

## Seeking spiritual rejuvenation

By Ruth Ostrow

FROM the mouths of babes. I recently visited a friend with my daughter and we both became consumed with the image of Jesus on the cross, emaciated and tortured, clinging to life above our heads.

Not being brought up Christian, but having heard stories about the kind deeds of this enlightened being, my child was intrigued. "Mummy, why don't they show him doing anything else?" she asked in her innocence. And it got me thinking about religious iconography and how our depiction of Jesus influences so many in the world – including non-Christians living in Christian societies – at the deepest, subliminal levels of our psyches.

Imagine if most depictions of Jesus showed not a man suffering on a cross, near death, victimised, persecuted, misunderstood – or alternatively newborn and powerless – but striding across water? What if the resounding image people cleaved to their bosom was of a man turning water into wine?

An interesting article in Lawrence Journal-World argued the importance of depicting Christ on the cross. Said one priest: "The corpse can help you enter into what you want to see the image to be, with different crucifixes. Some show the suffering and the humanity of the experience. For some, it's a more divine experience."

A Lutheran pastor said the cross, with or without Jesus, is "a symbol often used as a constant sign of the great sacrificial love of what God has done on our behalf". It has limitless implications, including resurrection.

But all things being equal, does this sort of religious iconography speak to younger generations? Does it engage in the way a joyous, laughing Buddha does? Studies show young people of all faiths defecting from traditional religions towards DIY spirituality in droves.

We're living in hard times. Some will take succour from the notion of suffering, austerity and black robes. But for many spiritual seekers like myself, the old symbols of major orthodox religions are becoming ineffectual in this time of world chaos. We want positivity; we need emblems of hope; we crave "walking on water". At the very least, let's consider the spiritual imagery we put into our heads just as we examine the food we ingest: does it rejuvenate the psyche?

As a former student of art history, I know that religious iconography has adapted many times over the ages. Perhaps it's time to bring back the Byzantine halo.

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