

The Way of The Cross

A new set of Stations for the Cross for St Andrew's Church

Some members of St Andrew's will remember the Stations for the Cross, painted by Mark Cheng, which were on display during Lent 1999. Now Mark has painted a new set of Stations and very generously presented them to St Andrew's. They will be on display in the window openings of the nave during Lent and Holy Week. We are most grateful to Mark for this special gift.

Mark writes:

It was during the interval, a number of years ago, at Alec Cowan's performance of the Gospel of St Mark, at the College theatre on Lansdowne Road, that I told Christopher that I would paint him a set of fourteen Stations of the Way of the Cross. I never forgot that promise, even if it took me a long while to fulfil it.

One of my favourite prayers is 'O Deus Ego Amo Te', ascribed to St Francis Xavier, one of the founders of the Society of Jesus, who aimed to bring Christianity to China, which at that time in its history shut its doors against all foreigners; he died within sight of the country, and his body was taken to Goa, where it was buried. A part of the prayer, literally translated, reads: You took on the nails, the spear, many ignominies, innumerable sufferings, sweat and anguish and death itself: all these for me, and for me a sinner.

I have been intrigued, if that is the right word, by the humanity of Christ. The question has been: would his Godhead not 'interfere' with his humanity? How real were his experiences and sufferings as Man? I am here reminded of, and, in fact, distracted by Shylock's anguished cry: If you prick us, do we not bleed...? One of my friends said that the previous set of Stations, which was displayed at St Andrew's some years ago, made Jesus too human. But that was exactly what I wanted to do, and how can one make Jesus too human?

The Stations I wanted to paint were based on the traditional set most commonly in use

in churches. Most representations are fairly figurative, but there are also versions, such as I saw in a church in Lille, which are totally abstract. I hesitated because I wondered if the traditional themes used in Catholic churches would be acceptable to Anglicans generally. My doubts were largely dispelled when I saw a beautifully executed, semi-abstract set at St Paul's Church, Bedford recently. Now that my doubts had been largely laid aside, I had little excuse not to start on the work immediately. However, I still waited several years, for which I have no excuse, apart from one most painters experience: doubt and trepidation before the first stroke on a canvas.

Eventually, last spring, I stirred myself and ordered the requisite number of painting boards from a local shop. They, surprisingly, took something like three months to arrive! Apparently, few shops stocked more than a small number of boards of the size I wanted.

I had little idea how I wanted to paint the Stations, though I knew I wanted them to be different from the last set. My original plan had been to do a semi-abstract, stylised set of paintings, but eventually they became more 'impressionist': paintings have a way of going their own way, and I was content with that.

And so, one day last August, I was able to present Christopher with the Stations.

Mark Cheng, the husband of Irene Cheng, a member of St Andrew's, was born into an Anglican family in Hong Kong in 1930. His father took the family into the Roman Catholic Church in 1937 and Mark was educated at Jesuit schools in India and Hong Kong and was a Jesuit novice for two years in the Philippines before he decided that this was not his calling. He then trained as a teacher of history and of art and, although he has been interested in art and drawing all his life, he did not begin to paint seriously until 1960.

Christopher