words than the uttering of certain sounds.”*

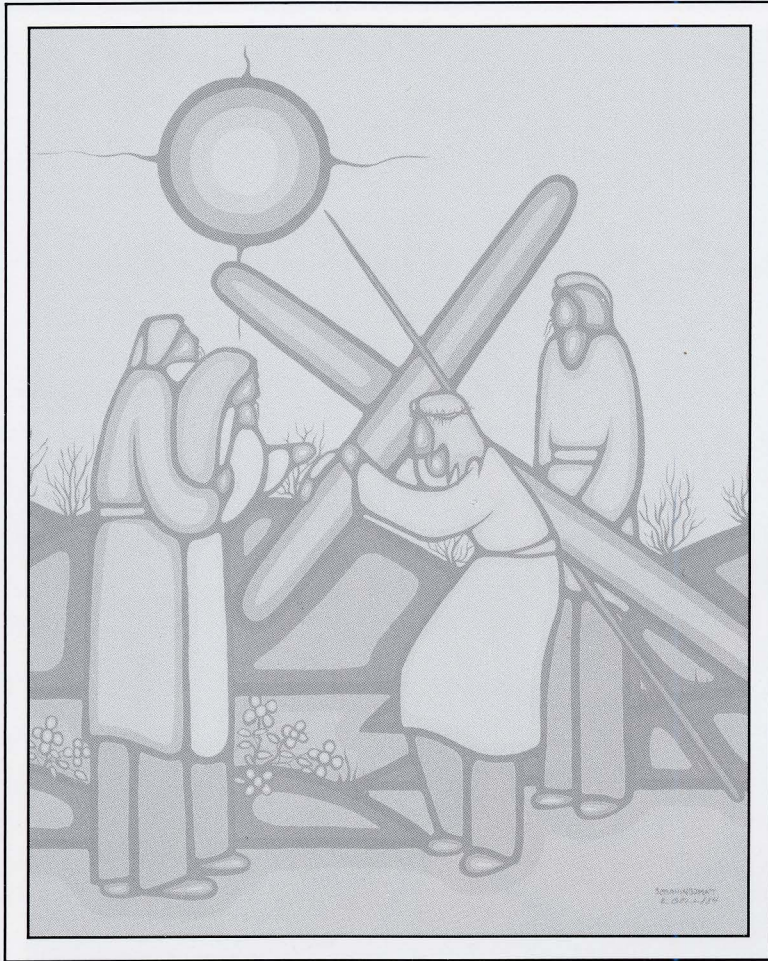
*Leland Bell*





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Jesus Meets One Who Is Very Sorrowful  
Leland Bell  
acrylic on canvass  
50 cm x 45 cm

*Immaculate Conception Parish Church  
West Bay, Manitoulin Island*





## JESUS O NAGISHKAWAN OGIN KESHKENDAMINIDJIN

(Jesus Meets One Who Is Very Sorrowful)

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Mary, the Mother of Jesus, meets him carrying His cross. He is moving towards Calvary — the place of His crucifixion. She looks into His eyes. “It must have been sad for her”, one Native woman commented.

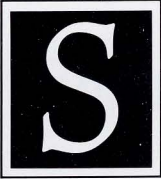
The cross is heavy; the crown of thorns pierces deeply. “He must really love us,” one Native man whispered. Jesus is willing to suffer in His physical body, to take on our sin and disorder and to open the Christian pathway to God, the Creator Spirit.

Like Mary, a mother of today suffers when her son suffers. She may see him caught in the downward spiral of alcoholism or drugs. He rejects his family; he never writes, calls or visits. A mother pains but can't do anything about it. Like Mary, she watches, waits and prays.

Mary — or the mother — ponders: “I gave him life.” . . . “I held him in my arms.” . . . “I loved to cook for him — bread, bannoch, fish.” . . . “I remember the first sign of a beard and his teenage friends coming to visit.” . . . “I remember when he left home . . . ‘to do His Father's business!’ as He said.” . . . “I set him free and hoped!” . . . “From the crowd, I heard him preach; I saw His power in miracles; I sat and chatted with his followers, and now . . .”

“Is that you Jesus?! “Are you suffering in my husband, my son, my daughter, my friends today?” “Are you still loving us in this suffering world?” “Are you inviting us to unite ourselves with you in the continuing salvation of all people?”





# IMON CIRENEING GA-ONDJID O WIDOKAWAN JESUSAN

(Simon Of Cyrene Goes To Help Jesus)

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## THE FIFTH STATION

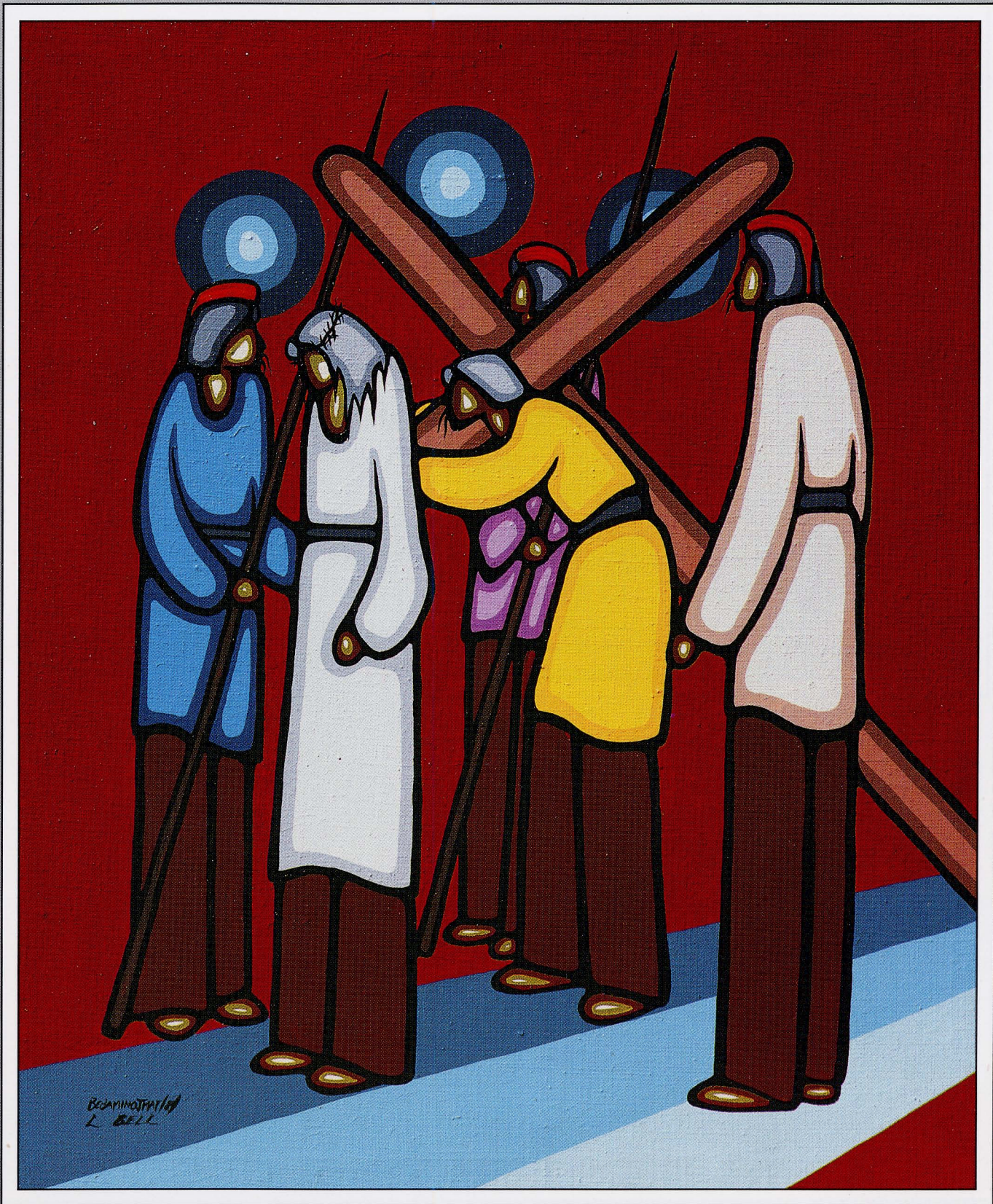
"They enlisted a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, father of Alexander and Rufus, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross."

(Mark 15:21)

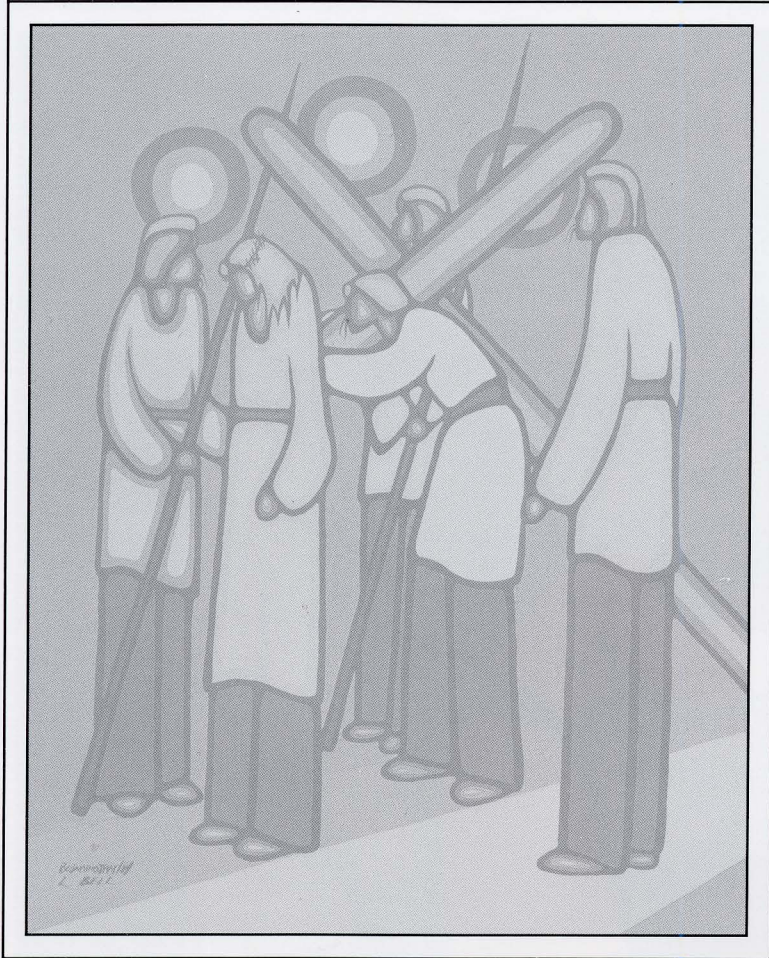
*"The three circles are the Trinity. I use a path. Jesus has taken this path. He accepts his situation and walks the path, the way of the cross. Simon is dressed in a yellow frock, because in my tradition yellow is the color of the east and symbolizes knowledge. He must possess knowledge and wisdom if he helps another man who is suffering."*

*Leland Bell*









Simon Of Cyrene Goes To Help Jesus  
Leland Bell  
acrylic on canvass  
50 cm x 45 cm

*Immaculate Conception Parish Church  
West Bay, Manitoulin Island*





## SIMON CIRENEING GA-ONDJID O WIDOKAWAN JESUSAN

(Simon Of Cyrene Goes To Help Jesus)

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Who is this man Simon? Where is Cyrene? Have the soldiers forced him to help Jesus? Does he act willingly, lovingly? What is happening within him? Does he have an inner struggle?

The reality that another person helps Jesus invites us into the mystery of service. To walk with Jesus, maybe we begin by walking with Simon. Perhaps we can support, assist and even carry others in their time of suffering. A recent song may come to our ears – “He ain’t heavy, he’s my brother.”

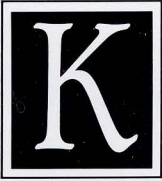
When we visit the sick, the elderly, the imprisoned, aren’t we living like Simon? Or, when we feed the hungry, clothe the naked or live any of the beatitudes, aren’t we really following Christ?

This kind of love costs! It hurts when we suffer for another. This sacrificial love draws us out of ourselves, making us like Christ – a person for others.

This loving without counting the cost urges people to give and give, to die to self that others may have life. Jesus himself said: “I have come so that you may have life, and have it to the full.” (John 10:10)

This fulness of life, this movement of self-transcendence called one native man to service. He found two young boys who had drowned. The older was holding the younger. He had given his life to try to save his friend, like Simon, faithful to the end. “A person can have no greater love than to lay down their life for their friends.” (John 15:13) In this experience, God called this Native man to service.





## ITCHITWA VERONIK O GASSINGWEWAN JESUSAN

(Holy Veronica Wipes The Face Of Jesus)

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### THE SIXTH STATION

Although there is no guarantee of its authenticity, this Station of the Cross is a legend of Christian antiquity. Like many legends, the person eventually embodied the legend itself.

Consequently the name "Veronica" is derived from the latin *vera icon*, meaning "true image", for as the legend goes, Veronica's facecloth was imprinted with the face of Jesus for her act of kindness.

What is certainly enduring about this story is that a compassionate woman wiped the face of our suffering Jesus, "so disfigured did he look that he seemed no longer human." (Isaiah 52:14)

We do well to ponder her action, for she is woman, a compassionate arm of integrity.

*"I see something other than comfort at work here, a kind of compassion. It's the woman giving the compassion, or Jesus consoling the woman. The soldier holds the sword, for in all of life the potential for danger always lurks under the surface and tries to take hold."*

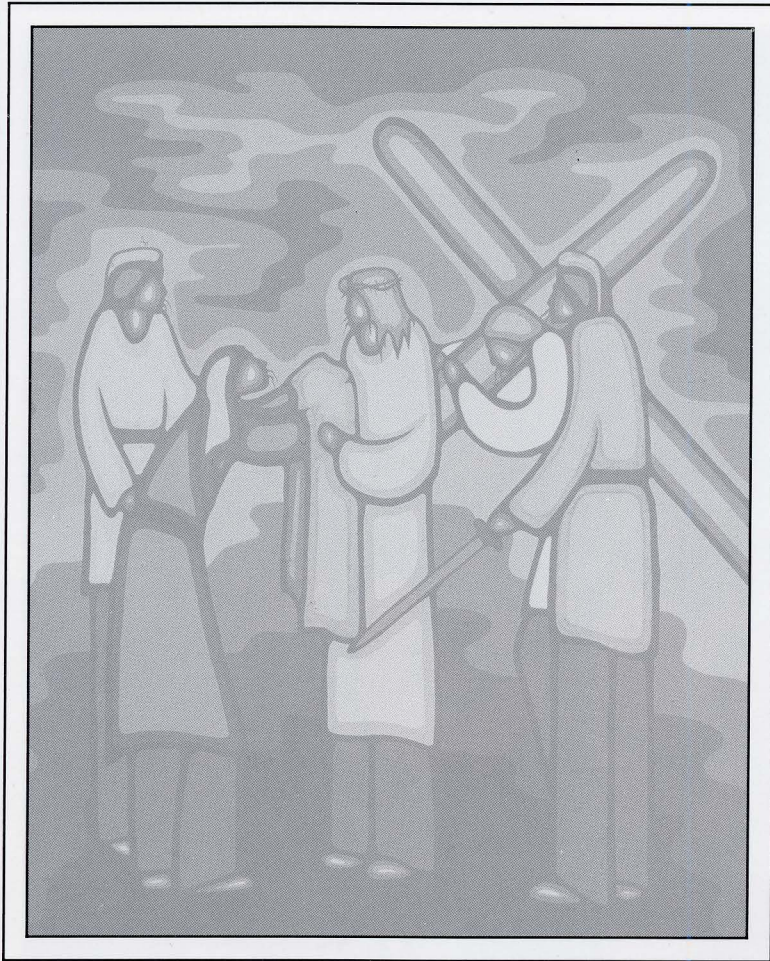
*Leland Bell*





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Holy Veronica Wipes The Face of Jesus  
Leland Bell  
acrylic on canvass  
50 cm x 45 cm

*Immaculate Conception Parish Church  
West Bay, Manitoulin Island*





## KITCHITWA VERONIK O GASSINGWEWAN JESUSAN

(Holy Veronica Wipes The Face Of Jesus)

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Veronica comes out of the crowd to assist Jesus. She transcends any personal fear. Her love moves her to this suffering person despite the soldiers, the leaders and the crowd. Her action can stimulate any of us.

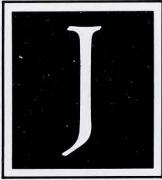
As one husky man put it: "When I am in a shopping centre, in traffic or anywhere, I am gifted to see Jesus' presence in the suffering young children, older men and women. It hurts deep inside to see this. Why does Jesus give me this opportunity to be like Veronica, when he knows well that I am weak in reaching out to others. My pride holds me back. I want to help but it isn't easy."

Different social settings may challenge us to act. Sometimes our values, our commitment as Christians, will call us to stand up for Christ. His face may be malnourished in the starving of Africa; His body may be whipped in the oppressed of Central America; His head may be crowned with the thorns in the injustice of Native land claims. Christ in His people may call us to be Veronica in our own time and in our unique way.

We may write a letter to government leaders or speak with those who can make a change. We may walk in solidarity with a group protesting the nuclear arms build-up or serve among those who struggle for peace and the right to life.

Like Veronica, or anyone involved in social action, we ponder the facts, look at our possible responses, pray and then move with the conviction of truth in a loving manner.





# ESUS MINAWA PANGISHIN TCHIBAIATIGO-MAKANANG

(Jesus Again Falls On The Road Of The Cross)

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## THE SEVENTH STATION

“The devil then took him to the holy city and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple. ‘If you are the Son of God’ he said ‘throw yourself down; for scripture says: He will put you in his angel’s charge, and they will support you on their hands in case you hurt your foot against a stone.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Scripture also says: You must not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ”

(Matt. 4:5-7)

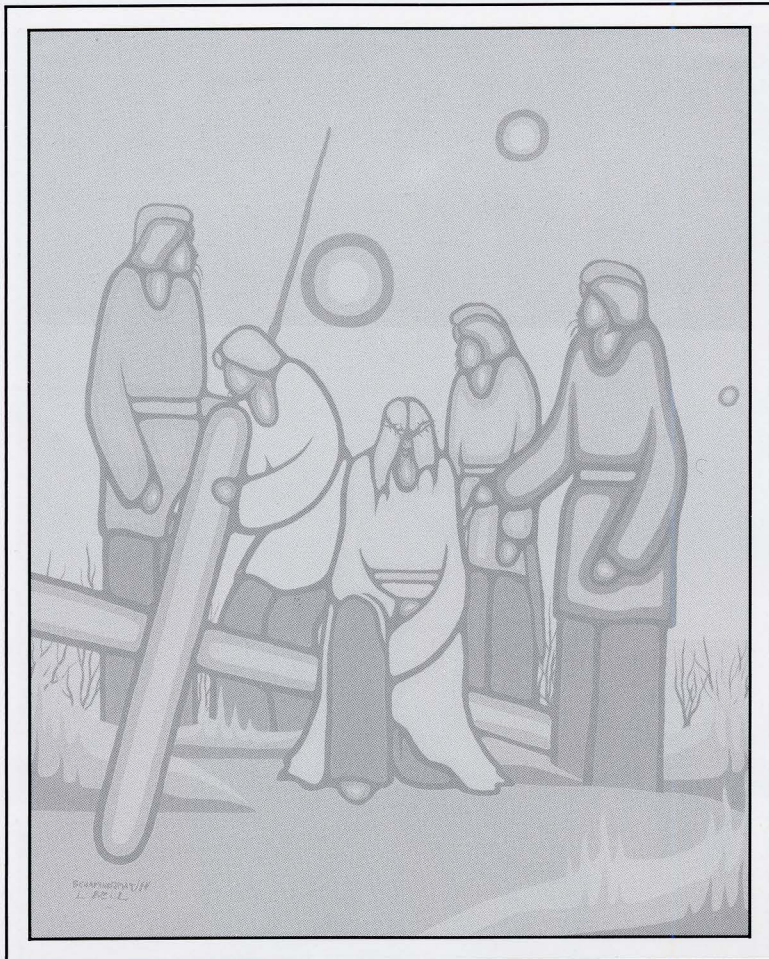
*“Here I try to show the fall, not so much that Jesus collapses under a great burden, but more in the sense that he tries to gather strength in the form of prayer. The Trinity watches over him. He is going to a high place to receive a vision; he is going to the mountain to pray. Simon remains beside Jesus; he is the support.”*

*Leland Bell*









Jesus Again Falls On The Road Of The Cross  
Leland Bell  
acrylic on canvass  
50 cm x 45 cm

*Immaculate Conception Parish Church  
West Bay, Manitoulin Island*





# JESUS MINAWA PANGISHIN TCHIBAIATIGO-MAKANANG

(Jesus Again Falls On The Road Of The Cross)

---

His weakened legs cannot hold up his body. He pauses. Imagine the inner ache, along with the physical pain. His whole being is wounded; He cannot go on.

Where will the strength come from to endure this suffering? Can He possibly pray and ask for help in this moment? Does God hear the cry of the suffering servant? He appears abandoned, rejected and lost, a man despised and spat upon.

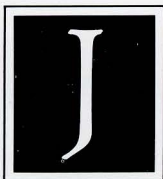
Even in North America so many people look forlorn, pained and lost. Others are imprisoned, hospitalized or walk around with a glazed stare of isolation. Like Christ, these people fall but how do they rise again?

What will spark an inner spirit to stand up and keep going? Christ must have reached back to the strength of the Garden of Olives. He cried out in prayer to God and received the power to move toward Calvary for the good of all people. The Creator Spirit gave Him the courage, the "guts" we might say, to do what he had to do—this mysterious will of God.

Like Jesus, we too will enter the limitation of our humanity. We too will meet our human weakness. What inner spirit do we reach to? What strength do we call upon?

Every human person faces the reality of suffering. We hurt; we ache but we stand again and move forward on our journey of life. Our crosses sometimes knock us down but never knock us out. We call upon our spirit within, united to Christ's Spirit, to move forward in life.





# ERUSALEMING DAJI-IKWEWAG O MAWIMAWAN JESUSAN

(The Women of Jerusalem Are Crying For Jesus)

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## THE EIGHTH STATION

"Large numbers of people followed him, and of women too, who mourned and lamented him. But Jesus turned to them and said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep rather for yourselves and for your children. For the days will surely come when people will say, "Happy are those who are barren, the wombs that have never borne, the breasts that have never suckled!" Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us!"; to the hills, "Cover us!" For if men use the green wood like this, what will happen when it is dry?' "

(Luke 23:27-32)

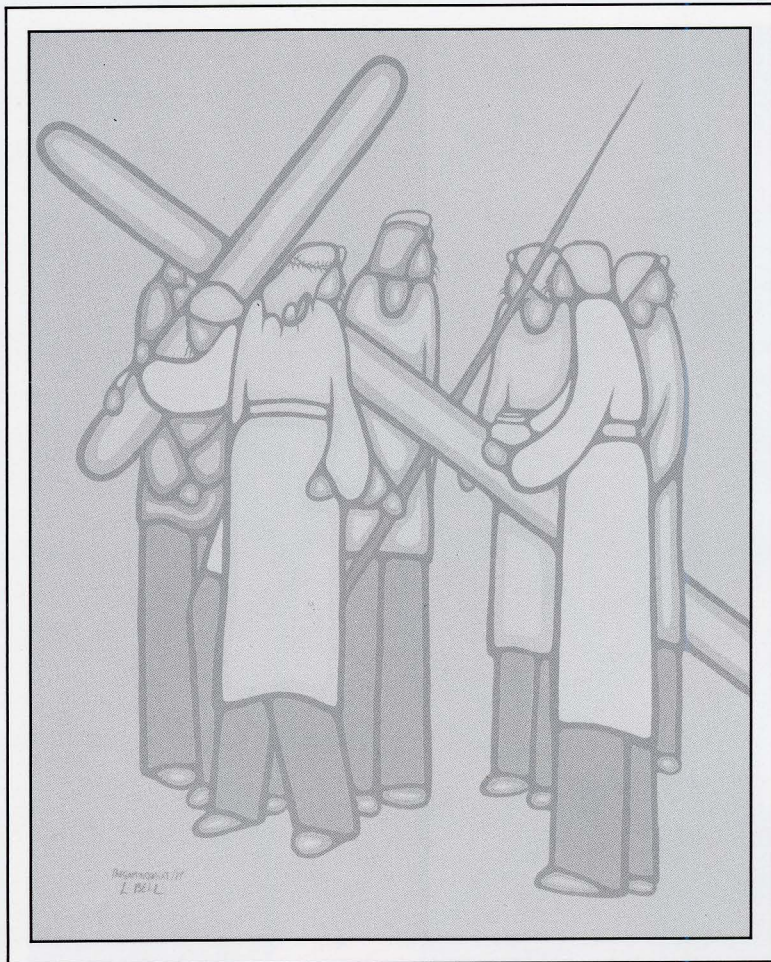
*"There is a separation here. The red background symbolizes people, while the blue background symbolizes spirituality. Because women carry life in them, in our tradition they pray for water because water sustains life. So the woman is holding the bowl. The cup of life must be maintained."*

*Leland Bell*









The Women of Jerusalem Are Crying For Jesus  
Leland Bell  
acrylic on canvass  
50 cm x 45 cm

*Immaculate Conception Parish Church  
West Bay, Manitoulin Island*





## JERUSALEMING DAJI-IKWEWAG O MAWIMAWAN JESUSAN

(The Women of Jerusalem Are Crying For Jesus)

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From among the angry mob the faithful women lament for Jesus. Their caring and compassion strike a gentle note amidst the discord of cursing and blasphemies. The contrast of love and hate focus on Jesus. Silent to His blasphemers, He whispers to those who care: "Do not weep for Me; weep rather for yourselves and for your children." (Luke 23:28) Even in His excruciating pain He looks outside Himself with concern. His love reaches from one generation to the next and on down through the ages.

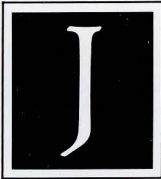
The love of the women call forth His own love. This feminine presence and lamentation remind one Native person of Mother Earth weeping for the taste of the healing medicines, for peace and tranquility. Or, the weeping is like Mother Earth hearing the call of the drum. In this moment of personal and social pain love prevails.

This human-divine situation spans all time. Jesus suffers for each person, each family, every nation. The women proclaim a compassion for all humanity in their compassion for Jesus.

God is Father, yes; but God is also Mother, bringing consolation to the weary, weeping for our struggle, unconditionally presenting a heart of mercy. This feminine outreach for the Jesus of today continues. Mothers, single women and religious show care, concern and compassion for people. They bring a divine sensitivity to our present world. Their fidelity to young and old, their gentleness amidst many injustices and their creative voice balance the aggressive, harsh and dominant realities.

These contrasts strike the heart of every person. We need the Creator Spirit – gentle, strong and peaceful.





## ESUS MINAWA TCHINGIDJISSE

(Jesus Again Falls On His Knees)

---

### THE NINTH STATION

“Next, taking him to a very high mountain, the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. ‘I will give you all these’ he said ‘if you fall at my feet and worship me.’ Then Jesus replied, ‘Be off, Satan! For scripture says: You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone.’ Then the devil left him.”

(Matt. 4:8-10)

*“Jesus is exhausted. At this point I want to show more of the inside of Jesus. He is cradled by the earth because there is nothing really there but the earth that holds him or cradles him. The anguish here is caused more by people and so the soldier carries a whip. But again, he is not alone because Simon is there; Simon reaches out to him.”*

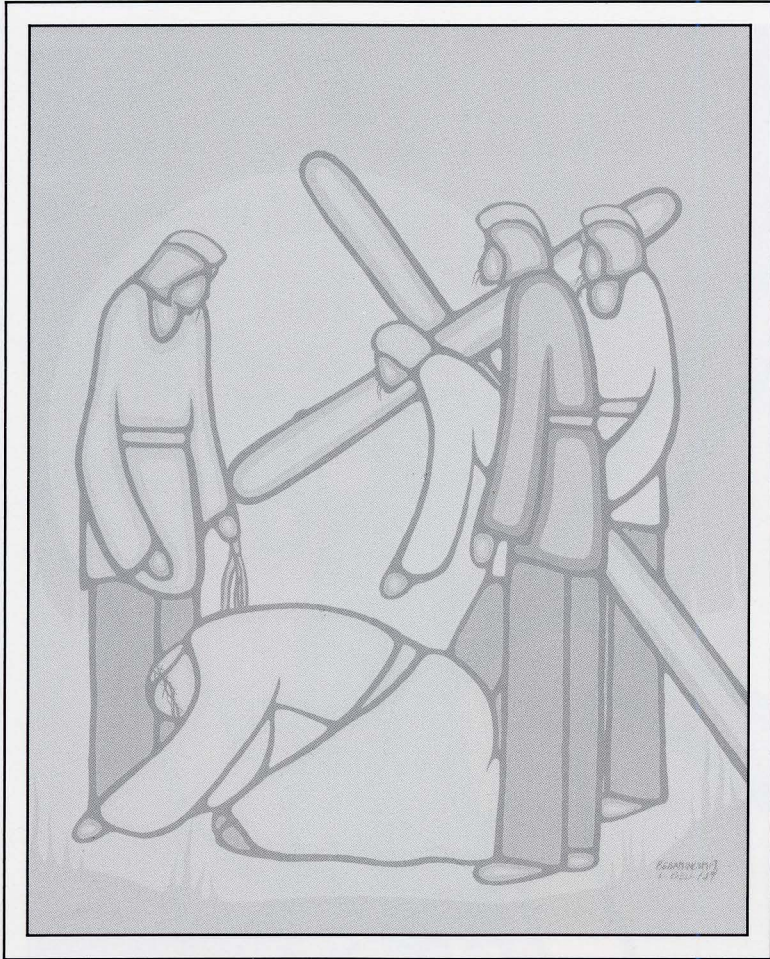
*Leland Bell*





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Jesus Again Falls On His Knees  
Leland Bell  
acrylic on canvass  
50 cm x 45 cm

*Immaculate Conception Parish Church  
West Bay, Manitoulin Island*





## JESUS MINAWA TCHINGIDJISSE

(Jesus Again Falls On His Knees)

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This time Jesus collapses to His hands and knees. He is almost flat on His face. Can He possibly rise again? Has the end come? As one Native person said, "It's hard to get up, after falling the third time."

Has alcoholism or sexual irresponsibility caused a fall for the third time or maybe the thirty-third time? Who will help us get up this time? We seem to have no push, no inner strength but maybe a friend comes along. Simon is still helping; the women are still weeping; Mary, His mother, is still near by. They helped Him. Who will help us?

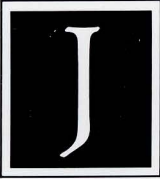
If we are drowning in alcohol, maybe a recovering alcoholic will make a twelfth step visit. Or, a friend will tell us the truth about what we are doing to ourselves.

Sometimes another person mediates the love that moves us to change. This *metanoia* – conversion of mind and heart – prompts us to a new beginning. With the help of friends we rise up and move ahead. As Jesus Himself said: "Love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12)

The social situation often graces someone in time of difficulty. Strength comes from the group; courage emerges from others. As Jesus said: "For where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them." (Matt. 18:20)

This presence of God – a Love creating purpose and a Peace giving meaning – supports the struggling person. The social context lifts the person with love. People help people.





## ESUS AJIGWA GIJAMADJIWE IMA GE-DAJI-NISSIND

(Jesus Has Arrived At The Place, And Is Being Prepared For Crucifixion)

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### THE TENTH STATION

“They took his clothing and divided it into four shares, one for each soldier. His undergarment was seamless, woven into one piece from the neck to hem; so they said to one another, ‘Instead of tearing it, let’s throw dice to decide who is to have it.’ In this way the words of scripture were fulfilled:

They shared out my clothing among them,

They cast lots for my clothes.

This is exactly what the soldiers did.”

(John 19:23-24)

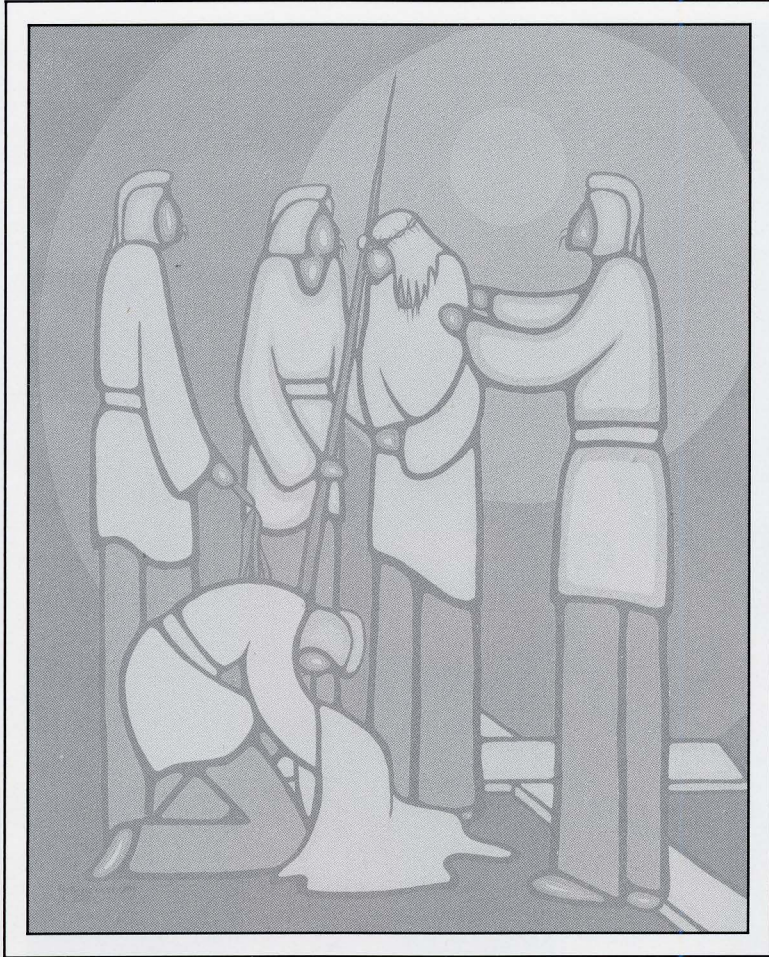
*One soldier bows in reverence, with great respect. He recognizes that there is something great about this man.”*

*Leland Bell*









Jesus Has Arrived At The Place, And Is Being Prepared For Crucifixion  
Leland Bell  
acrylic on canvass  
50 cm x 45 cm

*Immaculate Conception Parish Church  
West Bay, Manitoulin Island*





## JESUS AJIGWA GIJAMADJIWE IMA GE-DAJI-NISSIND

(Jesus Has Arrived At The Place, And Is Being Prepared For Crucifixion)

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The callous soldiers tear the blood-coated garments from his scourged body. He loses His last possession. Naked He stands before the crowd. Where is His dignity, self-respect, honor? He is rejected, belittled, shamed.

Imagine His inner feelings. Ponder His sense of isolation. Enter His world of rejection.

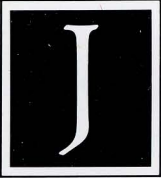
Haven't we too been in similar situations? Don't we too live the beatitude from time to time? "Happy are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you on my account." (Matt. 5:11)

So often the Native people have lost their dignity. Stripped of land, language and political rights the *Anishnabek* become like the suffering servant, Jesus Christ. Even among their own people self-respect can be lacking. Self-confidence can falter. They can stand fearfully among their own, paralyzed and immobile.

What will create the honor and dignity to continue? Like Jesus, the Native person needs the Great Spirit, the Holy Spirit poured out by God upon all peoples. With this energy of Love, the person endures the suffering, turns the pain into compassion and silently rises as a dignified person.

The silent posture and purposeful eyes speak of dedication and determination. Justice will triumph; truth will overcome; dignity will prevail. All peoples will walk through their specific passion to a new life based on love.





## ESUS SASSAGAKWAWA TCHIBAIATIGONG

(Jesus Is Nailed To The Wood Of The Cross)

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### THE ELEVENTH STATION

“The passers-by jeered at him; they shook their heads and said, ‘So you would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days! Then save yourself! If you are God’s son, come down from the cross!’ The chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked him in the same way; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He put his trust in God; now let God rescue him if he wants him.”

(Matt. 27:39-44)

*“The red circle here means that he is doing this for the people; he is dying for the people. He is in great pain. There is no way to comfort someone who is in such great pain.”*

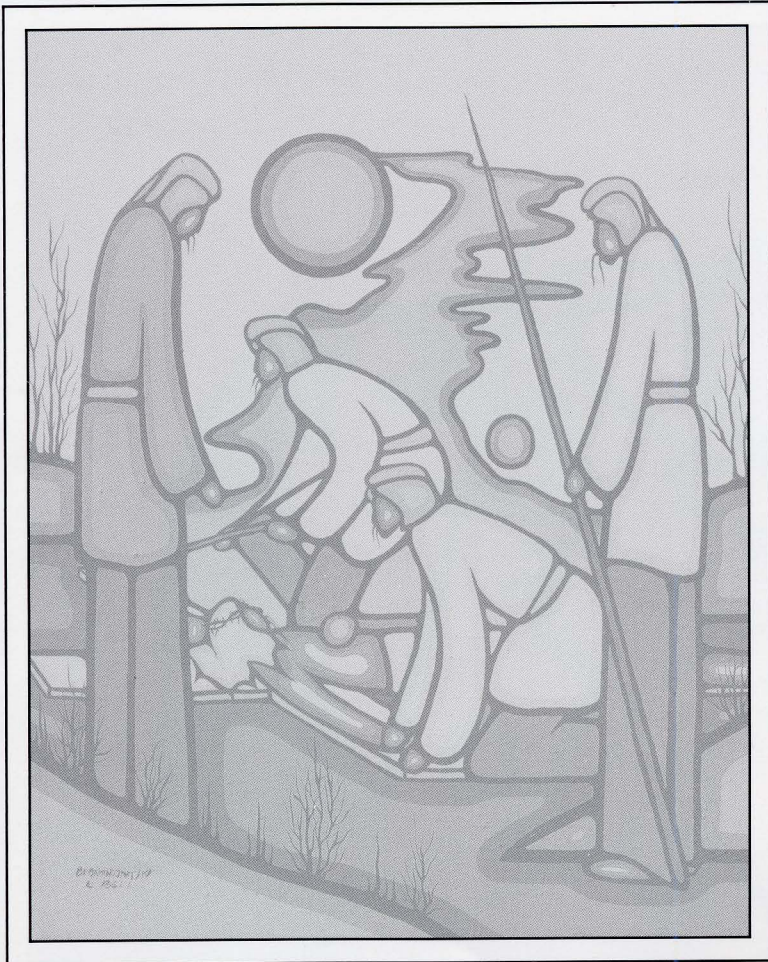
*Leland Bell*





BENJAMIN LEVY  
L. 1961





Jesus Is Nailed To The Wood Of The Cross  
Leland Bell  
acrylic on canvass  
50 cm x 45 cm

*Immaculate Conception Parish Church  
West Bay, Manitoulin Island*





## JESUS SASSAGAKWAWA TCHIBAIATIGONG

(Jesus Is Nailed To The Wood Of The Cross)

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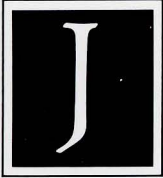
The spikes secure His hands and feet. He surrenders. His blood begins to flow for all humanity. The redemption moves resolutely towards completion. Yet, this salvific act of love never ends. We ponder St Paul's mysterious words: "... as I am suffering now, and in my own body to do what I can to make up all that has still to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the Church." (Col. 1:24)

Every Christian enters this mystery of suffering. We are sinners and co-redeemers. As one native woman said: "When I look at the picture of Jesus being nailed to the cross, I think of the times that I have hurt Jesus. Every time I sin, I am the one who is putting the spikes into Jesus." But the same person realizes that she is uniting her redemptive suffering with Jesus when she said: "I must therefore repent and live a life of love, faith and hope. When I feel hurt and rejected, I am with Jesus being nailed to the cross."

This "nailing" and "being nailed" reveals a central aspect in Christian spirituality. The sinner becomes the savior. Although Jesus was sinless, He took upon Himself our sins. We in turn commit our own sins, but experience His forgiveness. We are forgiven sinners. We move among people knowing our weakness, our sinfulness but we speak of the loving, forgiving Jesus. We can only say with St. Paul: "For it is when I am weak that I am strong." (2 Cor. 12:10)

His power of loving forgiveness comes into our weakness. We simply respond with humility and gratitude. What a gift!





# ESUS AGODJIN TCHIBAIATIGONG NIBO GAIE

(Jesus Is Hanging On The Wood Of The Cross And Dies)

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## THE TWELFTH STATION

“Like a sapling he grew up in front of us,  
like a root in arid ground.  
Without beauty, without majesty (we saw him),  
no looks to attract our eyes;  
a thing despised and rejected by men,  
a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering,  
a man to make people screen their faces;  
he was despised and we took no account of him.

And yet ours were the sufferings he bore,  
ours the sorrows he carried.  
But we, we thought of him as someone punished,  
struck by God, and brought low.  
Yet he was pierced through for our faults,  
crushed for our sins.  
On him lies a punishment that brings us peace,  
and through his wounds we are healed.”

(Isaiah 53:2-5)

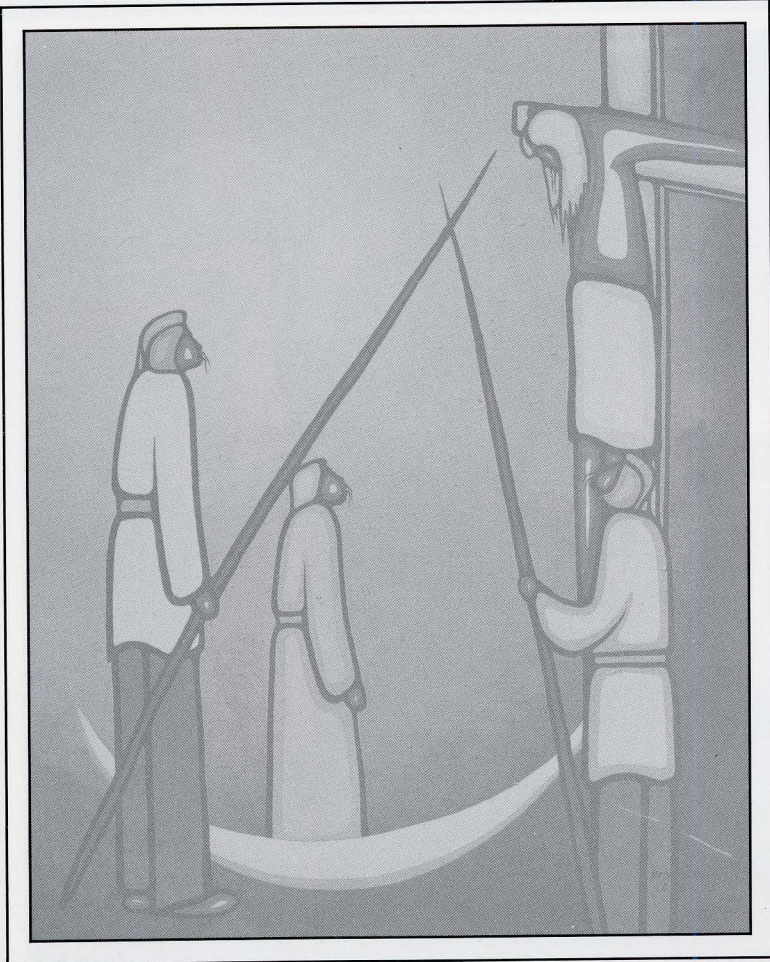
*“Something significant has happened. The figures look up like when we look up to the stars. When we look into the darkened sky at night there is an immensity to it and we are so insignificant. Yes, something great has happened to us whether we understand it or not.”*

*Leland Bell*









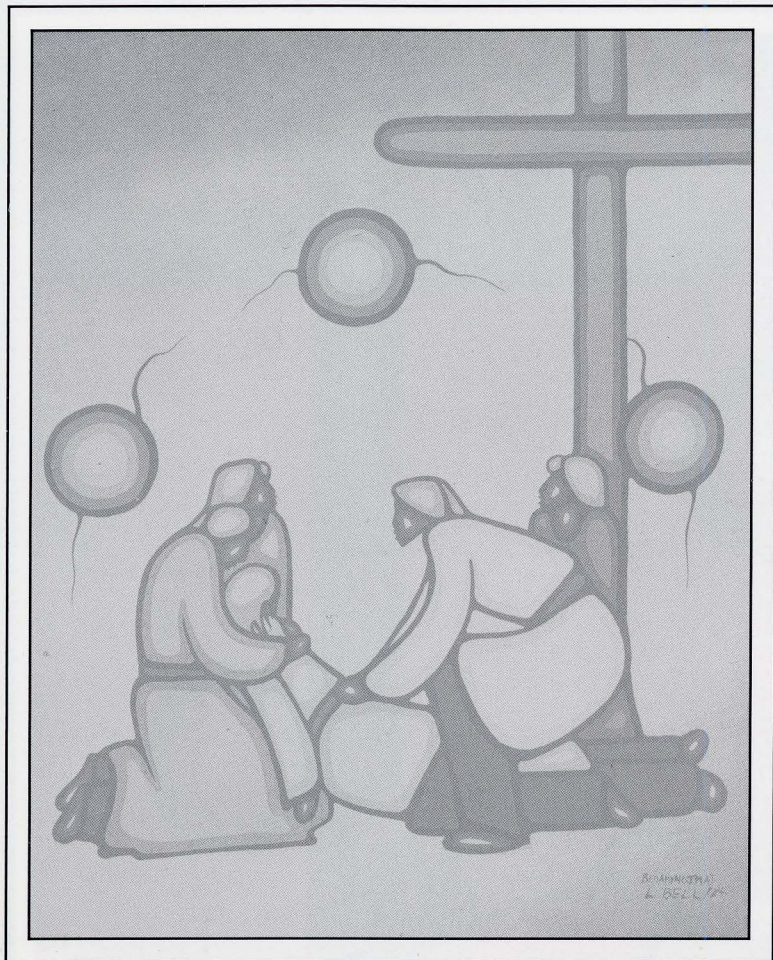
Jesus Is Hanging On The Wood Of The Cross And Dies  
Leland Bell  
acrylic on canvass  
50 cm x 45 cm

*Immaculate Conception Parish Church  
West Bay, Manitoulin Island*





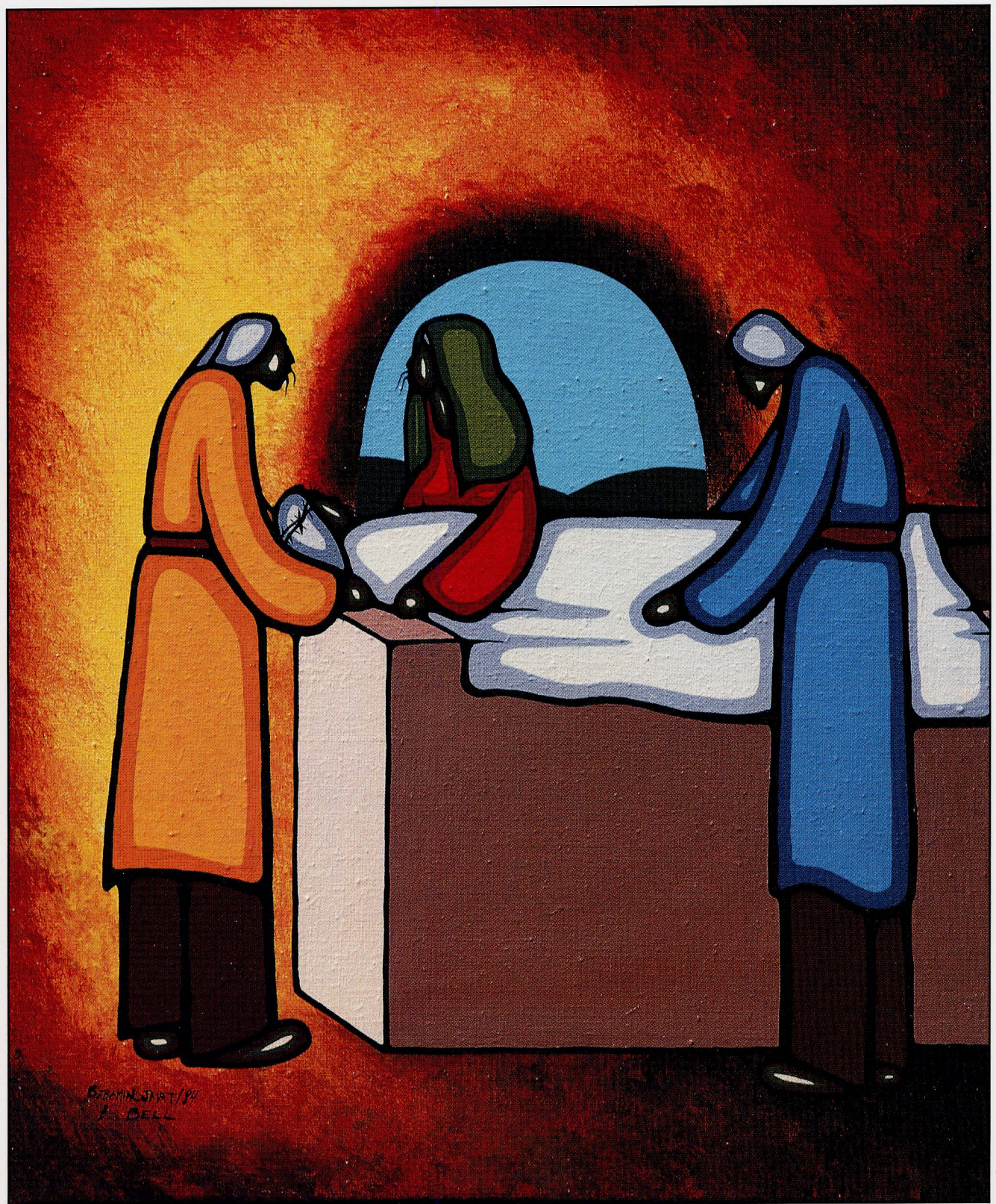




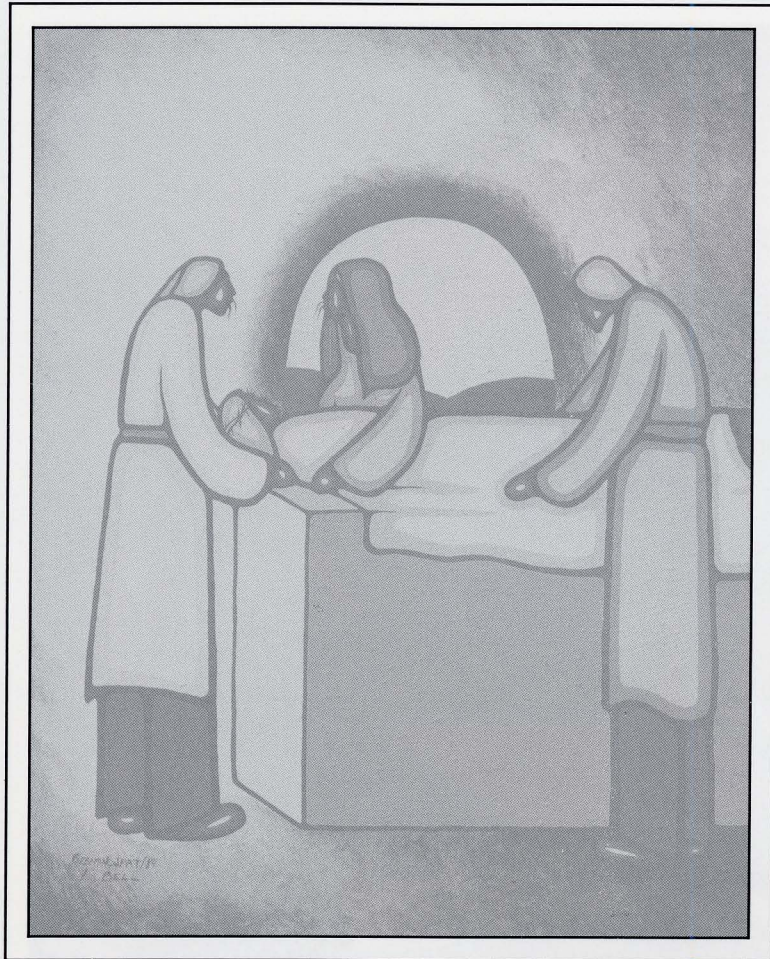
Jesus' Body Is Taken Down From The Wood Of The Cross  
Leland Bell  
acrylic on canvass  
50 cm x 45 cm

*Immaculate Conception Parish Church  
West Bay, Manitoulin Island*









Jesus' Body Is Placed In The Designated Spot For The Dead  
Leland Bell  
acrylic on canvass  
50 cm x 45 cm

*Immaculate Conception Parish Church  
West Bay, Manitoulin Island*





## JESUS AGODJIN TCHIBAIATIGONG NIBO GAIE

(Jesus Is Hanging On The Wood Of The Cross And Dies)

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Like a common criminal, Jesus hung in agony until death. He gave up His life for all people. The Original Man — Adam, turned away from God. Jesus — the Second Adam, the Redeemer, opened up the way to God. As He said: “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.” (John 14:6)

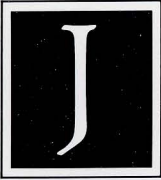
This new life invites everyone to live and love like Jesus. But His life means death. To be like Christ, we must die to ourselves. We may be tempted but we resist. We may want our own will but another’s will prevails. We may think that our ideas are best but another idea is chosen. This dying to self creates inner freedom and gives life, life in abundance. This apparent contradiction draws a person into the Christian way of sacrificial love. The mystery of the spiritual life opens up.

To walk this spiritual path creates a bond with the Redeemer. As one man prayed: “Lord can I really die to myself? Can I take the time to sit and listen to those who are lonely, fearful, suffering from deep rejection in prison—afraid I may not like them. Why can’t I reach out and say something kind? Why am I so selfish with my time?”

The agony of the cross continues in our time. The body of Christ suffers today. Only when we join our suffering to Jesus’ do we become co-redeemers with Him.

Our ultimate redemption comes with total and complete surrender to God. The moment of truth arrives when we meet God face to face—our physical, human death. We paraphrase His words: “Into your hands I hope to commend my spirit O Lord.”





## ESUS WIIAW NISSINIGADENI TCHIBAIATIGONG

(Jesus' Body Is Taken Down From The Wood Of The Cross)

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### THE THIRTEENTH STATION

“When it was evening, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, called Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. The man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate thereupon ordered it to be handed over.”

(Matt. 27:57-58)

*“By using the four colors of yellow, red, blue and white I want to show that there is light even after someone has gone. There's something here besides an ending. We can't hold back a person who has died by our tears. We have to learn how to let go.”*

*Leland Bell*





## JESUS WILAW NISSINIGADENI TCHIBAIATIGONG

(Jesus' Body Is Taken Down From The Wood Of The Cross)

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The crowds have gone; a few remain . . . John, Mary of Magdala and Mary, His mother. Simon bends over him; Joseph of Arimathaea gets permission to bury the body. And Mary cradles the dead body of her Son.

As she wipes away His blood, sweat and tears, her mind like ours must have raced back to the many moments of goodness in His life. He healed, cured and gave life. His death is indeed a travesty of justice.

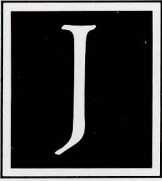
But love is not always just. Rather, love is a decision. Mary made her decision many years back when she gave her *fiat*. His other friends stood with him in death. Jesus Himself chose in the fulness of His humanity at Gethsemani. "Father . . . let your will be done, not mine!" (Luke 22:42)

When the Spirit is with us, we too will choose to tend the broken body of Christ. We will move to the suffering servants of our time, to the little people, the marginalized — in body, mind, affect and spirit. As a Native person reflected: "Somehow I'm going to have to get bloody when I take you down from the cross. Otherwise, how can I place those broken hearts next to yours?"

Christ has died a common criminal, an outcast. Mary embraces His body, empty of life. Today can we embrace the emaciated body of the person with AIDS? Can we befriend the Sikh, the Pakistani, the Black? Can we love those who are different, sometimes even our enemies?

This involvement with the weak and wounded demands a spiritual strength. The Spirit nudges us into relationships and service that humble us. We find ourselves among the poor, identifying with refugees and peaceful with the rejected of our culture. Our hearts hear His whisper. "In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me." (Matt. 25:40)





## ESUS WIIAW ATCHIGADENI TECHIBEGAMIGONG

(Jesus' Body Is Placed In The Designated Spot For The Dead)

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### THE FOURTEENTH STATION

“After this, Joseph of Arimathaea, who was a disciple of Jesus — though a secret one because he was afraid of the authorities — asked Pilate to let him remove the body of Jesus. Pilate gave permission, so they came and took it away. Nicodemus came as well — the same one who had first come to Jesus at night-time — and he brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, following the Jewish burial custom. At the place where he had been crucified there was a garden, and in this garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been buried. Since it was the Jewish Day of Preparation and the tomb was near at hand, they laid Jesus there.”

(John 19:38-42)

*“The tomb is not a dark place because this painting is supposed to give comfort. It is a sacred place to be in and so there's a kind of warmth in it. There is no idealistic or perverse kind of attitude towards death. No, the people in this painting care for Jesus right to the end, to the end of life. They still love Jesus. It didn't end on the cross and it didn't end after he was taken down from the cross. It went beyond. There is the light.”*

*Leland Bell*





## JESUS WIIAW ATCHIGADENI TECHIBEGAMIGONG

(Jesus' Body Is Placed In The Designated Spot For The Dead)

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Some of His disciples place His body in the tomb, newly hewn from the rock. Covered with the shroud, His lifeless body waits. In a real sense, riddled with the sins of all humanity, Jesus – the Son of God – is redeeming His People. United with God, the Creator-Spirit, He is opening up a new creation, a spiritual journey to God.

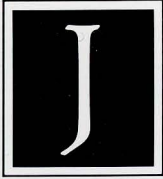
This “Way of the Lord” stands open for everyone. But burial comes first. One Native man shared his thoughts: “How many times Lord have I witnessed your burial in my people. A mother buries the needs of her children for the excitement of night life. Husbands and wives bury themselves in grief when their marriage fails. I see the Lord buried in the alcohol and drug abusers, the unemployed, the homeless, the abused child.”

Who will set these people free? How will they enter the “Way of the Lord”, the spiritual journey to God?

Christ gives us His Spirit to enter this journey. His redemptive love on the cross has opened this way of the new creation. Through our baptism we are brothers and sisters of Christ, invited to live like Him. As one man prayed: “Lord help me to bury the selfishness that keeps me from truly loving you and my neighbor. Too long have I hung on to the grave of my sins, fearing to let You heal me once and for all.”

This burial of our sins, weaknesses and disorders in Christ means that we can rise with Him. The mystery of death gives way to resurrection. We are people of hope!





## ESUS ABITCHIBA

(Jesus Risen From The Dead)

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### THE FIFTEENTH STATION

“Meanwhile Mary stayed outside near the tomb, weeping. Then, still weeping, she stooped to look inside, and saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, the other at the feet. They said, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ ‘They have taken my Lord away’ she replied ‘and I don’t know where they have put him.’ As she said this she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not recognise him. Jesus said, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?’ Supposing him to be the gardener, she said, ‘Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and remove him’. Jesus said, ‘Mary!’ She knew him then and said to him in Hebrew, ‘Rabbuni!’ — which means Master. Jesus said to her, ‘Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go and find the brothers, and tell them.’ ”

(John 20: 11-17)

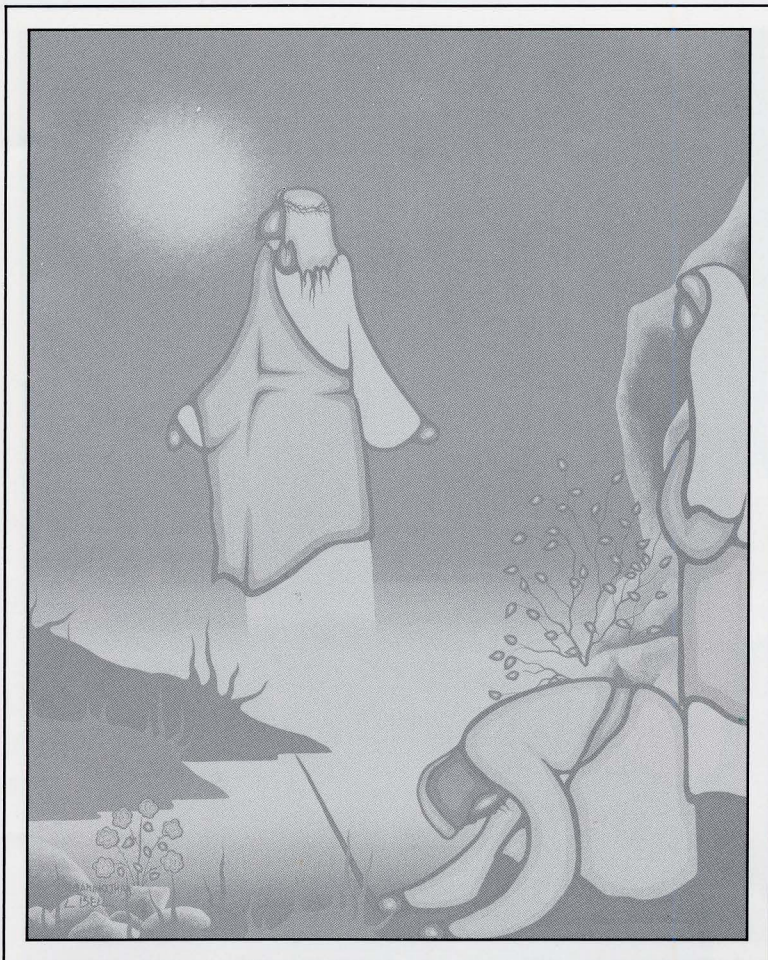
*“Early in the morning at dawn you pray to greet the day. You announce your name, who you are and who you are praying for. Then supposedly at dusk when creation stops you announce your prayer again and your prayer is heard. You praise again and you stand still again . . . All of creation is being purified. It wasn’t just the cleansing of sin, but it was also the cleansing of all of life. It wasn’t necessary for the people at that moment to understand or to know the meaning. His resurrection shows it was for all people and all centuries. The important thing is what was provided. Life. We always celebrate his life. We can’t celebrate death. What we celebrate is life!”*

*Leland Bell*









Jesus Risen From The Dead  
Leland Bell  
acrylic on canvass  
50 cm x 45 cm

*Immaculate Conception Parish Church  
West Bay, Manitoulin Island*





## JESUS ABITCHIBA

(Jesus Risen From The Dead)

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Love triumphs. God – Our Creator – in union with the Holy Spirit raises Jesus Christ from the dead. Alleluia!

This miracle of resurrection grounds the Christian faith. As St. Paul said: "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is useless and your believing it is useless." (I Cor. 15:14) In His risen body the Christ appeared to Peter, Mary of Magdala, John and many others. Among these, logic indicates an apparition to Mary, His mother.

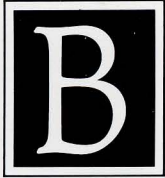
These appearances reveal that Christ has risen in the body, although His resurrected body differs from His earthly body. During His appearance to His disciples He ate some grilled fish. When they thought He was a ghost, He told them: "Touch me and see for yourselves; a ghost has no flesh and bones as you can see I have." (Luke 24:39)

The Risen Lord is alive and well. He brings love, peace and joy to His friends. They become believers; they form a christian community in faith, hope and love. They live like Him, reproducing the pattern of His life, death and resurrection. They are people of the Way, His Way of spirituality.

This spiritual gift of belief in the resurrection creates people of hope. In times of suffering believers know that, like Christ, they will rise one day. One person shared that "the Spirit freed me from alcoholism. I have tasted the resurrection."

His life makes possible new life in us, for we are His spiritual children – children of the Light! Alleluia indeed!





## EEDAHBUN

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The man's breathing was a little faster as he trudged up the steep path. Despite his age, he was still as sinewy as the cedar and as agile as the deer — yes not only the deer, but also the rabbit. From time to time he would stop for a rest. As he leaned against his birch staff, he raised his arm to wipe the sweat from his brow; then, with the same hand, he smoothed down his long greying hair that was tied with a leather thong at the back of his head in a braid. He looked out at the view below him. It never ceased to cause him wonder.

Already there was dampness in the evening air as the sun retired to its teepee in the western sky. A heavy dew was to be expected. The month was September, *Watebaga-gizis*, the moon when the leaves change color.

Coming into a clearing, the elder turned to his young companion and said: "See all of this my son. It was given to us by *Manitou*, the Great Spirit, the Creator of life. It is ours to care for."

These words were spoken with authority and conviction as he earnestly gazed into the young man's eyes. His glance would last but a moment. This was the way of his people. For once he had caught the young man's attention his own eyes quickly darted back to the Mother Earth which inspired him.

A peaceful silence, a silence that speaks within, encompassed them. The elder knew when to speak and so he said.

"Now it is your turn to seek your vision quest, your own purpose in the life of our people. We must hurry and reach the summit before dark. We have much to prepare." The old man's face shone with an exuberance not unlike that of the boy's, his step quickening with anticipation.

The night passed quickly. Soon 6:14 a.m. arrived.

The first light of dawn. The *Anishnabek* call it *beedahbun*. Even though the dawn is so repetitiously inevitable it still surprises them. After all the tomorrows that follow an unending succession of todays, dawn



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continues to capture their imaginations, as it did this old man and his young friend which he had so diligently lead to this unique place to see it's unfolding. There was nothing banal about the dawn for them. Every sunrise is a Genesis, a new beginning, a resurrection, a promise. Is it not the same for us?

Dreamer's rock.

This significant and dramatic setting rises five hundred feet above the lake on the Whitefish River Indian Reserve close to Manitoulin Island in Northern Ontario. Below it the *Anishnabek* have given homage to the Great Spirit of life for untold centuries. They thank their Creator for the beautiful gift of the land, for the clear water, the fresh air, the birds and plants and most especially for the sun which gives life to all things. There is no one more honoured by the *Anishnabek* than their Creator who gifts them with this special rock higher than all the other surrounding hills, so high, it is said that the *Anishnabek* need only reach out their hands to receive a message from their Creator. Here they can dwell with the heavens.

"Grandfather," asked the boy eager to learn. "From here it is possible to see in all directions. We can almost see the whole earth, can we not?"

"You observe well, my son. Look! Look out over the land of many waters. "

"Grandfather, it's beautiful, isn't it? Oh look! There's an eagle," the young boy remarked with excitement as he pointed eastward.

"My son, our brother the eagle is carried by the first break of dawn and brings us knowledge. Coming from the east, the eagle flies the highest of all the birds. His wings brush the sky where he is closest to the Creator.

"In our traditions, my son, yellow is the color of the east because there the sun rises, just as we see it here on Dreamer's Rock. This beautiful color of yellow teaches us that many of our brothers and sisters in this world have yellow skin as ours is red."

"If yellow is the color of the east, Grandfather, then what is the direction for red?"



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“The south is the direction of red. This color represents the warmth and growth of Mother Earth where plants and animals and vegetables grow in abundance. For us the cougar has its home in the south and invites us to learn the advantages of involvement in our world because he is a swift and passionate animal with great powers of concentration.”

“Grandfather, is the color red for our people only?”

“It is the color for the First Nations of our land and the Native Peoples who are our ancestors in all directions.

“But let me also tell you of the direction of the west where the eagle flies and the sun sets. This is the gateway where our grandmothers and grandfathers have gone before us to the spirit world. Black is the color which represents the west. In your journey of life you will meet many people of black skin. They too are our brothers and sisters, my son. To help us and indeed all peoples journey to the center of our inner selves, touching our human spirit, the turtle prepares us to meet our Creator.”

“In school many of my friends are white. Do they not have a direction, Grandfather?”

“Of course my son. North is their direction where the snows fly and the great white bear walks the tundra. White reminds us all of purity – a clear mind and a happy heart.

“As you can observe, my son, we have come full circle from east to south to west to north, from yellow to red to black to white. This sacred circle with its four directions teaches us harmony and unity. This teaches us that we are called to live in harmony with nature and to be at one with all peoples. When we gather together in our pow-wows and assemblies this is why we sit in a circle – no one in front, no one behind.”

Color is only skin deep, but one's culture is heart deep. The old man shared his wisdom with generous pride while the young boy prepared for more instruction in the ways of his people. This was a moment that he had anxiously awaited. Finally he was in a sacred place where he could communicate with the Great Spirit. No, more correctly, he was in a sacred place where the Creator would communicate with him, would guide him to a



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knowledge of himself that would help him serve his people.

At the summit of Dreamer's Rock generations of Ojibway youth continue to fast and pray for a dream vision which might reveal their spirit guides. An elder directs the young person who searches for the dream within himself by bringing him to Dreamer's Rock and placing him in a natural depression in the rock, a depression much like the shape of the human body. It is as if the rock cradles him.

The Elders are the backbone of the *Anishnabek*. They guard the language, the history and their way of life — all that is sacred to the people. Intuitive wisdom allows the elders to teach respect for all living things, respect for children, for parents and especially for the Creator who is the foundation of all that possesses life.

Traditionally the dream quest is for men only, not because it seeks to exclude women, but simply because for the *Anishnabek* women already possess the power of life and nurture — they are the heartbeat of the nation. Men need to discover the pulse and centre of life, so each young man must search for it in a more intense manner. For four days he fasts and in his fast he must encounter and deal with the emotions of fear, hatred, resentment and love. The Creator gifts him with a dream, a dream which will name him and direct him in the course which his life will take.

To be at Dreamer's Rock at sunrise is especially sacred. The sunrise ceremony thanks the Great Spirit for the gift of life. But it begins long before sunrise. Like the birds, the *Anishnabek* prepare to praise the Creator. Before each sunrise as the birds awake there is a crescendo of cacophonous twitters, a prescient chirping that seems to bid the dawn come quickly. And as the birds prepare for the new day, so do the people. The sacred fire is lit. Just as the sun begins to crest over the horizon, the sacred pipe is lit from the fire and is smoked and offered to the four directions. Such a ceremony acknowledges the Creator as the source of life; it is a morning offering which cleanses the participants allowing them to begin their day anew.

“*Beedahbun* — the first light of dawn.”



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The same *beedahbun* of Dreamer's Rock awakens the people of the four directions. Like any person first thing in the morning, we are groggy and listless. But slowly we awake; slowly we are aware of who we are; slowly we know our roots. We are transformed. More importantly, we begin to own this transformation. It becomes ours.

"It was very early on the first day of the week and still dark, when Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away from the tomb and came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved. 'They have taken my Lord out of the tomb' she said 'and we don't know where they have put him.' " (John 20:1-2)

Death has come and gone. New life is the promise, but just like Mary of Magdala we are still unsure. It seems more like the relief that comes with the death of someone after a lengthy and painful illness. "Finally I don't have to sit there, helpless and angry, watching the one I love be eaten away." At such a moment it is difficult to imagine that something new is beginning. Sometimes we don't believe in miracles but we rely on them. Maybe it's not so much that we don't believe, maybe it is more like we desperately want to believe. "I do have faith. Help the little faith I have!" (Mark 9:25)

At times the darkness seems so attractive, so alluring. At other times the darkness is more comfortable, even unavoidable.

There are so many reasons why it doesn't make any sense at all to continue believing. There are so many reasons why it would seem much better and much easier to head off down our own path, turn our backs on the world, or our wife and children, on our job, or our volunteer work, or the poor, and say "I've had just about as much as I can take." But like Thomas More in Robert Bolt's *A Man For All Seasons* we say "Well . . . finally . . . it isn't a matter of reason; finally it's a matter of love." Pascal expressed it another way when he wrote "the heart has its own reasons which reason knows little of".

Maybe, just sometimes, faith is being stubborn, is staying put. A spiritual sit-in of sorts. "I will not give in to the pressures of this moral laissez-faire! I will not



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neutralize my values and faith. I will love to the very end even if it hurts." Surely faith is that which helps us to keep the integrity of ourselves in tact, a self-knowledge which contains the essence of our being. It is a dream quest. Faith is knowing where we begin and where we end off, recognizing our gifts and accepting our limitation.

We know that faith is the eternal "Yes" to God and life, but there is a time when faith calls us to stand firm with "No". This substantiates the cry of social justice. "No! I will not buy products from South Africa until the law of apartheid is revoked!" This substantiates the cry for personal and family values. "No! If you encroach any more on my family life, you will destroy us and everything that I hold of value."

In more simpler terms, faith defines us. The "yeses" open our lives up to all that is creative and beautiful, to all that is challenging and loving; the "nos" protect us in order that we might continue to freely say "yes" to life and grace.

Jesus is *Beedahbun!*

He is the first Light of dawn, source of all love.

He doesn't lead us to Calvary, he leads us through Calvary – beyond it. Like the sparrow who nudges her fledgling to fly, he encourages the timid beginner to take its baby steps into a hostile environment.

When we venture forth into the unknown world seeking maturity or new beginnings (whether they are our choice or not) we can become insecure, vulnerable, so ready to retain the status quo. We see no reason for the Way of the Cross. "Why leave the nest in the first place?", we argue. "Why did you lead us into the desert when we had food and shelter as slaves in Egypt? Why rock the boat? Why gamble?"

Why risk change anyway? All it ever seems to bring is confusion, alienation, pain and darkness. This is the catch 22 of the short term.

The short term! But is that all that life is about?

What about the long term?

We are not meant to stop with death. In the Way of the Cross Jesus gives us a new vision. His passion begins



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the process of cutting us off from him. It is a *decision* (in its original form, a cutting away from) so that we can move from dependence to independence, and ultimately interdependence. The Resurrection directs us to a new order. The Ascension (the event when the risen Christ ascended to heaven) confirms our self-worth and upholds our individuality. Finally Pentecost (the event when the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles) tells us of our need for one another and of the indwelling Spirit within each of us. We are formed, informed and transformed.

“See today I set before you life and prosperity, death and disaster . . . Choose life, then, so that you and your descendents may live.” (Deut. 30:15,20)

The Resurrection, an affirmation of life, is not a denial of death. The believer sings praise to the Creator at *beedahbun*, at the first light of dawn. By affirming life, we neutralize the power of death over us. We consecrate life. We offer meaning. We introduce all that is hostile to all that is hospitable; all that is strange to all that is familiar.

Yet often, life is messy; it is not neat.

When we begin to look at life a little closer we see the cracks and wrinkles. We notice the young girl who gets pregnant at fifteen, or the uncle who is an alcoholic, the little child who is diagnosed with inoperable cancer, or the marriage that is ‘on the rocks’. We see those possessed by ambition or greed or hatred, and what’s worse, we see these tendencies in our very selves. We can no longer imagine that life will come to some workable conclusion. Yet, we crave for greenhouses in the jungle. We desire neatness but sadly discover chaos. We live in a crazy mixed up world. Seldom are there last minute reprieves. We become terribly suspicious about growing up or venturing forth. Caution becomes the rule, risking the fear.

The Stations of the Cross are a bold statement that life was never meant to be neat.

I suspect that like Adam and Eve in the creation allegory, we are forever trying to put the apple back on the tree. We long for innocence, for the way it used to be, for the good old days. We are ruled by nostalgia. Someday, if we only wait long enough, a knight in



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shining armour is going to sweep us off our feet and bring us to a 'heaven on earth', a silvan refuge far away from evil places and bad people.

We have more faith in magic than in Christ. Maybe that is why the occult is having such a revival these days! Maybe that is why we read our horoscopes and tea leaves more regularly than the Gospel! Maybe that is why there is such a superficial attraction to fundamentalism! Anything to make it easier, especially the answers.

However, we cannot put the apple back on the tree. Christ does not offer us innocence. Once this is lost, it is lost. Once we have sinned, we have sinned. Once the die is cast . . . Well, not quite. Christ can never offer us innocence. Living life with a myriad of experiences (good and bad) have put an end to that. Rather, Christ offers us salvation. For the Christian, the preferred state is not innocence, but redemption. And that makes all the difference.

But life is ambiguous. Therefore we are called to live with the ambiguity. Anything less is escapism. In the final analysis, most suffering (no matter the intensity) is unavoidable. We have little control of it's rude entry into our lives. What we can choose is to bear it gracefully, to move beyond bitterness and cynicism to joy. We always have a choice.

The way of the vision reveals the grace of confusion. Happy-ever-after endings only come in Hollywood; they are the stuff of Disneyland. Christ's passion (which is a re-shaping, a forging of something new out of something old) asks us time and time again not to steer away from the mess. Rather, everything he ever showed us or proclaimed to us revealed the unsettling challenging question, "What are you going to do with the mess?" The way of the vision puts it all right back into our own laps. Salvation and redemption are the presence of grace in the midst of the mess. They are not the solution to every ill, or the answer to every problem; but rather they are a graceful way of living with all that is unsure. The way of the vision, then, calls for faith.

Not only do we have faith in God, but surprisingly enough, God has faith in us. Put in another way, God exhorts us to believe in ourselves. Living with the mess,



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the Creator Spirit gifts us with talents and the freedom to live in hope. The Creator doesn't pamper us. Rather He loves us.

How are you going to help the poor? ("The poor will be with you always" Mark 14:7) How are you going to love your enemy? ("For he causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good." Matthew 5:45) How are you going to love in the midst of hatred and infidelity?

Love is *Beedahbun*, the first light of dawn, a promise of a new beginning. Yes, love persists like pain.

Love affords meaning to life. To end with death and despair would be to end with tragedy, a tragedy focusing in on the sorrow and misfortune of one man. In this case an itinerant preacher caught in the crossfire of Roman-Hebrew politics. Jesus Christ, the pawn in the chess game of Pilate, or maybe Herod, or maybe the Sanhedrin, or the Zealots, or Judas, or Peter's denial, or maybe you and me. Nevertheless a pawn.

Checkmate to Jesus! To end here would be to end with the self-destructive, tightly wound spring of despair. It would mean that we relegate all the little and poor people to impotence. There would be no room for the insignificant, for the impecunious, the timid, the backward and clumsy. Checkmate to the sinners and the outcasts. Checkmate to the freaks and the sideshows. All of them, pawns. All of them, losers. Hopeless!

It would be as if pain and suffering were a laughing jester who made fun of us, and mocked our faith as something naive.

But no, we do not end with death, we end with the resurrection. The last word does not go to darkness; it goes to *beedahbun*, to light. The resurrection brings us beyond death, beyond tragedy to glory. Yes, to blessedness.

Glory be to God!

Glory be to mercy, to forgiveness, to a way out.

Blessed be the Creator!

Blessed be Manitou, the Great Spirit!

Blessed be all life, persistent and precious!

Blessed be *beedahbun*, the first light of dawn!

Blessed be Light itself!



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Blessed be old wise men and women, our teachers!  
Blessed be brash, youthful students!  
Blessed be the poor, the sick, the dispossessed, the  
disadvantaged.  
Blessed be those who suffer!  
Blessed be everyone who has walked this earth before us!  
Blessed be Paul, and Mary, and Francis!  
Blessed be Theresa and Joan of Arc!  
Blessed be Kateri Tekakwitha and Joseph Chiwatenwa!  
Blessed be the unknown saints especially!

One could go on forever. And that is exactly what we  
are called to do. Not only to recite, but to become a litany.  
A litany: an unabashed, exuberant, continual refrain of  
praise.

A Eucharist: ceaseless thanksgiving.

*Megwetch.* Thank you.

*Megwetch* Manitou. Thank you Creator.

*Megwetch* in the morning, at *beedahbun*.

*Megwetch* in the evening.

*Megwetch* for the four directions, the four corners of the  
earth, for all peoples.

*Megwetch* for the Way of the Cross  
that leads to the way of the vision  
that leads to life,  
that leads to the Way.

*Megwetch* for Your Way, Your Truth, Your Life.

“How happy are the poor in spirit;  
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Happy the gentle;  
they shall have the earth for their heritage.

Happy those who mourn;  
they shall be comforted.

Happy those who hunger and thirst for what is right;  
they shall be satisfied.

Happy the merciful;  
they shall have mercy shown to them.

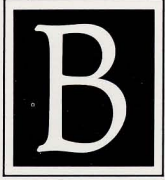
Happy the pure in heart:  
they shall see God.

Happy the peacemakers;  
they shall be called the sons and daughters of God.

Happy those who are persecuted in the cause of right;  
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

(Matt. 5:2-10)





We copy God.

Something drives us to be creative, to leave something that will extend beyond the limits of our finite and fragile lifetimes. Be it a child or a home or a song or a poem, a symphony or a sculpture or a car design; be it a world track record or a tennis championship or an Olympic gold medal, a photograph or a movie, maybe even a stamp collection – whatever it is, we chose to create. In this way, most of all, we are made in the image and the likeness of God. When we stop creating, we stop living.

Leland Bell has this memory etched into his soul. It was not always so clear to him that he would be a painter, and in this way copy the Creator. He was forced to search for the vision, for the dream. In one sense he discovered his gift; in another sense, it is earned, a craft he works at.

Leland Bell was born on January 3, 1953 of the *Anishnabek* Nation in Wikwemikong on Manitoulin Island. Raised as a foster child until the age of thirteen, he then moved to Toronto to be with his mother and older sister.

He attended Winchester Public School and was directed to a Vocational School. Something in him wanted to be a part of the mainline educational system. He applied himself to his studies, acquired good marks, went to summer school, and was finally admitted into Danforth Technical High School where he studied Graphic Arts. It was during these years that he began to recognize his passion for painting and color. Leland also toyed with writing and music at this time but his attraction to the brush and the palette lured him back to painting.

He went on to acquire a Bachelor of Arts degree in Native Studies from Laurentian University in Sudbury, Ontario. He delved deeper into the search for his identity as an Indian. While at University, he discovered that many cultures had contributed to the development of the world. But he could find very little that Native people contributed. However, he knew his culture was rich in ideas and values. It had a contribution to make.



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A number of his summers were spent on Schriber Island at the Manitou Arts Camp and at the Ojibway Cultural Foundation Summer Camp where he met many people like himself, people who were searching for the Native identity and a means to express it.

One day he had the experience of attending a Sunrise Ceremony. He knew instinctively that this was where he belonged. He felt deeply the call to acknowledge the Creator for the gift of creation, the desire to communicate this to others, to be creative himself.

Up to that point in his life, this was his most significant experience. It changed him. The best way that he could accomplish this was through his painting. He pursued his dream.

Leland Bell searched out his vision quest and was given the Indian name *Bebaminojmat*. It connotes the idea of talking straight or honestly in an open fashion, of not being afraid to communicate the truth.

Consequently he states, "I am *Bebaminojmat*, Leland Bell. I am part of this time, place and culture. My culture is as developed as any other culture in the world and as important as any other culture in the world. I believe this. I do not have to try to convince people, I don't try to convince the establishment that what I am doing is art. If they want to see what I am doing as folk art or something quaint, that's up to them. Yes, that is how I use my name, to say that what I am doing is important, that I am sincere."

Each painting is a conception. In a very real sense Leland's art, like the Inuit and other Native artists, defines the quintessential Canadian identity. Before the land was business to us, it was life to them.

Leland Bell lives with his wife and two children in Wikwemikong on Manitoulin Island. Every day is an opportunity to say '*megwetch*' to the Creator, to love the people in his life and to paint. Oh yes, for he gives thanks and loves best of all when he is painting, when he is creating.



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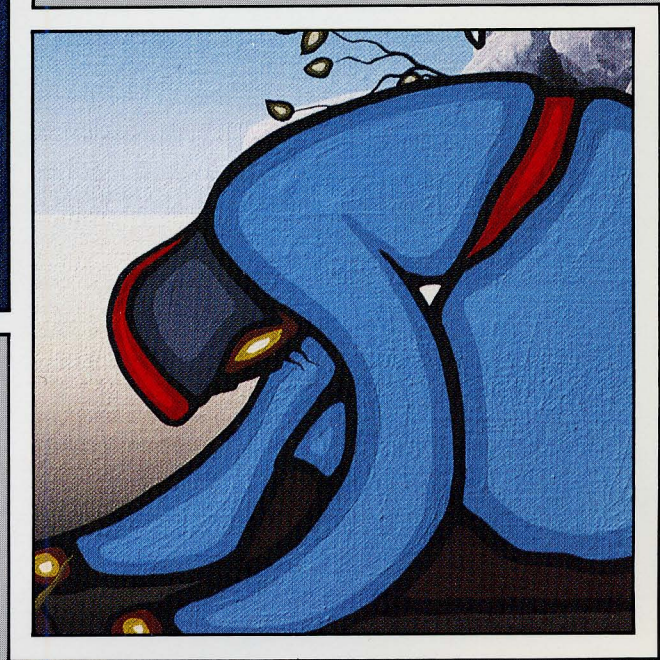
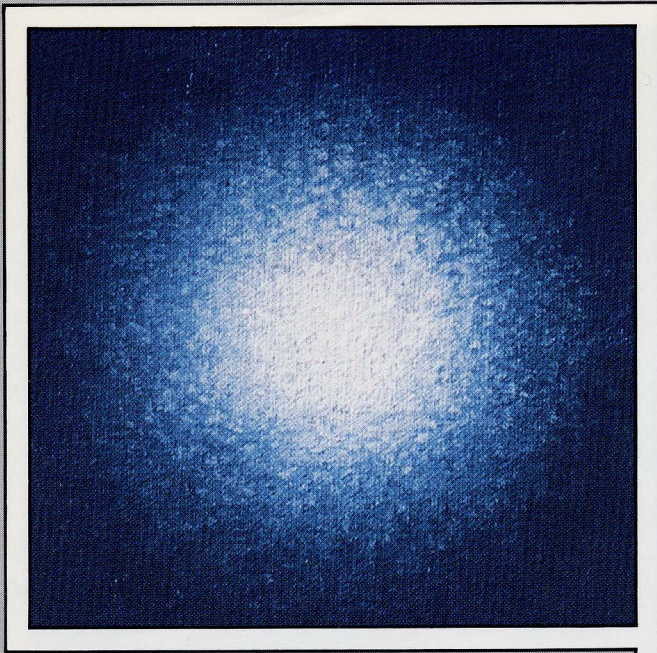
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A unique book which celebrates  
the passion of a People  
the passion of Art  
the Passion of Jesus of Nazareth

“Thus, not only is Christianity relevant to the Indian peoples, but Christ,  
in the members of his Body, is himself Indian.”

*Pope John Paul II*

“I communicate with my heart easily by expressing very universal themes. In other  
words, I paint things that everybody knows about, like caring, compassion,  
the ideas of unity, strength and humility.”

*Leland Bell*

Leland Bell, is an increasingly more acclaimed Native Artist who lives on Manitoulin Island with his wife and children.

Greg Humbert is a priest of the Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie. He has authored a number of books, most recently *The Lighter Side of Heaven*.

George Leach is a Jesuit priest serving the Native People in Canada. Among his numerous talents he has also authored *Hope for Healing*.