

# WORD FROM THE CLOISTERS

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## No crib for a bed

IT'S A FAMILIAR scene in towns and cities across Britain but not what you expect from the Christmas crib at your local church.

Two anonymous adult figures lie huddled in sleeping bags on sheets of cardboard. In the background a mass of twigs suggests a wood or grass verge. Above them, a clear, black sky twinkles with stars, with one much larger than the rest directly overhead.

And then there is the baby: a large plastic doll on a knitted blanket placed on the sleeping bags. A furry pigeon toy peers at the baby and a discarded pizza box in the foreground contains a small traditional crib. A handwritten cardboard sign reads, "A stable home for our family please!"

This is the Nativity scene that greeted parishioners at the first Masses of Christmas at Ealing Abbey, west London. The parish priest, Fr Ambrose McCambridge OSB, commended the crib to the congregation, urging them to make an offering to the chosen charity, Catholic Children's Society (Westminster).

As a reminder of the plight of homeless families this Christmas it certainly encouraged



them to dig deep. To learn more about the work of CCS or to make a donation, go to [www.cathchild.org.uk/donate](http://www.cathchild.org.uk/donate)

READERS OF the moving tribute to George Mackay Brown in the Christmas issue ("Et in Orcadia Ego") by the *Tablet's* literary editor, Maggie Fergusson, and of her acclaimed biography of this poet and story-teller from Orkney, may not know that for almost ten years he was an occasional but regular contributor to *The Tablet*. The editor between 1982 and 2003, John Wilkins, tells us that

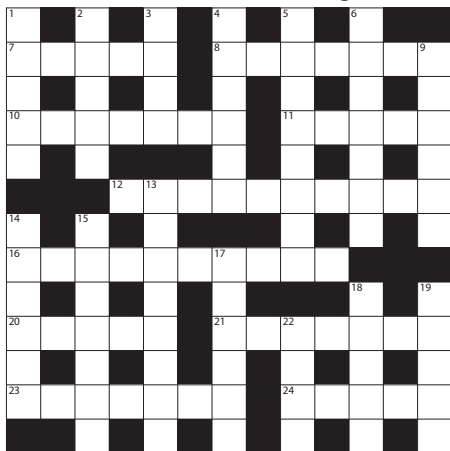
these gifts from his pen would arrive well timed to celebrate with a magical touch the great feasts of Christmas and Easter. "I always regarded these writings as jewels in *The Tablet's* crown", he says.

The last of them was selected by *The Tablet's* then literary adviser, Isabel Quigly, and was published in the paper for 6/13 April 1996. Maggie describes this in her biography as "perhaps the most beautiful religious poem that George ever wrote".

ALL LITERARY editors take a nervous peek at *Private Eye's* annual round up of Christmas log-rolling in their Books of the Year features. You can't get any chummy backscratching past Maggie Fergusson, but we do make a clean sweep of the *Eye's* awards for "Most expensive books of the year": taking not only first prize – for Marina Warner's choice of Paul Rego's *The Art of Story* (Thames & Hudson, £85) – but second prize too, for Michael Symmons Roberts, who picked Ittai Weinryb's *Agents of Faith* (Yale University Press), a snip at £55. Perhaps that's a lot to pay even for two beautifully produced volumes: but be consoled – the excellent *Tablet Bookshop* (020 7799 4064) offers a 10 per cent discount on these and thousands of other titles.

## PUZZLES

### PRIZE CROSSWORD No. 688 Enigma



### Across

- 7 Smallest and northernmost island of the Azores (5)
- 8 Language spoken by Our Lord (7)
- 10 The seeds of the flax plant (7)
- 11 "Town of stones and saints" (Spain) (5)
- 12 "The moan of doves in ----- elms" ("The Princess", Tennyson) (10)
- 16 Its capital is Antananarivo (10)
- 20 "Today - ---- for my country," Senator Robert Byrd, 19 March 2003 (1,4)
- 21 Another term for vulcanite (4)
- 23 A bend or curve in a river (7)
- 24 In dactylic hexameter, it is traditionally attributed to Homer (5)

### Down

- 1 Circular windows, also openings at tops of domes (5)
- 2 The late ----- Dunne made three films with Cary Grant, including *My Favourite Wife* (5)
- 3 Emily Dickinson called it "the thing with feathers" (4)
- 4 Golf-related word said to have evolved from the French for "youngest son" (6)
- 5 Symmetrical plane curve (8)
- 6 Santiago de Compostela is in this region (7)
- 9 Framework on which ship rests during construction (6)
- 13 It is also known as a mound builder or an

incubator bird (8)

- 14 A multiple race event in track cycling (6)
- 15 Describes a hormone-producing gland, one of a pair above the kidneys (7)
- 17 The palomino grape is best known for its use in making this (6)
- 18 1997 horror film starring Mira Sorvino (5)
- 19 First line of Austin Clarke's poem, "The Lost Heifer", refers to the "black ---- of the rain" (5)
- 22 Elisha ---- invented the safety elevator in 1852 (4)

Please send your answers to: Crossword Competition 4 January, *The Tablet*, 1 King Street Cloisters, Clifton Walk, London W6 0GY. Email: [thetablet@thetablet.co.uk](mailto:thetablet@thetablet.co.uk), with Crossword in the subject field. Please include your full name, telephone number and email address, and a mailing address. Three books – on Paul, Theology and Christian Ethics – from the OUP's Very Short Introduction series will go to the sender of the first correct entry drawn at random on Friday 17 January. The answers to this week's puzzles and the crossword winner's name will appear in the 25 January issue.

Prizes kindly donated by

[www.oup.com](http://www.oup.com)

### SUDOKU | Challenging

		7		3		1		4
3								8
			1		4			9
			4			7		
	5		8					3
				9	1	2		
7	1	3						6
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		4						5

Each 3x3 box, each row and each column must contain all the numbers 1 to 9.

4	5	3	7	1	8	9	6	2
2	8	7	9	3	6	4	5	1
6	9	1	4	5	2	7	8	3
3	4	5	2	6	1	8	7	9
8	6	9	5	7	3	1	2	4
1	7	2	8	9	4	5	3	6
7	3	8	1	2	9	6	4	5
9	2	4	6	8	5	3	1	7
5	1	6	3	4	7	2	9	8

### Solution to the 7 December crossword No. 686

- Across:** 1 Baring; 5 Gould; 8 Japan; 9 Zionist; 10 Noli; 11 Taverner; 13 Aaron; 14 Lippi; 19 Lanfranc; 21 Alma; 23 Vannini; 24 Haydn; 25 Slype; 26 Trajan.  
**Down:** 2 Ampulla; 3 Iona; 4 Guzman; 5 Geodesic; 6 Union; 7 Datary; 8 Jane; 12 Lorraine; 15 Palmyra; 16 Clovis; 17 Anoint; 18 Caen; 20 Nancy; 22 Shua.  
**Winner:** Fr Nicholas Paxton, of Didsbury, Manchester.