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On another new world order 100 years of *Rerum Novarum*

THIS MONTH MARKS the centenary of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* ('Of New Things'). The encyclical was a step forward in its time. It endorsed unionism, called for reform of capitalism to protect the poor from exploitation and argued for a wider distribution of property, while rejecting extreme versions of socialism. It was particularly important for Australia, since it coincided with the founding of the Labor Party and helped legitimate what became the Labor-Catholic alignment. It appears to have influenced Mr Justice J.B. O'Higgins' Sunshine Harvester judgment in 1907, which provided the foundation of the Australian wage-fixing system.

Yet a closer look at *Rerum Novarum* reveals some surprises, for in many ways it was a conservative document, struggling to slough off the assumptions of medieval Europe. Leo retained an attachment to a hierarchical vision of society and a preference for a Catholic confessional state. He neither supported the right to strike nor called for a family wage, though England's Cardinal Manning and Australia's Cardinal Moran interpreted him as having done so.

The encyclical also came late, because the Church before Leo had been dominated by political reaction. Time and again, Catholic social reformers like Ozanam had been defeated by more conservative opponents. Only slowly did people like Bishop Ketteler in Germany win the support of Catholic social movements and the papacy. Had Leo continued the reactionary social thinking of his predecessor, Pius IX, many of the Catholic workers in the English-speaking world may have been lost to the Church, as they were in Europe. *Rerum Novarum* remained, however, a steady beacon during the darkness of the anti-Modernist campaigns under Leo's successor, Pius X, for social reformers were able to claim it as their charter.

Today, *Rerum Novarum* retains more than historical interest. Much of the exploitation experienced during the Industrial Revolution in Europe is rampant throughout the Third World, and the scale of economic hardship in the Eastern bloc is clear. In the United States, union busting remains common and minimum wage rates are much too low. Leo led a battle charge; the war continues. Recent initiatives within the Church have included the US bishops' statements on peace in 1983 and on inequities in the American economy in 1987. The Australian bishops' wealth inquiry follows this path. As Cardinal Etcheagaray, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, said, 'For once the Church is not late in its appointment with humanity.' The most urgent task now, according to Archbishop Rembert Weakland, of Milwaukee, USA, is a moral evaluation of international capitalism. This endeavour was broached by Pope John Paul II's encyclical, *Laborem Exercens*. How is distributive justice to be realised on a world scale? We may not have another 100 years to provide the answer. ■

— BRUCE DUNCAN CSSR

THE DEATH OF GRAHAM GREENE after Easter silenced a voice that, for the greater part of this century, has posed questions of what it meant to be human, what it meant to be Catholic. As a novelist, Greene eschewed the theme of class that fascinated his contemporaries. Instead, he wrote about the big issues of his age: the Vietnam War, South Africa, Latin American dictatorships, persecuted Catholics, international capitalism and East-West tensions. His were not thesis novels, aimed at proving a point. They explored how human beings might behave in straitened times. Their sympathies lay with the victims, not with any ideology.



Graham Greene 1904-1991

Power and the Glory (1940) are famous: 'Mr Tench went out to look for his other cylinder: out into the blazing Mexican sun and the bleaching dust. A few vultures looked down from the roof with shabby indifference: he wasn't carrion yet.'

What fun wits have had with those vultures, and the bleaching dust and the blazing sun. Magazines ran competitions for parodies of Graham Greene — competitions he himself sometimes won under an assumed name. Equally there were those who mocked when his description of the results of a battle in Vietnam, in *The Quiet American* (1955), seemed extreme: 'The canal was full of bodies: I am reminded now of an

Irish stew containing too much meat. The bodies overlapped: one head, seal-grey, and anonymous as a convict with a shaven scalp, stuck up out of the water like a buoy. There was no blood: I suppose it had flowed away a long time ago.'

He puzzled some by saying that a novelist's first duty was loyalty to his characters and disloyalty to any institution that might claim his fealty: 'The writer is driven by his own vocation to be a Protestant in a Catholic society, a Catholic in a Protestant one, to see the virtues of the capitalist in a communist society, of the communist in a capitalist state.' Ideologies found this distasteful. The typical Greene character lives between here and eternity, on the rim between keeping your balance and falling off the edge. He advised critics to pay attention to the epigraphs put at the head of his novels. For *The Heart of the Matter* (1948) he chose words of the French poet Charles Peguy: 'The sinner is at the heart of Christianity ... No one is as competent as the sinner in the matter of Christianity. No one, except possibly the saint.' This confused reviewers into thinking that the hero of this novel, the troubled policeman Scobie who commits suicide, one of Greene's finest creations, was intended by the author to be a saint. Not so, Greene wrote to Evelyn Waugh; he was a muddled man, full of goodwill but not a saint.

By the time that appeared, someone had invented the term 'Greeneland' to describe the seedy, doomed territory the novelist had made his own. In vain he protested that he had been there and seen such things for himself: 'In the canal of Phat Diem the bodies stuck out of the water ...' It was useless; they had never noticed that the world was like that. Indeed Greene had been there to see for himself. His travel writing, recently collected, is quite different from the usual travel books, not only because of its muscular prose — all nouns and verbs, with few adjectives and even fewer adverbs — but also because it offers no travellers' tips on where to eat and what to see. It is too interested in the dangerous edge of things: terror in Haiti, poverty in India, socialist hope in Cuba, the hazards of innocence in Vietnam and embattled Catholicism in Poland.

Many of Greene's characters are like that. They live — as his own favourite epigraph, from his favourite poet Robert Browning, has it—'on the dangerous edge of things'. They are (Browning again) 'the honest thief, the tender murderer, the superstitious atheist.' Thus they are often contradictory characters; and it is their contradictions which elicit the novelist's attention. One way or another, they are failures; and in their failure lies their humanity. Humanity, as Greene came to know it, is incompletable and doomed to incompleteness. Another epigraph, from John Henry Newman, would give theological expression to this observation: 'the human race is implicated in some terrible aboriginal calamity'.

Civilised society hides this from view and escapes from considering it too closely. Not so the world of Greene's novels — a world that rots and stinks and dies; a world not of superabundant life, but something nearer to death in the afternoon. The opening sentences of *The*

Greene's writing turns its back on the comfortable life of bourgeois civilities. Something similar can be said of his religious dimensions. Here life is lived under the eye of God, with the sinner having rights as well as the saint. His travels through Mexico during the anti-Catholic persecution of the mid-1930s (*The Lawless Roads*, 1939) put the recent convert in touch with an underground Church. From then on, it became clear, he would prefer Miguel Pro, the Mexican Jesuit executed by firing squad, to 'Ronnie' Knox, the Oxford chaplain, or the Jesuits of Farm Street in London. The world of rubrics, the Roman Curia and 'official' Catholicism would hold diminishing interest for the man who had watched faithful peasants praying with outstretched cruciform arms in desecrated churches, and who had received communion from the soiled hands of outlaw priests. His Catholicism, too, would find itself on the dangerous edge of things. ■ — Edmund Campion

Time to treat justly

The bicentenary celebrations in 1988 highlighted rather than resolved Aboriginal grievances caused by the European occupation of their land. Another opportunity for a symbolic reconciliation of black and white Australians is approaching, the centenary of federation in 2001.

AT THEIR 1991 national convention, the Young Liberals stirred the land rights possum that had long been lying idle in the roof of Parliament House. Starting the year with the smell of government in their nostrils, they thought the time had come to put their stamp on contemporary issues. It was simplistic overkill, and it forced their seniors to publish a defence of land rights such as the conservative side of politics had not made for years. Even in a recession, there are not necessarily votes to be had from bashing the blacks. And politicians of all persuasions have had to acknowledge something of Aboriginal claims to special treatment, to put right the treatment meted out to them, as landholders and as citizens, for more than two centuries.

The Hawke government had gone into the Christmas recess with a flurry of cabinet decisions and legislative initiatives under the guillotine. Among these was a decision to establish a Council of Aboriginal Reconciliation until the centenary of the Australian Constitution, on 1 January 2001. Half of the council's members will be Aboriginal. But Cabinet's decision is a far cry from the treaty proposed by Mr Hawke when he met Aboriginal leaders at the Barunga Sports and Cultural Festival in 1988 and signed the Barunga Declaration.

Some Aboriginal leaders believe they are locked into a meaningless word game, designed only to save the Government face. Others have reserved their opinion, waiting to see what changes are wrought by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Commission regional councils elected for the first time in November last year. The Government faces a dilemma. If too much is offered to Aborigines, the Opposition will withdraw its support, or at least break its silence. If too little, Aborigines and their supporters will abandon the process, to seek tangible results through a more confrontational kind of political bartering.

On the day before the opening of Parliament in May last, Bob Hawke wrote to the Leader of the Opposition, John Hewson, advising him 'of the Government's wish to achieve a more bipartisan approach in furthering the welfare of the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and advancing the concept of an instrument of reconciliation'. The Prime Minister sent a copy of this letter to the leader of the Australian Democrats, to state premiers and territory chief ministers, and to opposition leaders in the various Australian parliaments. The Prime Minister said: 'It is our intent to continue to consult with the coalition and seek a bipartisan approach on these matters. There will also be a need for early consultations with the states, church leaders and others.'

Next day, the Governor-General, Bill Hayden, delivered a bland address on the Government's program for micro-economic reform. It was a sombre affair, attracting little attention until he came to the matter of the treaty. He announced: '[The Government] will be seeking wide community support and bipartisan political endorsement of an instrument of reconciliation, variously referred to as a treaty or compact, between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and the wider Australian community. The form and content of such a document will not and cannot be finalised until extensive consultation is initiated with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians. This process of consultation will be enhanced following the recent establishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission.'

There was restless movement on the Opposition benches. Six weeks later, after intense discussion with senior colleagues, Hewson replied to Hawke's letter. Treating it as a 'sounding out of the coalition's support for a process of reconciliation', he wrote: 'I would point out, as stated specifically in our current policy, that the



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coalition "is open to consideration of proposals which will improve relationships between Aborigines and other Australians". It is not possible, however, to give any firm commitment to a more bipartisan approach to a process of reconciliation at this stage until we know precisely what it is you intend to propose. You acknowledge that the coalition recognises the importance of reconciliation and, to this end, we would like to know how you intend to proceed with regards to a process of reconciliation as there may be room for considerable common ground.'

Hawke had paid tribute to the coalition's achievements while in government for the betterment of Aborigines, including the 1967 referendum, the Bonner resolution, the NAC-Government discussions on the makarrata [the Aboriginal term for the treaty], the Aboriginal Development Commission, and the 1983 Senate committee report. He might also have included the Land Rights Act for the Northern Territory. Mr Hawke noted that all these measures had 'received strong bipartisan support' and, pleading for a return to bipartisanship, claimed there was broad agreement between the parties on some objectives, including Aboriginal self-sufficiency, improvement in health, education, employment and housing.

Hewson welcomed the call to bipartisanship as a significant break with the recent past. He claimed that the bipartisan approach had been broken in the past seven years by the 'Government's pursuit of the national land rights legislation, your treaty proposal and ATSIC.' This line had been put strongly by the Opposition since Clyde Holding tried to go it alone on national land rights. When national land rights was abandoned

in 1986, the then Opposition spokesman, David Connolly, said the actions of the Hawke Government had 'turned the tide of public opinion massively against not only land rights but also the need to give specific support to Aboriginal Australians.'

By 1989, Fred Chaney, maintaining a watchful eye on Aboriginal affairs, was exasperated with the Labor Government's approach, and the way it had applied itself 'to romance, to theory, to totems and to self-indulgence'. Hewson's letter echoed this theme. Criticising insufficiently monitored programs, duplication of services and administrative inefficiencies, he wrote that he was sure Mr Hawke would understand 'that we would not want a more bipartisan approach to limit us from criticising your Government so long as we perceive these issues as being inadequately addressed'. Many members of the coalition believe that the Government only seeks bipartisanship on Aboriginal affairs when it is in trouble. They are not about to let the Government off the hook, whatever the commitment to reconciliation.

Seeking to avoid a semantic debate about the word 'treaty', Hawke had said that he was not wedded to this term: 'What I believe is important is that there be a process of reconciliation. In my view, the consultation processes will be as important as the eventual outcome. But there is little hope of a worthwhile outcome, even to consultations, without the support of the majority of Australians. I understand that in the recent past, the coalition, on the basis of an assumption that the nature of a "treaty" involves an agreement between two nations, has stated its opposition to such a cause. I assure you that it has never been in the Government's mind that the reconciliation process lead to such an outcome.'

There is no reason why a mature nation should deny itself the opportunity of using its Constitution to express the fundamentals of its identity as a nation-state

Nothing could be clearer. The instrument, whatever it might be called, will have no implications in international law. Hewson restated the objections to a treaty or anything like it by another name: 'Our opposition to a treaty is based on our strongly held belief that Australians belong to one nation, and one group of Australians cannot have a treaty with the rest of the nation. It has been our consistent position since 1981 that a treaty has implications in international law which are unacceptable to the Australian people.'

Whatever Hewson is opposing, it is not what Hawke is proposing, nor what he has ever proposed. If the Opposition were to reject his proposal, they would have to admit that their new position was inconsistent with what they had proposed, or at least tolerated, in 1981—a negotiated agreement with Aborigines, subject to constraints and having no effect in international law. As Leader of the Opposition, Andrew Peacock had criticised the Government for 'its resort to highly symbolic gestures in place of a careful and continuing attention to the administration of effective programs'. This false dichotomy between the symbolic and the material overlooks the possibility that there is a need for effective programs as well as symbolic gestures. Without effective programs, symbolic gestures will be a sham anyway.

Hewson still maintains a suggestion of the dichotomy: 'In our view, an ongoing process of reconciliation and adequate positive programs and material support which leads to a significant improvement in the standard of living, quality of life and self esteem of Aboriginal Australians would enhance their cause in a more meaningful way than a treaty or similar instrument.' There is no reason why there should not be both a process and an instrument of reconciliation. Hewson recognises 'the importance of symbolism in Aboriginal culture' but overlooks the importance of symbolism for all Australians in seeking to express our true identity, reconciled with our past. To date, the coalition has been profoundly pessimistic about this.

On 7 November 1990, the Opposition raised as a matter of public importance 'the Hawke Government's lack of performance and accountability in the administration of Aboriginal affairs'. The Opposition spokesman, Michael Wooldridge, referred to Hewson's letter to Hawke and said that 'in the four-and-a-half months since that letter was sent, we have not had the courtesy of a reply. If the Minister would care to give us a reply or would care to pass the message on to the Prime Minister, we really would like to have the opportunity to officially know what he is thinking and to try to work together to find some common ground.' Within the month, the cabinet decision was made and announced, and the Government issued a discussion paper on Aboriginal reconciliation.

Reconciliation can be effected by exercising collective responsibility for our present social reality. It will

not be furthered by harping on collective guilt for the past. In this, our national politicians could have a role to play. There are three separate questions to be answered in the process.

What do Aborigines want?

There is a wide variety of Aboriginal viewpoints. Some, like Michael Mansell, will not be party to any process that presumes them to be Australian citizens. They claim to be Australian Aborigines rather than Aboriginal Australians subject to the laws and policies of Australian Governments. They assert a sovereignty that was never voluntarily surrendered, and see domestic treaty talk as a denial of their separate nation status.

Others, like Charles Perkins, proudly see themselves as part of the Australian nation. Perkins has said: 'Aboriginal people would do well to consider that, in the coming decade, they can gain benefits for themselves and the nation by playing a more involved role in areas beyond Aboriginal affairs'. If the Mansell viewpoint enjoyed wide support among Aborigines, there would be no point in the Government proceeding with any process of reconciliation premised on Aborigines being citizens seeking recognition, rights and reconciliation under Australian law and through the Australian Government. If, as I suspect, the Perkins view can be shown to reflect the aspirations of most Aborigines, there would be point in proceeding.

What are the moral entitlements of Aborigines?

What additional rights ought Aborigines to have under Australian law, not simply because they are poor, disadvantaged or dispossessed, but because they are Aboriginal—descendants of the traditional owners of this land, and the primary custodians of the culture that is unique to this society? Such entitlements are unlikely to take the form of individual rights enforceable in the courts. But they may be collective entitlements capable of respect and recognition. Aborigines are not the only experts in justice, and simplistic claims couched as moral absolutes remain arguable, whether their protagonists are Aborigines or Young Liberals.

Young Liberals are entitled to assert that the 'original inhabitants of Australia did not possess any concept of private ownership of land, so no property was taken from them and there is no moral justification for any alleged descendants to be granted land on the basis of ancestry'. But ancestry is a question of fact determinable by evidence, and theft of land from people who have a concept of *group* ownership is a rectifiable moral wrong. There is room for argument here. Many, and not only Aborigines, would concede that Aborigines in some circumstances do have a moral claim.

What is politically achievable?

Hawke, Hewson and their minders may be better informed in answering this question than Perkins, Mansell and theirs. Australians generally have no absorbing

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More than a question of real estate

The most vividly individualised characters in Thomas Keneally's latest novel, *Flying Hero Class*, are the members of an Aboriginal dance troupe. Keneally travelled with a group of Aboriginal actors in the US in 1985, and while that experience is not directly translated in the new novel, it did affect and amplify his views about Aboriginal relationship with the land. In Canberra recently he discussed his experience of Aboriginal culture and his views on the prospects for reconciliation between black and white Australians.

Thomas Keneally: I think Australian white settlement began with a breathtaking sense of eurocentricity. It began with Governor Phillip coming ashore around about 11.30am on 26 January to read his commission, or have it read to him...

Morag Fraser: ...just around morning tea time. Absolutely. Now that meant that if that was at 11.30am, then at 11.25am this country, according to our legal fiction, was *terra nullius*. And at 11.35am it was suddenly crown land. It was part of the mystical body of the crown. And we think Aboriginal sorcery is astounding! This was a most astounding act of sorcery. Breathtaking! And in that commission of Phillip's there was no basis for an Aboriginal claim.

Anthropologists say there are a lot of inaccuracies in Bruce Chatwin's book, *Songlines*, but I remember in that something which, as a layman, I believe to be very accurate. He said that Australia was a spaghetti of odysseys and iliads written in geological terms. He was talking about the Aboriginal songlines, the fact that there was an Aboriginal map of Australia, unlike what Voss believed in Patrick White's great novel. Remember in that when Voss's backer—the draper from Sydney—asks, 'Mr Voss, will you take a map?', and Voss says, as a European would, and as historians often have, and as we have been taught to think, 'The map—I will first make one'. He's saying there's no map out there, there's no real continent. There's a nullity. And I think that we will not adjust and attend to this problem until we realise that Voss's attitude (which isn't the same as Patrick White's, but Patrick White was nonetheless depicting a European attitude) was wrong. There was a map.

Would you translate that a little more, Tom. Spell out just what the map consisted in?

Well, the songlines which connected the geological sites in ancient Australia, songlines represented in the paintings of Yuendumu and Papunya, they will run, say, from up near Broome. Each geological feature will have a

relationship to a particular adventure of an ancestor hero. Every four-year-old Aboriginal child who is raised traditionally knows something of what's two hundred or three hundred miles down the track because they know the journey, they know the dreaming. I find it very exciting that that map pre-existed. But the fact that it did pre-exist means that they had title, doesn't it. And we've said there is no land title. And that's the proposition on which the famous land case of 1971 was based where Justice Blackburn said there was no common law title, no precedent in common law for Aboriginal title to a property. He said they had a just case, if only there were, in common law, some title.

It's hard to know where's the horse and where the cart is in a statement like that.

Yes, that's right. Absolutely. It's extremely eurocentric. The argument was that they had no sense of title and that therefore we didn't have to come to terms with them. This is a continuing problem. That is why I would like all parties to seek a treaty so that we have legitimacy and so that aboriginal legitimacy is recognised. Of course I have the most selfish reasons for wanting this, the most selfish white reasons: it is so that we can get on together, so that we can be forgiven by the dispossessed race and therefore be led into a genuine citizenship of this country. If you deny the legitimacy of another person you are denying your own legitimacy.

If in a marriage you oppress one partner you are yourself ultimately oppressed. The other partner might bear the more visible scars but the result is you can't live or expect a good life, you can't get away with it if there is an unacknowledged and unrecognised denial at the base of everything.

You talk about having 'selfish reasons'. I assume you also have reasons which are not just the selfish ones., and thoughts about action and processes which move beyond the alleviation of white guilt.

It is not purely the alleviation of white guilt. It is that I know that inequity poisons everything Therefore, for



From page 8

concern about an agreement between two separate parties distinguished on the basis of race, two centuries after the first wave of non-Aboriginal migration. But they may be open to negotiating and guaranteeing the place of Aborigines in the Commonwealth, while reviewing the Constitution in the lead up to its centenary. There is no reason why a mature nation should deny itself the opportunity of using its Constitution to express the fundamentals of its identity as a nation-state.

The Barunga statement was signed by two traditional elders in the Northern Territory, each of whom espoused the need for a treaty within one Australia—what the other signatories, Bob Hawke and Gerry Hand, now call an instrument of reconciliation. The elder from the Centre, Wenten Rubuntja, said: 'Today there are lots of people living in this country. People who have come from all over the world. But we don't call them foreigners. We don't ask, "Where's your country? Where's your father from?" They have been born here. Their mother's blood is in this country ... This is their country, too, now. So all of us have to live together. We have to look after each other. We have to share this country. And this means respecting each others' laws and culture. We have to work out a way of sharing this country, but there has to be an understanding of and respect of our culture, or law. Hopefully that's what this treaty will mean.'

the health of our body politic we should attend to this question or allow it to be attended to by the Aboriginal people if they want to be the main agents. There is a great timidity in the Australian soul. It is more than timidity. It is pusillanimity. And it is a small mindedness. Because we are small minded about admitting their sovereignty, either previous or present, or however we want to do it, we demean ourselves, and we undermine our legitimacy. What was noticeable about the bicentennial, in which I participated, was the feeling of illegitimacy that a lot of white Australians had. They felt that something had been poisoned at the source and that therefore we were an illegitimate nation. I don't quite go along with that. If you believe you are an illegitimate nation you've got to pack up and go, or you've got to attend to the condition immediately and in the quickest way possible. So I do feel there has to be a treaty which is also an instrument of reconciliation. We cannot afford to go on pretending, hand on heart, before the wide world, that we have not undermined our own legitimacy by denying the legitimacy of the indigenous people. So I think that this is a matter of crucial importance for Australia. And I would even submit that ordinary people know it is.

So how does one do something without the initiative being just one more form of bandwaggoning or exploitation?

The elder from the North, Galarrwuy Yunupingu said: 'What we want from a treaty is the creation of a just and mature society which black and white Australians can enjoy together. A treaty which recognises our rights and our status will provide the basis for building a society in which people live in mutual respect. To those people who say they support the concept of "One Australia" I can only say that I agree. There should be one Australia and we should be part of it. But our part should be on our terms. A treaty will wipe out injustice and redress the wrongs of today, which can be traced to the wrongs of the past. It will put us on the right track for the future. It will create an Australia we can all share in pride. It will mean, in 2088 and 2188 and all the other '88s, all Australians celebrating their achievement.'

Approaching the centenary of our existence as a federation under the Constitution, we have the time to negotiate a just and proper settlement. Committed to finding common ground, we need to settle so that no Australian will be alien to the land or to the society that is our common heritage. ■

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It is very hard to do it while children are not taught anything real about Aboriginal culture and Aborigines in relation to Australia in the school system. We should emerge from school with a powerful sense of that Aboriginal planet, Australia, for this reason: that they've been here for a minimum forty thousand years. That's two hundred thousand generations We've been here for six generations. The idea that just because we are of the race who invented the internal combustion engine we have nothing to learn from what we call pre-history, but which two thousand generations of Aborigines would have considered very real life, is preposterous. A lot of Australians say, 'Aw, I'm sick of hearing about the Aboriginal issue'. They are going to be sick of it until there is at least this instrument.

Has your experience writing and travelling with Aboriginal artists altered your own sense of the land?

I think that the European artistic record shows that we were for a long time ambiguous about Australia. There was a powerful feeling in a lot of Europeans that the country could gobble you up. Well, I was born at the end of that era. I felt dutifully like that. But I feel less and less like it now and I don't think the new generation will feel it at all. I admired and envied the Aborigines I travelled with because of their connection with this place, their place. I envied that extremely passionate attachment to the land as something more than real estate. ■

Poor Johnny one note

It is bad for the country when the advisers of those who rule all speak with one voice.

IN COMMON WITH the media, the bureaucracy is part of what might be called the tyranny of consensus within Australia. Quite simply, the range of views allowed on the economic agenda has shrunk to an alarming degree. Those who step outside a narrow economic rationalist perspective receive little or no attention and have been marginalised within the Labor Party. 'Competition is good', 'the public sector is bad' are among the tenets of the dominant ideology. A few brave souls, such as academic Hugh Stretton or *Age* economics editor Kenneth Davidson, argue for an alternative view but they struggle to be heard above the prevailing chorus.

The contribution of the media to this state of affairs was discussed by Margaret Simons (*Eureka Street*, March '91) and I shall not elaborate on it. What is contended here, and lamented, is that there is an apparent lack of breadth in the advice governments receive from public servants, with serious consequences for public policy and, ultimately, for the quality of our democracy. It is not suggested that every public service department should embrace a full range of views merely for the sake of diversity. There would appear little value in a government headed by John Hewson having a Marxist as head of the Treasury. However, as will be seen, there is evidence that the key economic departments in Canberra are dominated by a particularly narrow right-wing economic perspective. The obvious consequence is that only advice



of a certain kind is tendered, to which the smart retort might be that only advice of a certain kind is sought, and that senior public servants do not appoint themselves. There is truth in this, and a chicken-and-egg argument can easily develop from pursuing the point. But senior public servants do appoint their underlings, and these appointees provide the pool from which governments choose future senior public servants.

The traditional notion of the civil service has been so parodied by *Yes Minister* that to restate it virtually invites ridicule. Nevertheless, theory has it that a neutral public service, selected and promoted on the basis of merit, advises government on how to implement its program. Public servants, like academics, are supposed to be protected by permanent appointments. In other words, they should not have to fear dismissal if they offer unwelcome or unpalatable advice. The Westminster model, of course, is just that—a model. Human beings have ideologies and prejudices, and a competent minister will bear this in mind when listening to public service advice. Moreover, in two respects it is clear that the Australian experience has drifted some way from the model.

In the late 1960s the species *ministerial adviser* evolved from the political swamp. The adviser was supposed to look after the minister's 'political' interests but in fact often acted as a buffer between the minister and public service. Needless to say, this species is not much

It is barely conceivable that the current economic policy advisers ever stood around the tutorial room discussing the elements of a just society

loved by public servants but has nonetheless flourished over the years and shows no sign of extinction. A second relevant development has been the emergence of the Special Executive Service. Under this scheme, certain top positions within a department may be filled on a contract basis, with salary incentives for superior performance. Predictably, this system is extremely popular with those who believe that the answer to Australia's problems lies in replacing the practices and ethos of the public sector with those of the private sector. The potential of the Special Executive Service to lend itself to greater politicisation is obvious, although it is too early for a definitive judgment.

In the public service, as in our constitution, we seem to be stuck with an American/British hybrid, retaining aspects of the neutral/permanent system while moving in some way towards a non-permanent, more politicised approach. Whether this makes a case for abandoning the pretence of neutrality and opting for the US system is an interesting theoretical question. But what is cause for grave practical concern is the paradoxical situation in which the senior ranks of the public service seem to be dominated by men (usually) who, to some extent, appear to question the very rationale of the public service and the role of the state. The paucity of public sector advocates in the current bureaucracy is, in my view, of greater concern than the dearth of right-wing ideologues in the supposedly Keynesian public service of the 1950s and 1960s.

Dr Michael Pusey, in his survey of the attitudes of senior federal public servants (*The Age*, 27 September 1990), uncovered a set of views that should alarm anyone who sees an adequately funded public sector as an essential component of a just society, and who would contend that the test of a successful polity lies not in the number of millionaires per square kilometre but in the treatment afforded the least well off. Dr Pusey revealed that 79 per cent of those surveyed 'favoured reducing the state's involvement in social and economic spheres', 74 per cent shared 'doubts and fears about the growing intervention of the state' and, perhaps most astonishingly, '43 per cent thought the distribution of income was biased towards wage earners, with only 21 per cent seeing it as biased towards employers and owners'. This last figure is truly staggering, since it suggests either ignorance of the decline in real wages in the past seven years or, worse, the view that even the pounding that wage and salary earners have endured is far from the optimum punishment. Clichés about ivory towers and Canberra's detachment from reality seem most apt.

Dr Pusey found that 72 per cent of the bureaucrats surveyed were economists, had a median age of 40 and 'their view of the world was straight out of economics text books'. It is my contention that although these economists have probably been 'trained', they have not been educated. The distinction between training and education is a critical one, but one largely lost on the present federal government. As Hugh Stretton points out, (*Political Essays*, 1987) earlier generations of pub-

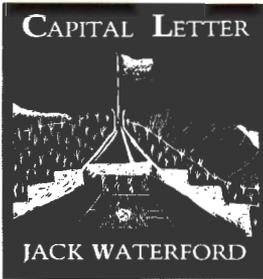
lic servants, including those in treasury/finance departments, were broadly educated people able to see economic decisions in the context of history and of the government's social obligations.

It is barely conceivable that the current economic policy advisers ever stood around the tutorial room discussing the elements of a just society. Quite simply, justice is not on the agenda. Ponder the implications of the Treasurer describing as 'a great set of figures' a policy outcome that in fact inflicts suffering and deprivation on large numbers of his citizens. Is this not the triumph of dogma on a grand scale? Judge us not on outcomes but on our adherence to the new-right catechism. An episode of *Yes Minister* parodies the (admittedly exaggerated) notion that the British civil service should be run by men with a first in classics from Oxbridge. If, however, the episode's message is that departments should be run by narrow specialists, then such a view is wrong—and dangerous. Given a choice, I would opt for a public service dominated by classicists rather than economists. It is my suspicion that specialists do more harm than generalists.

IN FOLLOWING NEW-RIGHT DOGMA, Australia suffers from two crippling historical limitations. The first is the cringe, as we slavishly follow what is seen as fashionable economic dogma from the United States and Britain; the second is that we are invariably out of date—there is now significant disillusionment with economic rationalism in Britain and the US, but we persist full-bore with a privatisation program and other elements of the new-right shopping list. Is it too much to expect that bureaucratic advice should incorporate the lessons to be learnt from overseas experience? The opening of political prisons and the smashing of Berlin Walls do not, of themselves, guarantee flourishing pluralism, but it is sobering to reflect that a more vigorous and diverse economic debate is occurring in Eastern Europe than in Australia.

Australia has had no political prisons or Berlin Walls, but it is hard to escape the conclusion that the economic policy debate has rarely, if ever, been more limited. Views outside a very narrow perspective are ridiculed or, more often, ignored. Those who suggest that governments have social obligations and should rule with compassion are traduced as 'wimps'. What a wretched Americanism that word is! It is surely possible that current economic directions are wrong, and the discovery of error can only come from the consideration of alternatives. In not providing sufficient breadth of options the public service is failing, but that failing is part of a wider Australian problem: the lack of sufficient diversity of economic ideas. A flourishing of diversity is a necessary precondition for better policy outcomes and, just possibly, a fairer society. ■

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The lore of diminishing returns

THE BANKS ARE NOT especially the Government's friend at the moment. During the past few years Paul Keating has been known to blame them for mismanagement or lack of initiative. It would suit the Government to have the banks cop some blame for the recession. So why did the Government, and in particular the former Attorney-General Gareth Evans, and the Justice Minister, Michael Tate, try vigorously to keep the Westpac letters from being tabled in Parliament?

There was a case, remember, for the letters to be seen as deserving, at Parliament's discretion, to remain suppressed. These were confidential exchanges between solicitor and client, covering matters still before the courts. But parliaments have never been zealous about preserving private rights when matters are in the public interest. On this occasion, the Clerk of the Senate, Harry Evans, advised the President, Kerry Sibraa, that Democrat Senator Paul McLean ought to be allowed to table the letters. Why, then, did Senators Evans and Tate vehemently disagree—and prevail on the President not only to rule otherwise but to establish an *ad hoc* committee, with the two Opposition legal luminaries, Senators Durack and Hill, to devise strategies to keep the documents out?

The answer is not complicated. There is a royal commission into the Tricontinental disaster in Victoria. Another into WA Inc. And another into the collapse of the State Bank of South Australia. By the middle of the year, each of these inquiries could start uncovering material damaging to Labor Party interests. Who knows what might be unearthed? Certainly Senators Evans and Tate do not, but each has been in the game long enough to know that one should let one's imagination run wild. It might yet become necessary for lawyers representing party interests to argue before royal commissioners that certain documents should be regarded as privileged.

Then why spoil a good argument in advance by adopting a liberal line on the Westpac documents for the simple pleasure (almost certainly of short-term benefit) of seeing Westpac annoyed and humiliated? The senators could well have reflected that observers of the catalogue of incompetence, mismanagement and outright dishonesty revealed in the Westpac letters might blame the Government that created a climate for such events by deregulating banking.

There is nothing particularly naughty about this sort of strategic political thinking. It is just that Gareth Evans and Michael Tate have managed to retain, through long years in Government, continuing reputations for straightforwardness, and even for judging issues on their merits.

Alas, these are different and desperate days. Federally, Labor's day of reckoning is still two years off. But

though it has snatched wins against the odds on the past two occasions, the odds are very, very long against a third miracle. As for the states, only Queensland looks safe for Labor.

Royal commissions and the state of the economy are damaging and will continue to damage Labor in the area in which, at great cost to its internal cohesiveness, it has worked hardest over the past decade: acquiring a reputation for economic competence. To think that a Federal Government which went into office with one policy only—to avoid repeating anything that Whitlam had done—and which continually made 'tough' economic decisions, should be on the rack for economic mismanagement. Or that a Victorian Government so austere that the public purse was not allowed to buy John Cain's teabags stands convicted of economic profligacy. Or that the sound conservative management of a John Bannon could come so badly unstuck. And that a Western Australian Government overanxious to be the party of state business and development should be next to bankrupt. The odour of Whitlamism—at most of romanticism and impracticality—now seems less difficult to bear and perhaps more likely, in the long term, to be forgiven.

There are other signs of the way things are coming unstuck. The press is now starting to get detailed accounts of everything that has happened in federal cabinet. The next stage will be to decide that the problem is one of public relations. And to blame the press. It is difficult to do both at once, but every government in decline—from McMahon, to Whitlam, to Fraser—has had a jolly good try.

The only body in Canberra that is not perturbed is the federal bureaucracy. Normally, the prospect of a change of government has the service somewhat worried. Who can be sure that he or she will get along with a new administration? But this time around there is a certain serenity. The public service is both intensely political—almost entirely captured in its senior ranks by economic rationalism and managerialism—but also at its most unpolitical—no ideological differences between the two parties, at most a mild debate about means rather than ends. Indeed, Dr Hewson probably more perfectly represents the prevailing philosophy than Mr Hawke. Sometime, probably not until the post mortems, Labor may wonder whether the public administration that led it down this path, and performed so efficiently in doing so, might share some blame for economic debacles that overtook the country and swept it from power. ■

Jack Waterford is deputy editor of the *Canberra Times*.

the weight of oblivion and songs of Redemption

Dylan turns 50

ROBERT ALLEN ZIMMERMAN was born on 24 May 1941 in the cold north country of Minnesota, in a birth made difficult because the head was unusually large. He arrived in New York in December 1960, as a promiscuous young folk-singer called Bob Dylan. His other aliases included Blind Boy Grunt, Bob Landy, Robert Milkwood Thomas and Tedham Porterhouse. Typically, in Sam Peckinpah's film *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid*, Dylan has a self-defined role as an almost mute character called 'Alias'. In his own surreal film, *Renaldo and Clara*, Dylan played Renaldo while Ronnie Hawkins, and everybody else with a hat on, played Dylan.

Who is Bob Dylan? His identity has been a preoccupation not only of fans and critics, but also of Dylan himself. Commentators sum him up in terms that do nothing to relieve the enigma: 'grandmaster of masks', 'mystic tease', 'rejector of roles', 'undefinable', 'Drifter, Messenger, A Nobody, Priest, Queen, Shaman, Idiot'. Robert Shelton, in *No Direction Home*, the best recent biography of Dylan, concludes, 'If any word alone can be found to characterize the contradictions in Bob Dylan, it would have to be *ambivalence*.'

What counts in the end for his world-wide audience is not Dylan's identity but his commitment. 'Ambivalence' is not helpful term in this context. On the first track of *Street Legal*, the album that prefaces his born-again Christianity, Dylan sings of a grieving good shepherd, risen 'forty-eight hours later' amid rolling rocks and broken chains, calling for commitment:

*Gentlemen, he said, I don't need your
organization, I've shined your shoes,
I've moved your mountains
and marked your cards. But Eden is burning,
either brace yourself for elimination
or else your hearts must have the courage for
the changing of the guards.*

(© 1978 Special Rider Music)

What Dylan is up to in his own heart, and what courage he has for making commitments, is his own business. But the challenges he issues to all who hear him is part of mine. For me, Dylan, more than any other contemporary artist, has pursued *and* let loose the maelstrom of spirits that spin through our present culture.

He is the weather-vane of a revolution in outlook that began in the '60s. His songs became anthems for the civil rights movement, for the radical Weathermen, for counter-culture drop outs, artists, mystics. When Trappist monk Thomas Merton abandoned the elected silence of Gethsemane Abbey for his private hermitage, he had a clutch of Dylan records under his arm. Bob Willis, English cricket captain, changed his name by deed-poll to Bob Dylan Willis. Australian artist Brett Whitely paints with Dylan's music on his earphones. When Jimmy Carter ran for President in 1976, he quoted liberally from Dylan's lyrics, as he did again in his nomination acceptance speech, as though Dylan were the Walt Whitman or Ben Jonson of the age.

Norman Mailer said in 1975 that 'Dylan may prove to be our greatest lyric poet'. Cambridge University's Christopher Ricks, describes him as belonging with 'the artists who've looked for the widest possible constituency, like Dickens and Shakespeare'. Dylan may not be a poet, but he is the best American *user* of words.

Never able to write a three-minute pop song—his number one hits such as *Like a Rollin' Stone* and *Mr Tambourine Man* went for eight minutes—Dylan preferred live performance and spurned long studio sessions or rock videos. Most of his great albums were recorded with minimal over-dubbing in a matter of a few days: you can often hear flaws on the tracks and mistakes in the lyrics. A bad singer by some standards, Dylan's gift for words, his phrasing, and his intense commitment on stage, give his work hypnotic power.

large 4.75

FRENCH FRIES

small

2.50

medium

3.50

large

4.75



The man has drawn record crowds. There were 450,000 at the Woodstock Festival in 1969, held not far from Dylan's soon-to-be-abandoned home. Dylan was absent, but according to Greil Marcus in *Rolling Stone*, 'willingly or not, [he] was the presence hovering over this three-day jamboree'. Millions applied for the 650,000 seats available on his 1974 tour of the US. In 1978, he was the drawcard for more than 200,000 at Britain's biggest rock concert in Blackbushe Aerodrome. In 1984, 100,000 filled Wembley Stadium to hear him. Today, Dylan still writes new songs and reworks old ones, but sparsely, and according to his own rules. In a 1986 interview he acknowledged a quietening of mood: 'I can't write those songs today ... I wonder not only where it came from, but how it came. I couldn't do that now, I'd be a fool to try.'

Dylan has made a lot of money, of course, though he could have earned much more. He appears on television about once a decade, for example, and that usually only as a favour to others. Why so? In 1963 a precocious Dylan was scheduled to perform on the *Ed Sullivan Show*. He chose to sing *Talkin' John Birch Society Blues* but the song was banned by network censors, who were fearful of libel action. Dylan refused to perform anything else and never went back.

His performances today are more than pieces of nostalgia or time travel, and more than iconic evocations of 1960s idealism. His work has always taken his audience beyond their expectations. Musicologist Wilfrid Mellers argues that Dylan's rasping voice was the first to reconcile the guilt and tragedy of white American folk music, with all its varied ancestries, with the spiritual hope for salvation and justice inherent in black blues. 'Dylan's songs, balanced between body and soul,' said Mellers, 'may imply the evolution, as well as the survival, of a myth.'

There is, in my view, a way of understanding Dylan's significance, a way that is more precise than recourse to words like enigmatic or ambivalent. Dylan has a genius for sensing and evoking movements of the spirit among us. Although few, if any, of us know how to describe the depths of the psyche, we know that there is more to reality than the countable objects and experiences that make up our history and geography and stocktakes. Songs like *Blowin' in the Wind*, *Idiot Wind*, *A Hard Rain's A Gonna Fall*, *Slow Train Coming*, even the recent *Under the Red Sky*, are about those hurricane moods of the spirit. Sometimes they offer hope, sometimes judgment, and sometimes derangement, anarchy, or nihilism. Dylan lays bare these varying moods but without being able to make a choice between them.

Critics speak of the phases in Dylan's career: first there were the protest songs of the Biblical prophet, then the romantic derangement of the mid '60s, then up-country contentment; then back to the city and romance; then the Christian songs; and, most recently, a period of retrospection. Dylan, however, claims that he has always been the same, always seeking after the

spirited. In one of his few interviews that can be taken seriously, accompanying the ten-sided *Biograph* record, he says:

'You got to be strong and stay connected to what started it all, the inspiration behind the inspiration ... As far as the '60s go, it wasn't any big deal ... I mean, if I had a choice I would rather have lived at the time of King David ... or maybe at the time of Jesus and Mary Magdalene—that would have been interesting to really test your nerve ... People *dissect* my songs like rabbits but they all miss the point ... I can understand why Rimbaud quit writing poetry when he was 19 ... I like to keep my values scripturally straight, though—I like to stay a part of that stuff that don't change.'

The two abiding influences on Dylan's work have been the Bible, particularly Biblical prophecy, and the romantic movement—artists like Rimbaud, Nietzsche, and Dostoevsky. Both influences connect with our longing for the transcendent. On the cover notes of *Planet Waves*, for example, Dylan describes his ambivalent starting point: 'Hebrew letters on the wall, Victor Hugo's house in Paris ... where Baudelaire lived ... where Joshua brought the house down!' Or again, on the jacket of *Desire*, he writes: 'Where do I begin ... on the heels of Rimbaud ... meeting the queen angel in the reeds of Babylon ... romance is taking over ... can not ya feel the weight of oblivion and the songs of redemption ... ?'

Some of Dylan's material is of divine inspiration and takes us along that Augustinian way, where our hearts would go but cannot rest. Some, like the worst of romance, has libidinous excess as its mainspring, taking us along that way of gluttony which leads to derangement and exhaustion. But the gluttony for experience is, even for Baudelaire in *The Flowers of Evil*, 'Le goût de l'éternel' — gluttony for the infinite.

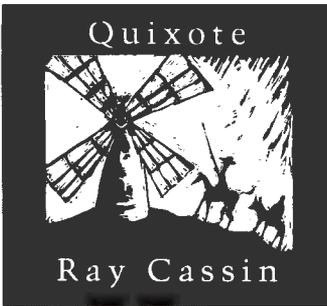
Dylan's songs bear the marks of both spirits, without an abiding commitment to one or the other. In the end he leaves his undiscerning listeners in a confusion of hope and despair, that besetting disease of the '60s. Quite explicitly, Dylan seeks no disciples. He continues to urge his fans to find their own path, not to follow him, and not to treat him as some messianic figure. Though in his most recent Melbourne concerts, in 1986, Dylan pointed his fans to the one he called his hero, Jesus, he has since moved to a position of much less certain faith. Thus the last track on his most recent album, *Under the Red Sky*, concludes with a characteristic piece of homespun fear and hope:

*The cat's in the well,
the leaves are starting to fall.
Goodnight my love,
may the Lord have mercy on us all ...*

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Happy birthday, Bob, and thank you for so many great songs. May the Lord have mercy on you, too. ■

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Feed them puns

AT LAST ALL IS REVEALED, and the truth is worse than anyone could have imagined. The full impact of the recession has been brought to our attention by the *Sunday Age*, with a little help from Professor Mark Wahlquist of Monash Medical Centre.

Professor Wahlquist, in a study for the National Heart Foundation, has charted an increase in our obesity levels and he believes that the economy may have something to do with it. We can't afford to eat nutritious food, you see, so we're eating junk instead and swelling with every morsel.

How could we have been so blind? It is not a matter of empty factories and growing dole queues, of foreclosed mortgages and family frictions. Newspapers are obliged to report such tedious matters, of course, so that at least employees of the Bureau of Statistics will be assured of a job. But we must not forget what economic hardship is really all about. It makes us fat.

I do not sneer at Professor Wahlquist. He would concede, I am sure, that the aforementioned list of woes is hardly negligible. And his reported comments are carefully couched in terms of what may be the case: 'I think it must be something to do with the food supply, and probably among the disadvantaged groups in the community ... it would be very interesting to know how much of this change took place as the economic situation worsened.'

Nor do I wish to accuse the *Sunday Age* health reporter, Deborah Stone, or the sub-editor who wrote the headline 'Recession may be causing waist inflation', of trivialising the news. No one thinks heart attacks are funny. And of course, my scorn does not extend to the photographer who took the picture accompanying Ms Stone's story. It shows a rear view of a very large Australian of indeterminate gender. You can tell the large person is supposed to be Australian, because he/she is wearing garments decorated with lurid Ken Done-ish motifs.

What does irritate is the kind of assumption that the *Sunday Age* evidently makes about its readers. One imagines the following chain of editorial reasoning.

Q: How do you sell bad news to yuppies?

A: Well, let's see if we can get a body-image angle on the recession. Or maybe a recession angle on their body image. Or both. Something that'll really get them worried.

Since the *Sunday Age* has nudged its former rival, the *Sunday Herald*, into oblivion, this assessment of popular anxieties may be correct. But if so it implies

something far more depressing about Australians than a tendency to wolf down stodge when the wolf is at the door.

One wonders how some of history's medical catastrophes would now be understood if they had been reported in this vein. The Black Death, for example: 'People all over Europe are urgently seeking cosmetic advice after outbreaks of bubonic plague. An embarrassing symptom of the plague, foul-smelling black swellings in the armpits, has disrupted many ordinary social activities. But the toiletries counters of department stores report brisk business.'

Or the Irish potato famine: 'The population of Ireland is literally vanishing. Health department officials fear that if present food shortages continue, ordinary citizens will soon be so thin that they will be unable to see each other. The officials predict dire consequences for Ireland's favourite social pastimes of drinking and conversation.'

And how would Florence Nightingale and her nurses have been regarded by reporters covering the Crimean War? 'Ms Florence Nightingale yesterday called for a complete review of military hospital procedures, to help reconcile maimed and limbless veterans to their new body image. "Getting killed in battle is bad enough," Ms Nightingale said, "but waking up in hospital without any legs can really ruin a soldier's day".'

OF COURSE people eat bad food when they are poor. Of course sellers of biscuits and confectionery will report that recessions are good for business. During the industrial revolution in Europe, the urban poor were notoriously unhealthy. That's why we have had factory laws, and housing laws, and clean-air laws and free school milk.

One would expect health problems, mental as well as physical, to be associated with times of economic hardship. And perhaps the health problems we now face, like our economic difficulties, are too complex to be solved by a 1990s equivalent of free school milk. But neither will they be solved by telling people that they could look like the rich and famous, and be as healthy as the rich and famous, if only they had as much money as the rich and famous. ■

Ray Cassin is production editor of *Eureka Street*.

Judging by appearances

Marian devotion and the question of Medjugorje

ON 1 JANUARY 1987, Pope John Paul II announced a 'year dedicated to Mary' in preparation for the year 2000. The announcement came as a surprise to all, caused some degree of confusion and found the Church unprepared. The confusion never quite disappeared. In retrospect, the Marian Year can be pronounced a failure on almost all counts. It did not attain its goal of renewal and never managed to touch the hearts of the people. At the same time, thousands of pilgrims from all over the world continued to throng the small village of Medjugorje in the mountains of southern Yugoslavia, where since June 1981 a group of young villagers has continued to report apparitions of Mary on an almost daily basis.

The contrast between the two events could not be more striking. An officially sponsored year of devotion to Mary dissolves in confusion and lack of response, while pilgrimages that lack approbation and are, in fact, officially discouraged by ecclesiastical authority, continue to arouse devotion and enthusiasm. The series of reported apparitions at Medjugorje continues. In some respects the Medjugorje events are unique. Among these are the sheer number of reported apparitions (about 2000 to date); ecclesiastical strife that has set bishop against bishop and religious orders against diocesan clergy; and the behaviour of the visionaries themselves, perhaps understandable in the light of continual strife that, through secrecy and self-contradiction, has added several jarring notes to the events.

At the same time, these events display many of the characteristics of previous Marian apparitions—appeals for prayer and penance, reported miracles such as healings and unusual natural phenomena—lights, clouds, mists—and promises of a special sign that will make believers of all. There is also abundant reporting of increased prayer among pilgrims and village residents. Some, although not all, of the young visionaries have experienced a complete change of heart, and are contemplating priesthood, religious life or other ways of dedicating their lives to God and the *Gospa* [Lady], who

'begs' the visionaries, often with tears, to 'pray, pray, pray'. The events are still under investigation by the Catholic bishops of Yugoslavia. Even if the official investigation pronounces the events 'genuine'—that is, without fraud, manipulation, intent to deceive, attention-seeking, psychological imbalance or demonic intent—questions still need to be addressed about prayer and devotion to Mary. What exactly is involved in Marian devotion? How is the prayer of the Church affected by Marian apparitions? What appeal does Medjugorje offer that is missing in official calls to renewed devotion?

The theme of Marian invocation is ancient in Christian history and the theme of intercessory prayer to Mary is also ancient, with the words attributed to Mary at the wedding-feast at Cana being usually offered as a biblical basis: 'They have no wine ... Do whatever he tells you' (John 2:1-11). As a focus of prayer, however, Mary has become a powerful symbol and has assumed to herself hundreds of images, often far removed from the biblical ones. 'Love gave her a thousand names.'

These images follow the history of the Church—from the imperial and virgin images of patristic and monastic times, through the Lady Madonna and Sorrowing Mother images of the Middle Ages, the Lady of the Rosary and Defender of Orthodoxy images of the Tridentine period, and the apparition and dogmatic images of the Marian era (1850-1950), down to the recent attempts at a renewal of biblical imagery. Each set of images evoked a particular form of prayer and devotion, and through the ages exercised enormous influence on the faith of believers.

Mary was praised as Queen, Virgin Mother, Mother of God. She was sought out as consoler and intercessor in the trials and tribulations of life. Through Mary, the Church was seen to be safe from heretics within and without. She was also an exemplar, offering at once images of virgin, wife and mother to be imitated. Mary was held up to women in particular as exemplar of a life

of purity, hiddenness and submissiveness. And all the while, the imposing poetic images of the litanies rang in believers' ears: House of Gold, Ark of the Covenant, Gate of Heaven, Morning Star.

At least since the Middle Ages, the traditional content of Marian prayer has remained the same: the Rosary. For some, to pray was to say the Rosary. It was the prescribed prayer for the 'lay' (that is, unlettered) Christian, or in other words for the non-clergy. The university-trained clergy had the Bible, the breviary and the liturgy, all in a sacred language, Latin. The laity had the *biblia pauperum*—the poor people's bible, the Rosary, which, with 'mysteries', offered a compendium of Christian life sufficient to the needs of the lay Christian. It was a brilliant catechetical response to the needs of lay Christians in a particular context.

The Rosary has remained central to prayer for many Catholics. It has an appeal that the eucharistic liturgy lacks. For others, the liturgical and biblical renewal have left the rosary in a kind of limbo. Even though the official Marian documents of Popes Paul VI (*Marialis cultus*) and John Paul II (*Redemptoris Mater*) assert that the Rosary is a devotion 'easily harmonised with the liturgy', the logic of this is not easy to follow. In contrast, it is not hard to see why the Rosary holds a central place at Medjugorje, while the liturgy, though important, does not.

THIS BRINGS US to the particular quality of such Marian devotion: it is popular rather than liturgical. From at least the sixth century, there has been an official liturgical aspect to Marian devotion, centred on the development of the great feasts and liturgies. For almost a thousand years, this liturgical devotion was restrained and left no doubt as to the point of liturgical worship—the celebration of the mystery of Jesus Christ from the Incarnation to his return in glory. Side by side with this liturgical devotion was the ever-burgeoning popular devotion. The one was restrained, discreet and for the most part biblically based in its expression. The other was exuberant, poetic, constantly responsive to new and old needs of the human heart. The principle at work was *de Maria numquam satis*—one can never say enough about Mary.

In an attempt to harness the exuberance of popular devotion and harmonise it with the liturgy, Pope Paul VI offered four criteria for authentic Marian devotion: it should be biblically based, liturgically integrated, ecumenically sensitive and anthropologically sound. The pope was arguing for biblical and doctrinal accuracy, and against prescriptions for human—particularly feminine—behaviour based on supposed Marian qualities.

The devotional atmosphere of Medjugorje and most Marian apparitions can be described as apocalyptic. This implies a particular focus on present conditions of chaos, infidelity and potential doom. The message of the apparition responds to this by offering certainties of prayer and behaviour that will offset the feared disasters. The atmosphere is usually intense, highly emotional and

unfortunately open to manipulation on many fronts. Promised signs and wonders keep people in a constant state of excitement. Secrets entrusted to a few, usually hinting of imminent disasters, add to the fear and dread and personal sense of unworthiness of the participants.

Our times do have their apocalyptic overtones. But playing on the fears, often unacknowledged, of pilgrims and believers can lead only to credulity and religiosity rather than to genuine faith. This is not to say that those who follow the Medjugorje events with interest are all subject to credulity, but to point out that the potential for deception under such conditions is very high.

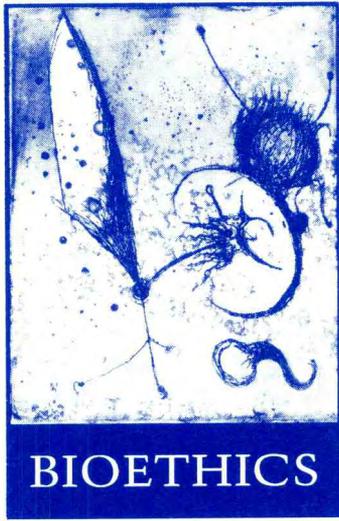
A thirst for the miraculous and for new and reassuring revelations, and alternatively a sense of fear and enslavement lest one miss out on some new sign from God, can only distract from what Luke's Gospel describes as carrying one's cross daily. In his work on devotion to Mary, Paul VI describes the Rosary as 'one of the most excellent prayers'. Yet, he says, we should not feel bound to the Rosary but should feel 'serenely free' about it. All the more, then, should people feel 'serenely free' with regard to apparitions, supposed secrets and promised signs.

An enormous gap remains between official Mariology, which in large part conforms to Paul VI's four criteria mentioned above, and popular Mariology. What is urgently needed, then, is the recovery of a Marian consensus. Official mariology has always appeared to be scrambling to keep pace with popular devotions. There is something in the person of Mary—historical figure and symbol—that touches the hearts of millions of believers. Perhaps the image so beloved by feminists and Pope John Paul II alike—namely, Mary, pilgrim of faith—will be the catalyst for bringing about a new devotional consensus. ■

— Compass magazine

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Consensus: shaping it or seeking it?

THE CATHOLIC HOSPITALS' ethics conference, held in Sydney in February, marked an advance in consultation between the bishops and those working in the field. It was the first time, so far as I am aware, that Australia's Catholic bishops have sponsored a national meeting of hospital ethics committees and advisers. But

the bishops' expectations were not clear, despite a stated desire 'to have access to a broader range of bioethical advice'. The conference *Handbook and Final Program* contained draft 'protocols', or ethics policy guidelines, for discussion in workshop sessions. Authorship was not attributed, but the aims and objectives listed in the document indicated that it had been drawn up by the doctrine and morals committee of the bishops' conference. It was not explained whether the protocols were being presented for redrafting, or whether the bishops would simply ponder the results of the meeting before issuing the protocols officially.

What did become clear was that a lot of work has to be done before general agreement can be reached on such matters. The bishops may want uniformity in Catholic hospitals, but a preliminary reading of the protocols gave the impression of a narrow approach to a range of complex issues. The subtlety of thinking that approved the GIFT (Gamete Intra-Fallopian Transfer) IVF technique was often lacking in other areas.

Distinct groups were obvious among participants at the conference: theologians, clergy, religious from the hospitals, medical and other professionals, and right-to-life groups. Some put a lot of stress on anecdotal evidence, despite reminders that an ethics conference should concentrate on reasoned argument. Ripples of applause during plenary sessions gave the impression that these groups were more interested in point-scoring than in debate.

I was intrigued by the selection of the speakers for the conference. Apart from Fr Norman Ford, most of the progressive moral theologians or philosophers among the Australian clergy failed to get a guernsey. Fortunately, they did participate at group discussions and in the plenary sessions, and interventions from Fr Ford, Fr Bill Uren, Fr Walter Black and Fr Tom Connolly, and other informed medical professionals, gave balance to the discussion. Their insistence on accurate definitions and a clear understanding of Church teaching contrasted with the fuzzy thinking evidenced in a vitalist approach that seemed more concerned with physiological functioning than with a fully human life. Such a view fails to take account of the teachings of Pius XII, Paul VI and the Vatican declaration on euthanasia.

The official tone of the conference was set in the first plenary session by a paper read for Cardinal Clancy by Bishop Robinson. The cardinal stressed the need to focus on the health of the whole person, but his warning against rationalism leading to a 'respectable atheism', and his appeal to the writings of Pascal, created an uneasy sense of a dichotomy between faith and reason. At times I had the impression of a ghetto mentality which sees Catholic hospitals as the last bastion against unethical medical practice. Some of the papers at other plenary sessions did little to dispel this impression. John Fleming, for example, argued that every person has a right to be conceived within marriage as the fruit of the love of his or her parents, and to be nurtured by his or her natural family. At times his statements about rights were insufficiently grounded and could have given a distorted impression of the Church's attitude to unmarried women who chose to continue a pregnancy rather than have an abortion.

Fr Laurie McNamara's paper, 'Referral for Induced Abortion and Co-operation', skirted many of the real issues and failed to offer concrete suggestions for hospitals dealing with such problems. Fr Frank Harman's paper, 'Institutional Policy and Individual Conscience', was erudite but took little of the dynamic view of conscience presented by Vatican II. He was strongly criticised on this point by Fr Tom Connolly. Nick Tonti-Filippini's paper on 'Life and Death with Dignity and Justice' tried to deal with the extreme views of some right-to-life protagonists but left the impression of an anti-technology bias.

Apart from the lectures and the plenary sessions, there was a series of small-group discussions on the draft protocols. In the sessions I attended, there was considerable disagreement on general approach. For example, there was much discussion of the draft protocol on 'The Management of Anencephaly in Utero'. Before consensus can be reached on such an issue, there has to be much more philosophical discussion of the significance of human life. Frequent references to the term 'viability' were not helpful in discussing an anencephalic whose potential is already achieved by the time of diagnosis at 16 weeks.

The medical and nursing practitioners at the conference instilled hope and made a valuable contribution by insisting on accurate clinical understanding of the issues. They were sometimes severe in their comments on the draft protocols, for instance on the use of chemotherapy during pregnancy. Ethical inquiry starts with an acceptance of reality. ■

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USA Health care chaos

America's woes suggest that Australians should be wary of playing follow-the-leader in public health policy.

THE UNITED STATES is the only industrialised nation, apart from South Africa, that does not have a national health insurance program covering all its citizens. Yet even in peace time the US has spent billions of dollars on defence, spending that has made it into a debtor nation. But perhaps the most distinctive reason why the US has no national health insurance program has to do with the American psyche. Americans are still close to the myth of their supposedly self-reliant origins, and this influences the way they evaluate remedies for social problems. A classic figure of American legend, the cowboy confronting a hostile environment, was transposed by Horatio Alger to the milieu of the Industrial Revolution. By hard work, self-reliance and frugality, Alger's heroes became millionaires. And each year, countless speakers at graduation ceremonies repeat Alger's message: 'If you really want to make it happen hard enough, you can achieve it!'

The corollary of this belief is that you work for what you earn, and you earn what you deserve. This tradition of self-reliance engenders among Americans a deep suspicion of any response to individual needs that involves redistributing income through government programs. People seem to be getting something they did not earn or pay for—something they do not deserve.

This mentality fosters opposition to a national health insurance program providing basic health care. Yet today, even many Americans who have earned a good deal and husbanded their earnings judiciously are faced with paying for catastrophic illnesses or long-term care. They are crushed by this, become medical indigents. As for the poor, they are not even capable of 'spending down' on health care. Not surprisingly, analysts are saying that the US health care system is itself terminally ill. What are the symptoms? The US spends more on health care than any other nation. Yet, among the industrialised nations, it produces some of the



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poorest results in areas such as infant mortality, poverty-related diseases and life-expectancy. In a recent survey of life-expectancy rates in 33 industrialised nations, the US ranked 16th. Japan was first.

This year, the US health care bill is expected to exceed \$600 billion. This represents 12 per cent of the national's gross national product. In spite of this, 37 million Americans are uninsured. Of these, about 12 million are children. Besides those lacking any insurance, another 22 million have inadequate insurance. The number of highly vulnerable persons is therefore about 60 million. Canada, in contrast, spends a third less per capita on health care than the US, and includes all citizens in its health insurance.

A study released in March last year indicates that US health care costs are rising at four times the rate of inflation. The private sector is expected to pay 60 per cent of this giant health care bill, with the public sector accounting for the remaining 40 per cent through Medicare (for the old) and Medicaid (for the poor). The federal government and many state governments have aggravated the problem by sharply limiting their commitments—pursuing more stringent payment policies toward care providers and reimbursing them for services below cost.

Medicare has adopted stricter payment policies and increased premium costs. In spite of this, Medicare and private insurance pay less than three per cent of the nation's nursing home bill. Medicaid is the biggest government program financing health care for the poor, but still only helps about 30 per cent of the poor. Even within this group, a third are covered by Medicaid for only part of the year. Furthermore, Medicaid eligibility standards, which can be set by the individual states, have recently excluded more than a million people to

reduce costs. The end of these exclusions is not in sight. This approach is in stark contrast to that of Pope John Paul during his visit to the United States in 1987. To Catholic health care professionals he said: 'In the necessary organisational and institutional response to needs, it is essential to avoid reducing human beings to mere units or categories of political or social planning or action. Such a process leads to new and other unjust forms of anonymity and alienation.'

Hospitals that attempt to bring care and compassion to the poor and vulnerable sick find themselves in a less and less tenable position. They operate in an increasingly competitive health-care market with their tax-exempt status under challenge and with reduced government support. All this at a time when the numbers of uninsured or marginally insured poor persons have increased. Last year, witnesses told a Pennsylvania State Legislature committee that hundreds of physicians

were refusing to treat low-income patients on medical assistance. Many hospitals face large losses because Medicaid reimbursements pay only about 40 per cent of their costs. Until now, hospitals have tried to offer uncompensated care to the vulnerable sick through cost-shifting. But private insurers are increasingly resisting hospitals' attempts to subsidise care of the uninsured poor by imposing a 'hidden tax' on insured patients. Big business, in general, has been attempting to shift the burden for health care benefits to employees through increased pay deductions. Last year, more than 25 per cent of strikes in the US revolved around disputes over health care benefits.

US health care is not only inequitable; it is inefficient. By 1995 it is estimated that the health bill in the United States will be one trillion dollars [\$1,000,000,000,000]. If present trends continue, and a moderate national economic growth rate of about 2.5 per cent is maintained, the Medicare Hospital Insurance Trust Fund will go bankrupt by the year 2005. Thus far, cost containment measures have only slowed soaring health costs.

WHY IS THE US HEALTH-CARE system so inefficient? James E. Hug SJ of the Center of Concern, Washington, DC, suggests six reasons. First, medical technology, which should be our greatest ally, is turning into our adversary. Our health care system has achieved almost miraculous breakthroughs, but has also created the cultural myth that the best health care is that which employs high technology. Emphasis on the latest technologies leads to the most expensive approach to health care, without addressing the causes of most diseases.

- There are no adequate controls on fees and medication costs. The fee-for-service payment system provides a financial incentive to prescribe more services, whether these are medically necessary or not. In Pennsylvania, charges for routine childbirth vary by as much as 252 percent.
- The use of market mechanisms to control costs has actually spurred costly competition for the latest high-tech equipment. This has led to cutbacks of nurses and other health care personnel.
- Malpractice suits and damage awards are out of control. The high costs of malpractice insurance, together with marginal or unnecessary medical tests whose main purpose is to protect the physician or hospital in the event of litigation, also fuel medical inflation.
- There is no effective system of measuring clinical outcomes, to guarantee that patients are getting value for money. If health-care managers do not begin such measurement, governments, insurance carriers and employers will do it for them.
- The US system is plagued by the high bureaucratic costs involved in operating the more than 1500 different agencies that pay the bills for health care services. Furthermore, a survey conducted by *Forbes Magazine* indicates that chief executives in health care were the

nation's highest paid bosses in 1989. The median compensation for health care executives (including salary, bonuses and stock options) was \$1.42 million per year.

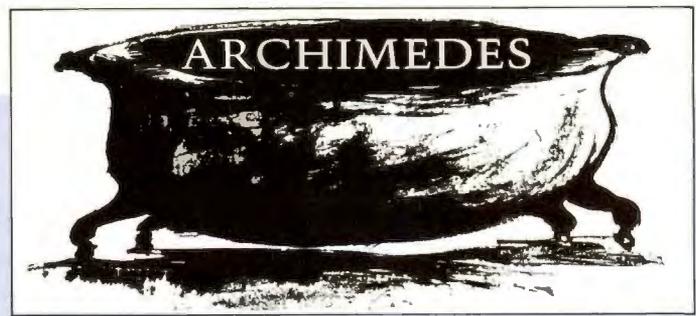
The US Catholic bishops, in a 1981 pastoral letter, called for a comprehensive national policy to provide universal basic health care. The bishops noted that private institutions alone are unable to develop and implement such a program. The bishops' statement came at a time when public opinion was hostile to large-scale government 'intrusion' into health care. Subsequent developments have shown their vision to be prophetic. Its rationale was expressed as follows: 'Every person has a basic right to adequate health care. This right flows from the sanctity of human life and the dignity that belongs to all human persons, who are made in the image of God. [Access to necessary health care] must be provided for all people, regardless of economic, social or legal status. Special attention should be given to meeting the basic health needs of the poor.'

Health care analysts are calling for the creation of a completely new system. There are six different proposals. Few advocate a completely government-run health system, or go to the other extreme and call for a purely private approach. Most recommendations occupy the middle ground. For example, the Pepper Commission proposed a public-private sharing of the burden. The various plans are estimated to cost between \$60 and \$100 billion dollars annually. Can the US afford this? There is no alternative.

Before the Gulf War, military experts and national security analysts from the Brookings Institution estimated that the Pentagon budget could safely be cut in half by the turn of the century. If that path were followed, an additional \$75 billion would become available in 1995, and \$150 billion by the end of the decade (in 1990 dollars). But a word of caution: if these funds are in fact to be used for establishing a national health insurance system, community leaders must insist that health care reform become a political issue. Change depends upon political will.

The alternative is to see the present situation compounded by demographic changes. At present more than four workers with health care coverage support each person actually drawing benefits. This ratio will slip early next century, less than 10 years from now. The 75 million baby-boomers, the erstwhile 'yuppies', have now become middle-aged. When they begin to make extensive demands upon the health care system after the turn of the century, Medicare may be bankrupt, and the struggle for health care is likely to become highly adversarial. ■

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Science, Guns and Money

AFTER FORMULATING THE PRINCIPLE that a body displaces its own weight in a fluid, and thereby solving the money problems of King Hieron, Archimedes did more than climb out of a bath and run naked through the streets of Syracuse shouting 'Eureka, Eureka'. He invented 'Archimedes' Screw' and, with that curious, detached interest in power that scientists have, declared: 'Give me a fulcrum and I shall move the world.'

Star wars also began with Archimedes: he is said to have arranged sets of concave mirrors to focus sunlight on the Roman ships invading Syracuse, thus setting their ships on fire and making them easy targets for the catapults he had invented. When the much-frustrated invaders finally entered the city they set about quick revenge. Archimedes, their tormentor, was unfortunately so preoccupied with a problem of geometry that he never heard his murderers enter his garden. He died under their blows, as George Steiner put it, "in a fit of abstraction".

Thales the Ionian, first-mentioned in most histories of science, was clever enough to invent Pythagoras' theorem three hundred years before Pythagoras. He was also smart enough to corner the market in olive presses, foreseeing a bumper crop of olives, thus making a lot of money. He was no rabbit in warfare either: by predicting an eclipse (possibly the first to do so), he brought an end to the six-year war between Lydia and Media in 585 BCE; and he later helped the army of Croesus cross the Halys river by diverting its course. Also suffering from abstraction, Thales is supposed, while looking at the stars, to have fallen down a well.

Government defence projects take up something like 70% of global public spending on research and development today (See Bruno Latour, *Science in Action*, 171). Australia's next major project in 'pure learning' may be the building of a gravity wave observatory at a cost of about \$40 million. Knowledge about gravity waves, if they exist, would enable us to see even further into the history of the universe: secrets worth unveiling. But what are the consequences? It just might produce a handy weapon in the new galactic order of the fourth millennium.

Ernest Rutherford, we know, made the greatest miscalculation of all time when he declared at the start of this century that nuclear physics would have no significant practical consequences.

The search for the secrets of the world is, in the end, a vote of confidence in the orderliness of nature, a revering of the miracle of creation, and a blessing on our future. But, oh scientists, beware of gifts. Watch out for fits of abstraction. And run naked through the streets at your own discretion. ■

— John Honner SJ



A lady arms her knight for the tourney. From the Manasseh Codex, Heidelberg University Library.

Differe same

*Ray Cassin looks at the Coen
Sir Thomas Malory, Raymon
Mean Streets and Goodfellas
John Ford, the bold knight
and Francis Ford Coppola
He finds they've go*

CHIVALRY, LIKE GOD, has often been pronounced dead. But, as with the deity, the truth seems to be that it has spent an unconscionable time a-dying. Chivalry lingers still, though not in places where those who prophesied its demise were accustomed to find it. And it survives not because we still tell tales of knights and their ladies, although we do, but because the telling of such tales has coloured all our storytelling. The heroes of pulp fiction and popular cinema are recognisably heroic because we know the mould from which they have been shaped; we can trace the lineaments of a Lancelot or a Tristram in a Sam Spade or a Philip Marlowe.

Chivalry, the code of the *chevalier*, arose when chevaliers were simply soldiers. Some were also courtiers, or aspired to be, but what made them chivalrous in the first instance was their pride in the art of fighting on horseback. If they or their descendants became powerful, it is because this art brought political power with it. And if the notion of chivalry seems bound up with sexuality, it is because we have yet to exorcise the demon that links masculinity and aggression.

Aggressive masculinity was what chivalry sought to curb; it was medieval Christianity's attempt to tackle aggression at its source. The issue was not whether one may fight, or when, or how. Those questions were asked by theorists of the just war, that other medieval response to the problem of living in a violent world. The chivalric ethic, however, probed deeper while paradoxically settling for less. Deeper, because it sought to channel aggressive instincts into virtues—courage, loyalty, honesty and generosity. Less, because this meant accepting that a fallen world must live with its warriors. The trick lay in teaching them to live in it.

The flavour of chivalry is strongest where the young learn to exalt both loyalty to the group and the integrity of the individual. It is to be found where these ideals conflict; in the dilemma of the honest cop tempted by a bribe, or in the honour code of the mafia. It is found in the world that Raymond Chandler prescribed for crime fiction in *The Simple Art of Murder*: 'a world in which gangsters can rule nations and almost rule cities, ... a world where you may witness a hold-up in broad daylight and see who did it, but you will fade quickly into the

nt hats, story

brothers film Miller's *Crossing*,
d Chandler, Martin Scorsese's
, John Wayne and the films of
its *Tristram and Lancelot*,
's *The Godfather Part One*.
ot a lot in common.



The hats have it: Bacall, Joe Dowling, and Bogart in the film of Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*.

crowd rather than tell anyone, because the hold-up men may have friends with long guns, or the police may not like your testimony, and in any case the syster for the defence will be allowed to abuse and vilify you in open court before a jury of selected morons, without any but the most perfunctory interference from a political judge.

'It is not a very fragrant world,' Chandler tells us, 'but it is the world you live in.' So it is, and one does not have to read Chandler's novels in tandem with the report of the Fitzgerald inquiry into police corruption in Queensland to know it.

But chivalry? This not-so-fragrant world gives us black knights aplenty, the enchanted forest and Castle Perilous, but where is the knight errant on his quest for the Holy Grail? Chandler has his answer: 'Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero, he is everything. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honour, by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it and certainly without saying it ... The story is this man's adventure in search of a hidden

truth.' Well *plus ça change*, Lancelot. Chandler's mean streets, of course, are recognisably American. But Hollywood makes us all walk those streets, just as poets in the Middle Ages made the 'Matter of Britain'—the Arthurian stories—or the 'Matter of France'—the stories of Charlemagne—common property in the chivalric culture of Europe. When a group of Australians recently started a magazine devoted to crime fiction, they called it *Mean Streets*. Their choice did not reflect cultural subjugation, nor did it reveal a lack of imagination. It was a way of evoking a tone, an ethos, a country of the mind.

They were not the first to have used the phrase in this way. It is the title of Martin Scorsese's 1973 film about growing up in New York's Little Italy, a world he revisited last year with *Goodfellas*. Scorsese's title is ironic as well as allusive. The young men whose paths he charts certainly inhabit a world that fits the Chandler prescription. It is mean in the sense of being petty as well as in the sense of being tough. But they are not Chandleresque heroes. Physically aggressive they certainly can be, but there is no sign that their aggression



will be transformed into courage, moral or physical. Honesty? There is only the bravado of machismo. Loyalty? Only to the mob, and it is maintained by fear. And generosity? Sometimes with money, rarely with themselves.

The knight of the mean streets is not the only type of hero they fail to emulate. There is a scene in the film where the men go to a cinema. The film they see is John Ford's *The Searchers*, a classic Western starring John Wayne. The character played by Wayne, Ethan Eastwood, is an embittered Confederate veteran. He is searching for his niece, who has been kidnapped by Comanches, and he means to kill her when he finds her. She has surely been 'dishonoured' and is no longer fit for white society.

The Searchers is about racism and sexism—though the latter term had not been coined when the film was made in 1956—and it uses Wayne's rugged frontiersman stereotype to weave the chivalric themes together. Eastwood must learn to temper aggression with compassion, and to discard a notion of honour that allows people to be treated as tarnished possessions.

All this is lost on the young men from the mean streets. They cheer during a fight scene, applauding the winner but seeing nothing else. It is, perhaps, a laboured and in-group way for Scorsese to make his point. For the audience to understand it, they must have seen *The Searchers*, just as they must know a little Chandler to grasp the import of the title *Mean Streets*.

But Scorsese is showing us the threads of a street culture. His characters do not learn what Ethan Eastwood learns, and wouldn't understand what makes Philip Marlowe a hero. Yet without this demotic chivalry to be measured against, they couldn't even be the down-at-heels black knights that they are. They go to the cinema to see life as they would like it to be, and when they leave they show how much they misunderstood what was really on the screen. Scorsese reportedly once said that he learned how to be a director by watching the films of John Ford. I suspect he was talk-

ing about more than camera angles and lighting effects. *The telling of such tales has coloured all our storytelling.* Critics sometimes complain that *Mean Streets* spends so much time being allusive that the narrative becomes an afterthought. This misses the point. The narrative is there but the allusions are needed to tease it out.

Hollywood loves the gangster film, and loves to show it by making gangster films that display how much screenwriters and directors know about other gangster films. The latest offering in this vein to reach Australian cinemas is *Miller's Crossing*, from the Coen brothers. It has all the elements: a fight between two mobsters for control of a city's gambling rackets; a loner hero; a femme fatale who loves the loner hero but ends up with one of the mobsters; carefully choreographed violence; and politicians weak and venal enough to make the mobsters look appealing by comparison.

The allusiveness does not carry the earnest intent of Scorsese in *Mean Streets*. The Coen brothers are having fun, and expect their audience to do so, too. If you spot that the opening scene parodies a scene in the first *Godfather* movie, then you can enjoy being a buff as well as enjoying dialogue that is very funny.

In the *Godfather* scene, a man asks the

Don to punish two youths who have assaulted his daughter. The Don agrees, after delivering a lecture on the importance of loyalty: if I do this for you, you must do something for me someday, etc. But in *Miller's Crossing* a mobster is talking to his rival. He also delivers a homily on loyalty, but it is a preamble to explaining why he must kill a man who pays his rival for 'protection'.

The intended victim's offence? He has, apparently, failed to grasp what honour and loyalty really mean. The gangster explains it this way: 'I'm talkin' about friendship, I'm talkin about character, I'm talkin about—hell, Leo, I ain't embarrassed to use the word—I'm talkin' about *ethics*. You know I'm a sportin' man, I like to lay an occasional bet. But I ain't *that* sportin'. When I fix a

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fixed fight. If ya can't trust a
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prey ... But Bernie Birnbaum is
a horse of a different colour,
ethicwise. He ain't got any.*

— Gangster Johnny Caspar,
in 'Miller's Crossing'.



fight a fight—say I pay a three-to-one favourite to throw a goddam fight—I figure I’ve got the right to expect the fight to go off at three-to-one. But every time I lay a bet with this sonofabitch Bernie Birnbaum, before I know it the odds is even up ...

‘The point is, Bernie ain’t satisfied with the honest dollar he can make off the fix. He ain’t satisfied with the business I do on his book. He’s sellin’ tips on how I bet ... It’s gettin’ so a business man can’t expect a return from a fixed fight. If ya can’t trust a fix, what can ya trust? That’s why ethics is important. It’s what separates us from the beast of burden, the beasts of prey ... But Bernie Birnbaum is a horse of a different colour, ethicswise. He ain’t got any.’

Ethics. Even the code can be funny. But, as Chandler reminds us, a plausible knight of the mean streets must be a man of honour ‘without thought of it, and certainly without saying it ... he talks as the man of his age talks, that is, with rude wit, a lively sense of the grotesque, a disgust for sham and a contempt for pettiness.’ Only bad guys talk about what is right, good guys simply do it.

Tom Reagan, the hero of *Miller’s Crossing*, makes no speeches. He *retorts* to the dissembling of others, in one-liners that sizzle with rude wit and contempt for pettiness. And he eyes the world with a stony countenance that in a more dandified character would pass as disdain. Yet if Reagan is a man of honour with thought of it and without saying it, he is also aware that the world judges us by the way we present ourselves to it. A medieval knight declared himself to the world through the conventions of heraldry, in the arms painted on shield and surcoat. Casting about for a modern equivalent to the coat of arms, the Coen brothers wisely decided not to underestimate the power of a Hollywood cliché. They chose the hat.

In westerns such as John Ford’s *My Darling Clementine*, good guys wear white hats and bad guys wear black hats. In the tough-guy films of a Bogart or a Cag-

ney, a whole world of meaning is conveyed by the tilt of a broad-brimmed hat. And in *Miller’s Crossing*, Tom Reagan will do anything to avoid losing his hat. He loses it at cards to Verna, his boss’s girlfriend, and demands it back. Fortunately, she really wants to be Tom’s girlfriend and is happy to part with it. A favour for her knight? Tom’s anxieties are crystallised in a dream in which his hat blows away in the woods. They are the same woods in which he later narrowly escapes being shot. And in the film’s last scene, Tom pulls his hat down over his eyes as he watches his boss depart to marry Verna. Well, a tough guy isn’t going to say ‘tomorrow is another day’, is he?

The world of the 1930s gangster depicted in *Miller’s Crossing* is close enough to our world to be familiar, and just remote enough to permit nostalgia. Our relation to it is rather like that of Sir Thomas Malory to the Arthurian legends. Malory wrote *Le Morte d’Arthur* in the late 15th century, when people sensed that the ethos of medieval chivalry was passing.

Malory retold the Arthurian stories to keep the chivalric ethos alive, in popular imagination and aspiration if not on the field of joust and tourney. No one should object if Scorsese has done the same with the films of John Ford and Chandler’s mean streets. And we should be grateful that Joel and Ethan Coen have devoted their considerable talents to reworking one of the cinema’s most fruitful genres. After all, if ya can’t trust an old story, what can ya trust? ■



John Wayne as Ethan Eastwood: a man without a hat is a man in trouble

After all, if ya can’t trust an old story, what can ya trust? ■

Ray Cassin is production editor of *Eureka Street*. He lives in a mean street and has lost three hats in the past year.

Eureka Street gratefully acknowledges the help of Ivan Hutchinson, who gave us access to his library.



Interior Lives

*Five women offer glimpses into their very private worlds of prayer
and their reasons for praying so differently.*

***Adrian Lyons and Kate Lindsey**
invited and edited their comments.*

Lita Hviid

I WAS BORN in Copenhagen and arrived in Australia at the age of five. My immediate nuclear family had no express religious background. But for some reason, even as a child, I used to explore churches. I had my time with the Congregational and Presbyterian congregations and with the Church of England. I would attend worship, and then enrol in Sunday school. This searching seemed a natural part of my childhood, and my parents never interfered. They simply explained it as 'her private thing'. When I look back now I think how brave I was. What attracted me each time was the feeling in the group and the sense of the mystery there.

I first learnt to pray on my own, by being in touch with nature. On the many walks I took, I went completely into my inner world. I would simply lie under a tree, stare into the sky and allow thoughts to come through. I don't think I came across formalised prayer until teachers' college. Interestingly I chose a Catholic teachers' college; that was one denomination I hadn't explored yet. Later, through friendships I became fascinated with Judaism. Always I would talk to people and read to find out how others viewed things and celebrated.

When the path started to look unpromising, I changed course, and eventually moved into the area of psychology, Jung's especially. I wanted to understand how the inner person relates to the outer life. It was a while before I could piece things together and draw parallels with religious experience. At first it was all very intellectual, which was not satisfying. Then I found a group who joined what I call spirituality with the journey in everyday life. Now I see my outer life as mirror to my inner life: the two cannot be separate any longer.

When I get angry, I now stop myself and say, 'What message has this got for me?'. The other person is acting out a shadow part of myself. I come to see the mystery of life through moments like that—and the interconnectedness of life and people as well. For me that is a kind of prayerfulness. Whenever I make such realisations, it changes the way I interact with people. I have two kinds of meditation—the first a personal kind

I do at home. When I started learning formal meditation, I found I had been doing it naturally anyway. It's like listening. You quieten yourself and open up an inner space, and within that space things come to you. To begin, I might focus on an issue in my life, or a symbol—it could be a cross, a circle, Buddha. I happen to be wearing the 'mu' at the moment, a feminine symbol. And there are particular kinds of music I use, very powerful ones.

My second kind of meditation is within a group. When people gather, the energy is heightened; then transformational work can occur through you and for you. In our group the leader intuits a key word or phrase. He works with music, too, choosing the piece we need

to take us into meditation. Afterwards we share the experience, sometimes leaving the images intact, sometimes questioning them. Some symbols are rich in themselves and need time to work within you and not be dispersed by words.

Particularly over the last two years, meditation has changed my way of working with children. There is so much you want for them, achievement and skills, and sometimes you don't allow them their own process. Now I tune in better to their needs. With meditation you touch on a different level, heart-to-heart. Before, I was frightened to allow that. I was more like the observer who stood out of

the circle, observing life and never fully in it. Now I'm not afraid to be vulnerable. I do believe in God, but it may not be the God of the Catholics or the God of the Jews. God to me is an essence that is through every human being—an energy, a presence, a being that permeates everything in our world. And my life task is to be in tune with that.

I have had my crises. Two years ago my whole life fell apart: I went into a complete blackness that touched every part of my life. Everything I held to be true of myself was pulled out from underneath my feet and I came crashing down. That was a scary place to be. Only now am I beginning to understand why I had to be there; there wouldn't have been a transformation otherwise.

Every experience, even that one, has something to teach. If we don't learn, we end up projecting ourselves on to others, particularly when we're feeling self-right-



When I started learning formal meditation, I found I had been doing it naturally anyway. It's like listening

eous or angry. If you point the finger, notice that three fingers are pointing back to you. It's all about coming to terms with the dark side and the light side of life, and of yourself.

At present I feel positive about mankind. Changes are beginning to happen and people are beginning to move. They are tuning into what Jung termed 'the collective unconscious'.

Geraldine Blaustien

MY EARLIEST recollection of prayer is the bedtime ritual that my parents taught me to say: a list of 'G-d blesses' which was chanted every night before sleep. It began with request for G-d to bless and take care of close members of the family and gradually, over time, stretched to include anyone and everyone who came within my circle of acquaintances. I became so anxious lest someone be left out of the benediction unwittingly that I eventually added the line 'and please G-d, bless everyone else'.

My parents took me to synagogue where the communal prayers were chanted in Hebrew. I didn't understand very much but took a great deal of pleasure from the music and from the sense of community and order. In an observant Jewish home, as mine was, many prayers take place in the family setting. Every Friday night, my mother would light the Shabbat candles and we would welcome in the Shabbat with the traditional prayers over wine and bread. Children gain a very special sense of belonging and security during this ceremony, where weekly the father of the family blesses and thanks G-d for each of his children. I started *Cheder*, or formal religious and Hebrew lessons, quite late compared to

most of my peers. I was about ten. It was here that I started to understand the Hebrew of the synagogue, and the formal prayers became more meaningful to me. Prayer has always had an important place in my life but it doesn't take place at any special time or place. I do find that I take time to say 'thank you' when I am suddenly struck by a beautiful aspect of nature, or when I feel particularly grateful about an event in my life. I certainly ask for help when problems seem too big to handle but I tend not to ask for miracles; I limit my request to what I consider a reasonable thing to ask.

I make no attempt to visualise G-d (such an idea is quite alien to my religion) but I certainly perceive his qualities or essence in human terms. When I pray I have an internal dialogue with a Being who is separate from me. I feel he is always available to listen, comfort and

guide—clearly a father figure. I have no sense of fear or notion of being judged. If I feel I have done something wrong, I will tend to ask for help to put it right rather than ask for forgiveness. I tend to feel the onus is on me—I might just need a bit of extra courage to attend to the problem. I am also aware that I don't actually listen to what I'm saying so the same problem may return many times.

I asked my two children whether they still prayed and what it meant to them. My son, who is fifteen, said he prays internally and spontaneously. Sometimes he just wants to say thank you when he feels at peace or content with nature. He also assured me, however, that he considers himself to be agnostic! My daughter, aged twelve, still keeps up the childhood ritual of my early years. She asks for blessing for all family members and acquaintances. She also asks G-d to look after people who are no longer here. 'Sometimes I think of G-d as Someone who spends all his time listening to

everyone at once', she told me. 'I don't think he has trouble doing that. I just think that it is amazing that he can do it.'



If I feel I have done something wrong, I will tend to ask for help to put it right rather than ask for forgiveness.

Gillian Gardiner

I ONLY LEARNT to pray in a deep way fairly recently. To do that I had to overcome the hurdle of learning to pray aloud in a group. That opened up a whole new life, letting me know that God was drawing me out and inviting me to pray in a free and open way with others, in touch with them and with God at the same time. Thankfully, the committed young people in my parish don't seem to have those inhibitions. For them, praying together seems a very natural thing. When I was younger, my prayer didn't really get off the ground. I had a desire for it, but my prayer could have been an escape. Now it is vital to me, something necessary to the way I want to live. My whole life has changed as a result. What it means is quite simply sharing my life with God. Many times I focus on Jesus Christ, whom I see in a very personal way as a friend, someone I love. It's an intimate personal thing. At other times I catch sight of God in all his splendour and radiance, One quite other than I am. But the person I long to be with is Jesus. I've found it helpful to have a prayer partner—sometimes necessary, always beneficial. In the beginning it was important to have another person further down the track to encourage me. Now I commit a certain time each day, early in the morning, as prayer time. If I have to travel early in the day, prayer time may get shortened. Then everything else gets somewhat out of position. There's a desire in me to have morning prayer spill over into the day, quite spontaneously.

Sometimes I just love being with the Lord. That may not happen very often or for very long, but staying with a particular Scripture passage, and with the Lord as well, can be wonderful! Other times it is all very difficult and dry. Then you have to work at prayer and simply persevere. Prayer does make demands on my life—particularly demands to put things right. It isn't always a contemplative exercise. Sometimes through prayer I find courage to confront something I have been avoiding. There are times when a praying person can feel very cut off from God. I've had a glimpse of that. The most comforting thing is to know that Jesus himself experienced great trauma—his calling out from the Cross in a desperate way, and his time of loneliness in the Garden when everyone deserted him.

My way of praying changes with circumstances. It could be a desperate prayer, or just a 'Dear Lord, please help me'. Sometimes I stay there, desperately asking help for another person. Often nothing much happens until some real-life situation has been dealt with or healed. More and more I see the cry for help as an important opening to prayer. As a result of it often healing will come, though maybe not at that time. If I cry to the Lord as I'm going to sleep, next day I feel an inner peace. At other times I wake with an overflowing radiance—

one that doesn't stop with prayer time, but it carries over into breakfast and goes out the door with me to work. It lights up the whole day.

Some hymns that I associate with particular places and times stay with me throughout the day. And Scripture passages I've studied mean more to me when I come to them in prayer. Undertaking the journey without understanding the destination—very often that is what my Christian life seems like.

Anne Sheehan

MY EARLIEST MEMORIES of prayer are of chanting traditional prayers. And I vividly remember my parents making us pray the rosary each week. As a teenager I used to pray a novena [prayers on nine set days] whenever I wanted something. Joining the Antioch movement, a religious youth group, proved to be a turning point in my life. I was twenty, and at that stage prayer first became a meaningful experience, something I could take on alone. Prayer expanded from a rote exercise to be a means of contacting people and my emotions.

Since I've left Antioch, prayer has largely been left by the wayside, particularly since my recent marriage. Under the influence of my husband's forward-thinking attitudes to prayer and the Eucharist, I'm trying to discover new ways of reaching out to the community. At the moment I have abandoned much of my personal prayer. I find it dry and lack the discipline to continue with it. Prayer, when it happens, has become more spontaneous. In its purest form personal reflection can be incredibly rewarding. When I'm down, that's when I'm most likely to turn to prayer. I like to reflect on something—music, a quote, a verse of Scripture.

The past few months I have found that public worship infuriates me, possibly because of its rigid structures. Through friends and by learning from experiences I've come to see things differently. The church is no longer my life-support as it once was. In fact, I've examined what the church says about prayer and it really is garbage. The leaders (namely the priests) are not reaching the people. The traditional prayers are certainly beautiful, but the core of the church's prayer displays a male bias. Liturgy can be male-dominated, so much so that women are locked out. We need to secularise the experience.

Prayer is supposed to help you come closer to God. But I think you have to get closer to yourself first.



Anne Sheehan



Gillian Gardiner

Phyllis Fitzgerald

I AM A FUNNY MIXTURE: my father's side was Irish and French and my mother's family Indian. I've spoken English all my life and my religion has always been Catholic. A little bit of everything has rubbed off on me. When we were small children we never missed Sunday Mass. That was part of the religion. My dad was baptised in the Church of England, but that was about all. He would bring us to church and escort us back home.

When I was about five I went to a boarding school in Madras, where I remained for my entire school life. The Irish nuns brought us up very, very strictly. We attended mass every morning, benediction every day, and said the rosary, too.

Much later I went through some very bad stages. I lost my two parents within five months. After that I couldn't pray and couldn't understand why. I just said to myself, 'What good is it?'. I hadn't done anything drastic in my life: why didn't God care for me more? And then I thought, 'But who else do I turn to?' I complain to God, as I would to a friend, and ask for strength to cope. I think I receive assistance because people believe I'm extremely strong.

I usually say my morning prayers in the car coming to work. There the world is around me but still shadow. Sometimes I use prayers I've learned, and sometimes I just talk—tell him feelings, ask for strength. For some reason I often pray now to the Holy Spirit for strength and wisdom. I go to church every Sunday, but

it doesn't matter which church. There are memories attached to every one I do go to. It largely depends on whom I'm with. If I feel like praying, I don't mind where or when.

India is a very religious country. Everything is attributed to God—every joy, every sorrow, every trouble. I think it's because of the poverty. I came from the middle class. We were educated and had jobs, but money was not spent lavishly. God was the focus in our lives. Even now, in every Indian Catholic home around where we lived, there is a picture of the Sacred Heart. For our family it had a very special meaning. Every night my father would stand in front of the little altar and pray, though I'm not sure how he prayed. The house was built



in such a way that we had a verandah. One day my sister was in the bedroom in the centre, and my father on the verandah, when the whole ceiling collapsed. Each started shouting to see if the other was all right. They were trapped but not injured. And the only thing left in place was the Sacred Heart picture. It was brought to Australia and I have it in my house now.

I went back to India this last Christmas and I was really shocked by the contrast with Australia. Religion there is so important. In Bombay I went to the shrine of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. They have prayers there for nine hours every Wednesday. We went in at 6 o'clock and I couldn't believe it. There was no place to walk. And there were Catholics, Hindus and Muslims. All of them stood there with their eyes closed and hands joined. It brought a lump to my throat. India is so religious—and yet our people are poor. I heard a story recently: someone prayed to God and said, 'How can you be loving and kind and giving, and yet there are people starving?'. And God said, 'I made you'. So I try to do my little drop of help. It's my opportunity to do a little of God's work. But oh, I do get annoyed with Him!





Vietnam diary

THERE WERE FOUR OF US aboard the Air Vietnam flight from Bangkok to Ho Chi Minh City: Lam Thi Cuc, cameraman Bob Grieve, myself and an Italian businessman. The old Russian jet squealed unceremoniously onto the runway at Tan Son Nhut airport. Bob and I were anxious about what we could expect from the authorities. Cuc was nearly hysterical. She tightened her grip on her most valued possession, an Australian passport.

Bob and I cleared customs but with some explaining to do about the amount of camera equipment we had with us. We had no permit to film for commercial purposes. In the heavy air of the terminal building armed soldiers and police watched us with little more than mild interest.

Cuc was held back. Authorities wanted to know when this Vietnamese woman had left and how and why. They also searched her bags for any undisclosed items of value being brought in as gifts. They were not rude, simply abrupt. Cuc was terrified.

Finally she was allowed to go. She pushed her laden trolley towards the exit doors and a world she had never expected to see again. Her family rushed forward, a sister plunging her head and her years of suffering into Cuc's arms. Relatives clamoured to touch her, as if they needed proof that she had returned. Cuc looked as if she might break in two under the strain.

I knew very little about Vietnam before 1990, when Lam Thi Cuc invited me to go there with her. I had been in my early teens when 'that war' came to an end. Moralists and conscientious objectors were not often talked about in our middle class Catholic secondary school. My twelve year friendship with Cuc and her husband Minh, had helped fill in some of the gaps, but they had come to Australia as 'boat people' and it was understandably hard for them to talk at great length about the country they had left behind. Lam Thi Cuc and I started planning it about a year ahead. We invited a cameraman/editor friend of mine, Bob Grieve, along to record the journey. What took place during our month long visit was an extraordinary experience for each one of us.

Once clear of the airport we all piled into the rented minibus the family had arranged. The men loaded our bags, ordered the children aboard, directed fifteen adults into the bus. Cuc was last to push herself into the pile. Bob and I were upgraded to the front seat. The van pulled away from the airport with more than twenty of us on board.

We were heading for Cholon, the Chinese sector and home of Cuc's in-laws. The trip took us along roads that seemed to be crumbling beneath us, roads choked with cyclists and motorcyclists. I kept expecting to hear someone or something being crunched under our van,



Cuc (right) and her sister Hien

but our driver just bounced nonchalantly from one side of the road to the other. I concluded that the Vietnamese road system operates on a rich blend of free flowing confusion and a strong instinctive bent towards self-preservation.

The bus pulled up outside a two-storey shopfront style building, in a narrow little street behind a market. As we spilled from the over-crowded bus, neighbours peered out from behind curtains and doors, anxious to see the strangers who had arrived in their street. We had been warned before leaving Australia that visits like ours can make life difficult for those you are visiting. I quite expected that a police car would wail its way to our door at any moment and an officer would demand an explanation of our presence.

But the family showed no signs of those concerns. To make us feel at home, they brought out bottles of cool water. A small fan was placed in the centre of the room. It laboured in vain against the stifling thick air. A somewhat skinny dog and cat roamed about quite freely and at the far end of the room, there was a caged rooster which crowed occasionally. On the wall above the cage was an altar to Our Lady with Christmas tinsel draped around it. This tiny house was home to two families, their children and assorted animals.

Within forty eight hours of arriving in Ho Chi Minh city all tourists have to register with the police. We did that through Saigon Tourist, a government agency that arranges permits for travel and keeps the police informed of your movements. We handed over the information they required with some apprehension. But then I watched in disbelief as that same information was recorded in a small exercise book with a red margin ruled down one side of the page. I wondered if all the hun-

dreds and thousands of exercise books filled with details of visiting tourists and business people were ever fed into a central intelligence bank or whether the books were simply ruled off and stored in some government library basement. But my speculations didn't still our anxiety: one of our first planned destinations was Can

Tho, a southern city in the Mekong Delta where Cuc had begun her escape to the west.

BUT SAIGON TOURIST was happy enough to arrange permits for our trip, insisting only that a guide accompany us wherever we went. A driver was also assigned. Tran Trong Thao, our guide, was a man of about forty. He spoke with interest rather than passion about his country and its achievements. But he sat in the front seat of the bus and Bob, Cuc, her brother and sister and I all piled in the back, as far away as possible. Suspicion was rife.

Our trip to Can Tho took four long hours, yet we travelled little more than 160km. Twice we boarded vehicular ferries to cross delta tributaries and twice our van was surrounded by beggars who would bang on windows and push their dirty, malnourished faces up against the glass, pleading for money. Some of the beggars were children of three, four and five, grubby little urchins desperate to sell tattered packs of chewing gum for less than one Australian cent. I couldn't help but compare the miserable children before me with my healthy and well fed nieces and nephews back in Australia.

Thao could see our distress. A couple of times I caught him slipping money to the children. I don't think this government employee was simply trying to spare us pain. As we drove on, he warned that some children



A soldier at Cu Chi with the guerilla target

are taught to beg because it is profitable but he also conceded that for the most part dire need was the single motivation.

Vietnam is a country of 67 million people, more than 90 per cent of whom are peasants. It remains one of the world's poorest countries. The U.S. economic embargo, Thao maintained, hurt his country more than most westerners imagine. Development is excruciatingly slow and foreign investment extraordinarily difficult to attract. Thao suggested quietly that Vietnam was still being punished for daring to win the war. He volunteered that his own government had also to take much responsibility for Vietnam's problems but added that trying to fix the problems with an embargo in place would challenge the very best of administrations.

The walls of fear and distrust seemed to be shifting a little. Thao had not tried to paint a picture of a land of milk and honey. We wouldn't have believed him. But increasingly his frankness encouraged and heartened us.

Once in Can Tho, Thao walked us through the markets. He also arranged a boat trip on the river, a trip not unlike the one Cuc had taken many years before. It was a disturbing irony. Cuc and her husband had gone to Can Tho to flee the new communist government. Now an employee of that government was allowing her to confront the ghosts and terrors of that night.

Thao also came with us when we took Cuc, her sister Hien, and Hien's two children, 16 year old Ha and his 10 year old sister, Lan Dai, to Vung Tau for the weekend. Vung Tau was home to the Australian military forces during the war. But in the years before the fall of Saigon, Cuc and her sister had often travelled to the beaches at Vung Tau for the weekend. Life for Cuc and Hien was good then. Today Hien's children rarely

have enough to eat. In fact neither of them had ever seen thundering waves crashing onto golden sands until that weekend.

Lan Dai walked slowly towards the water, her malnourishment undisguised by the brand new bathing suit we'd bought for her in Ho Chi Minh City. But even more disturbing was the sight of Cuc and Hien paired at the water's edge. Life in Australia has been good to Cuc; she was well fed, robust. Her sister was little more than skin and bones. Three failed escape attempts, imprisonment, confiscation of property and the drowning of her two older children when they tried to follow Cuc, had left Hien physically and emotionally ravaged. During the weekend, Thao remained in the background, discreet but encouraging.

NO MATTER WHERE YOU travel in this country it's hard to avoid evidence of the role the military has played in Vietnam's history. Killing fields, like the infamous tunnels of Cu Chi, have become tourist parks. The allied forces spent most of the war trying to destroy the tunnel system. Now though, former American soldiers can, for a small price, crawl through those tunnels, buy a round of ammunition and take up aim on the rifle range where years before they would 'shoot to kill'. Their erstwhile enemy happily supplies the gun and the bullet.

War crimes museums are in no short supply. You get the feeling the government here is more afraid that its people will forget the high price of independence, than it is of invading forces. In Hanoi, hundreds and hundreds of faithful patriots stream past the body of 'Uncle Ho' each day. School children are told the story of a great and fearless leader and taught to respect the

ideals for which he struggled. Vietnam is still struggling to survive. In a country with the world's fourth largest land force, military bases are littered with rusting monuments to former glories. Decay happens quietly in the long, uncut grass of the local barracks, where young soldiers of eighteen and nineteen wander casually about in thongs and uniforms that are too small.

But Vietnam is not a country without hope. Madame Dai is a former lawyer and was a political dissident under the regimes of the South Vietnamese governments. These days she runs a small restaurant in what was once her law office. After dinner she invites her guests upstairs to a tiny room where young students from the conservatorium put on a concert featuring traditional Vietnamese music and dance. The night we were invited upstairs, I sat next to Pierre Trudeau. We drank cognac, marvelled at the music and felt the pride these young Vietnamese people have for their country.

Madame Dai knows there are grave problems but like Thao, she believes things are moving forward, albeit very slowly. The tension between new guard and old guard in Vietnam is intense but somehow constructive. Human rights and political freedoms are still denied, but it seems to me there are grounds for optimism. As an aid worker said to me before I arrived in Vietnam, 'the people and their government are learning to smile—it's just going to take time', and I would add, encouragement!

On our last night in Vietnam we shared a meal with Cuc's family and that of her in-laws. We sat on the linoleum floor with a tablecloth of newspaper spread out before us and ate spring rolls, rice and chicken. There were probably twenty of us in all. The children sat on the staircase and looked on. From time to time they would wander out on to the street and play in the warm night air. Life here is simple and hard.

We farewelled Thao at the airport, all too aware that he had not turned into the hideous government ogre we had expected. He seemed genuinely pleased to have met and helped us and sad that we were leaving. Most especially though he had enabled Cuc to finally believe that maybe she was now welcome in her homeland.

Her Australian passport clutched tightly in her hand again, Cuc said goodbye once again to her family. But this time—not for good. ■

Jane Phelan was a television news correspondent for ten years. She is now supervising producer of a variety/chat show.



What Did You Get For Mental?
my father sternly asked each night.
Ten, I said, and seldom lied.

I sat in his study after dinner
reading hidden comics and waiting
for the call: Show Me Your Homework.

In the drawers of his desk
where I was not permitted
I often found strange toys:

Latin grammars; cheque -book stubs
neatly tied; a blue inkp pad and stamps
marking NOT NEGOTIABLE;

and once, in its own deep drawer,
a pencil, deep bruise-purple,
mysteriously marked: INDELIBLE.

To ask was to confess
but inside his Shorter Oxford, this:
incapable of being erased.

Someone Has Been Using My Stamp,
he announced that night. Someone
Has Broken My Pencil.

In my homework book
were purple bruises,
incapable of being erased,

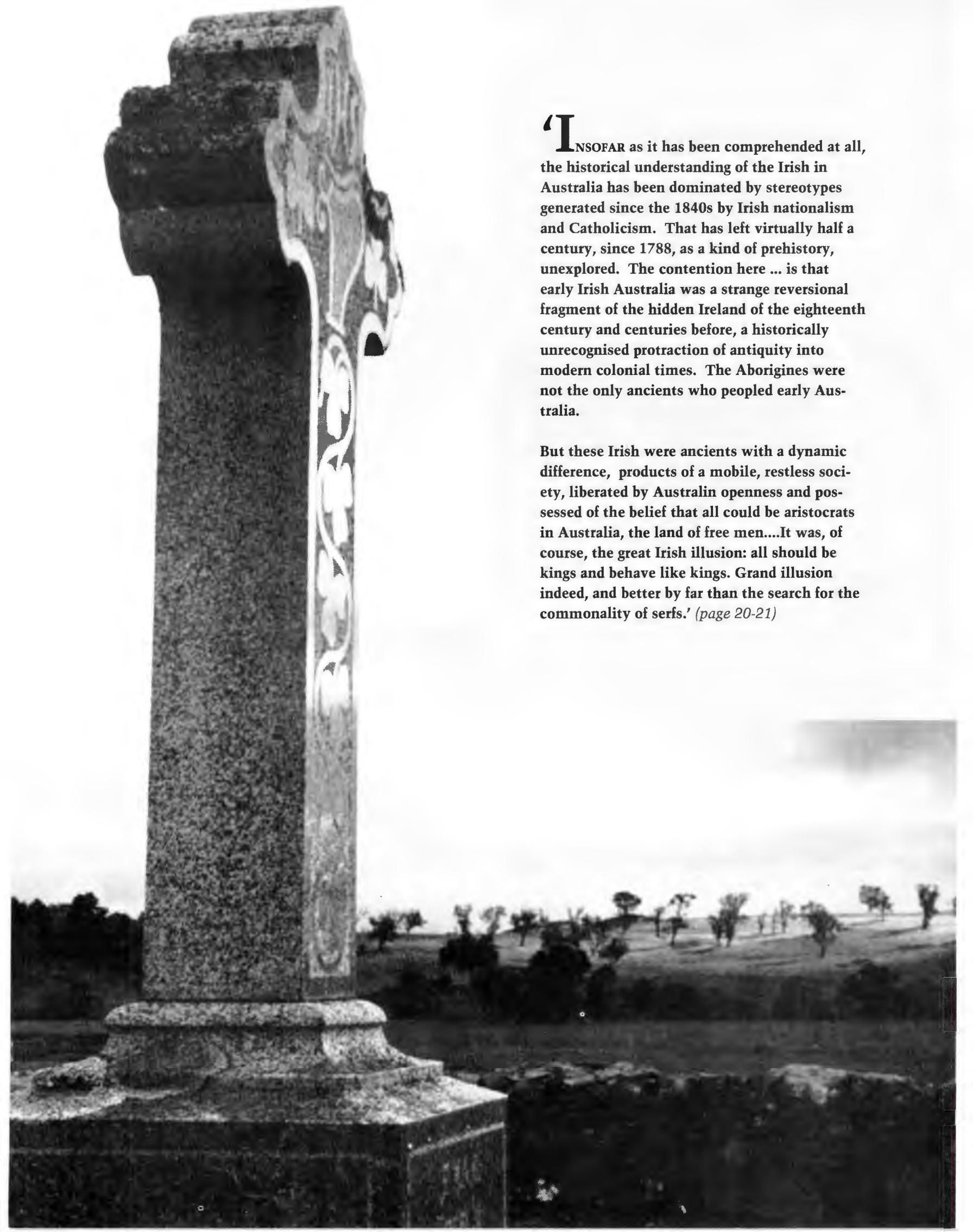
and vast cubist cities,
legoed from just two words:
NOT NEGOTIABLE.

Confiscated, those blue-prints lie
in his desk-drawer still, perhaps,
sealed in a bag marked Exhibit A,

or B, or Z, and labelled, in Latin,
in his hand which never fades: whatever
you have written, you have written.

Peter Goldsworthy

From the sequence **Autobiograffiti** in *This Goes With That: Selected Poems 1970-1990*,
Collins/Angus & Robertson Publishers Australia, 1991.



INSOFAR as it has been comprehended at all, the historical understanding of the Irish in Australia has been dominated by stereotypes generated since the 1840s by Irish nationalism and Catholicism. That has left virtually half a century, since 1788, as a kind of prehistory, unexplored. The contention here ... is that early Irish Australia was a strange reversional fragment of the hidden Ireland of the eighteenth century and centuries before, a historically unrecognised protraction of antiquity into modern colonial times. The Aborigines were not the only ancients who peopled early Australia.

But these Irish were ancients with a dynamic difference, products of a mobile, restless society, liberated by Australian openness and possessed of the belief that all could be aristocrats in Australia, the land of free men....It was, of course, the great Irish illusion: all should be kings and behave like kings. Grand illusion indeed, and better by far than the search for the commonality of serfs.' (page 20-21)

All should be kings

PATRICK O'FARRELL HAS LONG stood preeminent among Australian historians for the breadth of his historical vision and the elegance with which he has expressed it. For almost a quarter of a century, he has blazed a trail through the history of Irish Australia. He has set standards, developed themes and established linkages in the story of our past that will challenge generations of scholars and students to come.

But Professor O'Farrell's appeal is not to academic specialists alone, or even principally. His writing gives pleasure to all who value intellectual thoroughness, reasoned originality and literary power.

His latest book, *Vanished Kingdoms*, should further enhance O'Farrell's standing. It is multi-layered: a scholarly and a popular history, professional as well as intensely personal, anecdotal as well as thematic. It also launches a frontal attack on many cherished assumptions of the Australian history profession and of diehard Irish Australians.

Vanished Kingdoms is a highly personalised account of family loyalties and experiences, and at the same time a history of grand themes about the immigrant experience, in particular the colonial assimilation of the Irish in Australia and New Zealand.

It is infused with an abiding affection for Irish culture and Irish ways. But it is also a history tinged with bitterness about lost opportunities and disdain for the 'holy jingoism' of the Irish clerical empire in Australia. It appears driven by sometimes competing, and sometimes complementary sentiments—ambitious, yet also quite specific, admiring, yet also angry.

In *Vanished Kingdoms* O'Farrell attempts to put the Irish-English in-

Patrick O'Farrell, **Vanished Kingdoms, Irish in Australia and New Zealand, A Personal Excursion**. New South Wales University Press, Kensington, 1990. ISBN 0 86840 148 X RRP \$24.00

terface in Australia into a new historical framework, and in so doing, he is uninhibited in his chiding of the Australian history profession for its subservience to majority values. Australian historians, he observes unapologetically, 'took—still take—an English view of appearances, accept English priorities, reflect Protestant value-judgements.' His conclusion is inexorable: the Irish Catholic sub-culture has no real existence for such historians who write 'from and about the walled garden of the Establishment'.

Vanished Kingdoms revisits some long-established O'Farrell themes. There is the insistence on the centrality of the Irish-English interaction to the course of Australia's history. There is the demolition of the myth that the Australian Irish were an 'irrelevant underclass of pathetic peasants and stereotyped rebels'. There are the broadsides against 'Irish clerical imperialism'. There are the unambiguous correctives to the effect that membership of the Catholic Church and the labour movement are only partial aspects of the full Australian Irish identity. But *Vanished Kingdoms* is not just a synthesis of old arguments. The book breaks new ground and in doing so invites close scrutiny and criticism.

O'FARRELL EXPLORES in a greater depth than he has done previously the notion of a 'hidden Ireland' in Old Australia distinguished by its 'old, hierarchical, autocratic Gaelic socie-

ty'. He argues that for many in Ireland, penal Australia offered more opportunities than it did punishment, promising them the idealised form of disciplined, ordered, secure and productive society that Ireland used to be. Australia offered the Irish the chance to be once more 'aristocrats of an anarchic kind'.

O'Farrell uses family history in a way that will set new standards for historians. The experiences of his parents in emigrating to New Zealand early this century, their interaction and that of their family with a new society in a new world, and the family's move to Australia form the foundation for a venture into the grander themes of Irish colonial integration and assimilation.

Vanished Kingdom also has a more powerful and less complicated nationalist sentiment than much of O'Farrell's previous writing. It is highly critical of the Irish clergy in Australia who 'simply did not know how to think of themselves in relation to Australia and Australians', and who failed to 'attend to any culture other than their own'. He laments the 'failure to locate the Catholic faith in a real Australian cultural setting.' He dismisses the notion of an Australian Catholicism modelled on Ireland as 'a contrivance, a bit of play-acting' and argues that, when its props fell bare 'what was revealed was the irrelevance to Australasia of the Roman-Irish religion.'

These are grand themes which clearly challenge many of the orthodoxies of the Australian history

establishment, and the comfortable myths that have sustained many Irish Catholics, and their descendants, in Australia. My guess is that O'Farrell has sparked a controversy with this book which is likely to have a life of its own for years to come.

For all their power, however, the grand themes of *Vanished Kingdoms* and the moving depiction of family life that it contains often lack a sense of integration. The linkage between the O'Farrell family experiences in Greymouth, and elsewhere, and the extrapolated themes of Irish colonial assimilation is not always obvious, indeed sometimes seems a little strained. History of the kind that *Vanished Kingdoms* epitomises will always be, to an extent, unsatisfying to its readers because of its inescapable subjectivity. Sympathetic though I am to O'Farrell's arguments, it seems that, at a minimum, the linkage between the family history and the grander themes ought be more explicit. At times, *Vanished Kingdoms* seems like two separate books. On the one hand, there is a family and social history, lovingly presented and superbly crafted. On the other, there is a political and religious critique that, for the history profession at least, constitutes a revolutionary challenge to many of its orthodoxies.

But it is open to question whether the former does sufficiently illuminate the other; whether the themes of the politico-religious critique are sustained and underpinned by the social and family history.

There is no doubt that O'Farrell has dared to say what others have only courage to think about the direction of Australian history writing over recent decades. There is also no doubt that he has opened up new areas for historical research and argument. But, with *Vanished Kingdoms*, he has put an opening argument, not the last word.

Vanished Kingdoms is as much a literary work as it is an historical one. But its style is both a strength and a weakness. It is a strength because it is moving and evocative. O'Farrell has a rare gift for the memorable phrase. One telling example is his description of the Australian Irish identity in the 1930s and 1940s as 'caught between colonial mindlessness and Irish irrelevance'. His portraits of characters such as the New Zealand Marist Brother Egbert, Vincent Buckley and Daniel Mannix, his portrayal of families such as the Tullys and the Hanrahans, his tales from personal visits to Ireland and his depiction of the Roman-Irish Catholicism of Australia are all superb ex-

amples of historical writing at its personalised best and most powerful.

But the rhetoric is also capable of taking on a dangerous life of its own, of becoming heavy and repetitive, so that the point being made is obscured or laboured unnecessarily. *Vanished Kingdoms* could be considerably shorter without compromising its historical purpose or its literary power.

But such criticisms should be put in perspective. *Vanished Kingdoms* says much that was crying out to be said. If there is criticism of what it did not do, or how it did what it has done, then such criticism should be seen rather as the desire to take a stimulating argument further than as denigration of the start that has been made towards a complex and difficult change of historical approach.

Of one thing there can be no doubt: *Vanished Kingdoms* will become a benchmark in Australian historiography, and enhance the standing of an historian who is greater than many who are more famous. ■

Michael L'Estrange is on the staff of the Leader of the Federal Opposition, John Hewson.

Frightened Money

'You can't win with frightened money'.

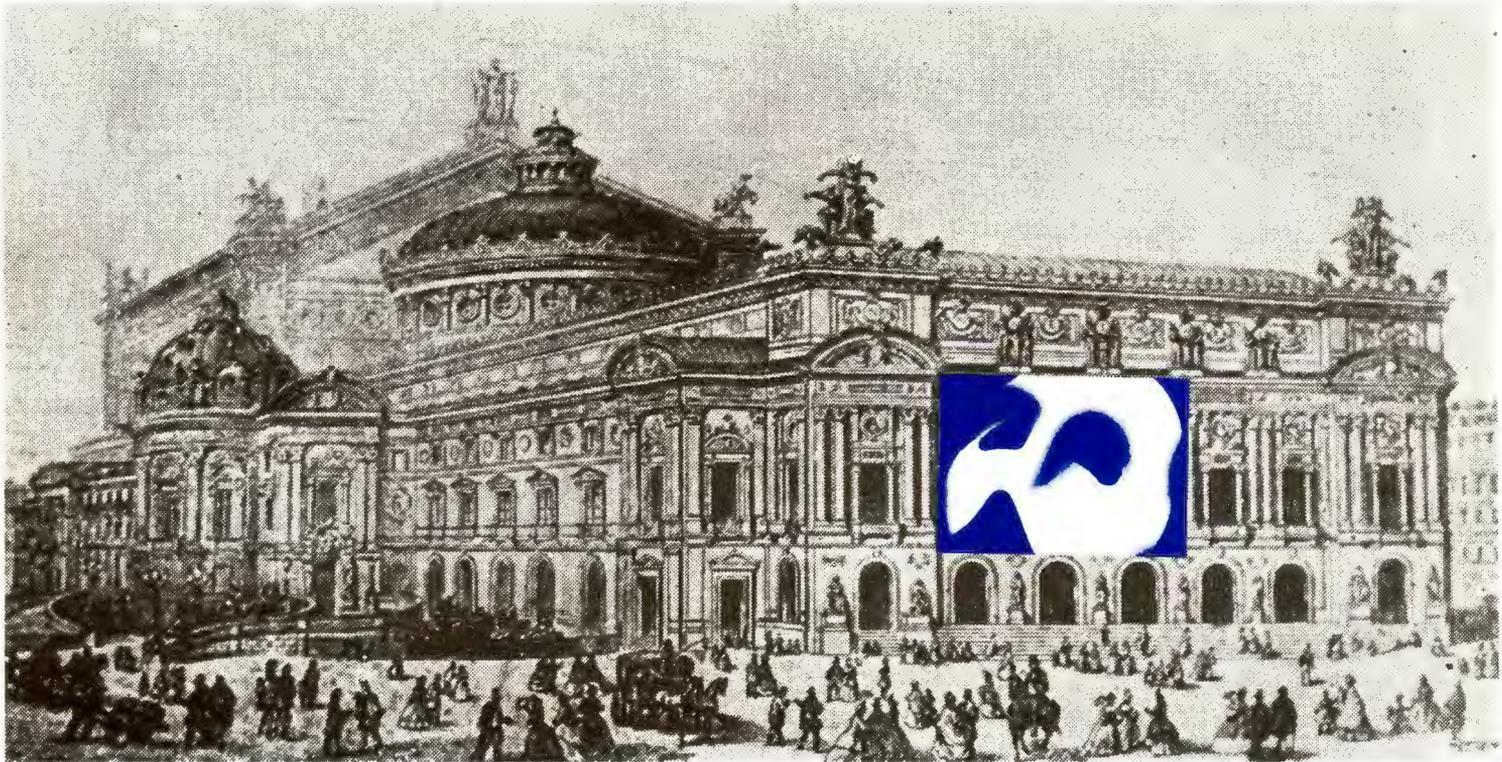
— Punters' dictum

*All right. It's just the sun making to set
And Linda Ronstadt singing 'Long, Long Time'.
They taught you long ago that Pascal's Bet
Was what it said it was. And it's no crime*

*To feel the years with their cold proficient grip
Manoeuvre for the heart. Twelve hours will show
A freshened star to landward. Earth's brief trip
Will wheel us round, and vindicate the throw.*

*Meanwhile, the hungry waters mount the sand,
A finger-touch reverses pain: and he
Who gave us calculus, and one last stand,
Offers the French for how the blessed might be.*

Peter Steele



Libertines, myth and one heck of a ghost

WHY IS IT WE are all so besotted, still, with 19th century opera? Some musicians offer a disdainful account which starts by observing that, after all, most people's musical tastes have never 'got past' the reign of Queen Victoria. Another view, from the left, would have it that people who enjoy the likes of *La Traviata* are clinging desperately to a bourgeois world-view which the operas recreate and confirm. The audience is said to be so dull, anyway, so little concerned with what it is experiencing in the theatre, that the meaning of opera must be sought in the foyer on first nights.

I confess that, faced with phenomena like the huge popularity of a sweetly-pretty effusion such as *The Pearlfishers*, I have been known to reach for one of these arguments

myself. But, for various reasons, they are all of them, if not false, at least decidedly incomplete. Some people's musical tastes are narrow, some do hanker after what they imagine was a more secure age, and some prominent patrons of the opera are indeed gormless. So having conceded that much to amateur sociology of taste, let's move on to more fruitful reflections.

The Palais Garnier, headquarters of the Paris Opéra, was not exactly an obscure building, even before Andrew Lloyd Webber seized upon its ghost for his finest musical. The facts about it are precise and marvellous: commissioned in 1860, completed 1875, three acres, seventeen storeys. Best of all, says Lloyd Webber, '... there really is a lake underneath the building.' I want to discuss a scene

which lies on the far side of the lake, and in order to do so, we will need to go some way into the action.

In *The Phantom of the Opera*, dry ice mists roll across a lake fringed with an undergrowth of (electric) candles. Christine and the Phantom descend along plunging sloping ramps, then embark in a (radio-controlled) boat which ferries them to their weird trystings. It is a brilliant piece of *trompe l'oeil* staging, but the eye deceived is wide open as well. Bronze candelabra erect themselves and you wonder, or whisper, ... hydraulics? The celebrated flying chandelier is another such effect, this time the wow-and-goshery laced with fear if you happen to be in the flight path. The whole evening is a cocktail of nineteenth century ingredients: magic and hokum, trapdoors, fire-



pots, transformation scenes, witty disappearances, and, of course, one heck of a ghost.

The best thing about *The Phantom*, I am tempted to say, is that, given all this, you don't need to listen to the music. But that wouldn't quite be fair. Lloyd Webber is a resourceful composer with a much wider range of styles at his disposal than just the frail, sickly lyricism of 'Think of Me' and 'Memories'. In *The Phantom* he plays with those styles in much the same way Maria Björnson's designs and Hal Prince's staging play with nineteenth century spectacle.

Early in the show, for example, we see the company rehearsing an opera-within-an-opera to a score one part Offenbach, one part Meyerbeer, all bad and exactly right. Björnson costumes this in jewel-box gaudy, and she and Prince between them create around the triumphant hero a hilarious surfeit of phallic symbols, from elephants' tusks to an upraised mace. (Check the program photograph.) For those who know and like *Aida*, this is good lampoonery. For those who think all grand opera ridiculous, it is comforting.

The big number to which all this is leading, is 'Think of Me', and at least half the audience is waiting for it. Who should sing it first, however, but an over-ripe operatic soprano, vibrato and all. A suspicion that the evening will turn out a touch too cultural begins to hover over the house. But with one quick twist of the plot, we are listening to another version of 'Think of Me' sung by our heroine, Christine, the little chorus girl, her big chance come at last, and she sings it right, doesn't she, and the orchestra helps her along with a sudden mighty surge.

Were all the rest like that, we would be in familiar 'popular' territory where any kind of seriousness is mocked or faked. But the reassurance

supplied by these ironic games of style now makes possible a scene of considerable and genuine power. Christine, alone in her dressing-room, gazes into the mirror. Behind it appears the Phantom, summoning her to his kingdom of night.

Simultaneously we see the corps de ballet, practising a dance routine, Degas-like in posture and lighting. One kind of control over women, over performers— is set against another.

The word 'possession' forks. There follows the descent to the lake, and now we are in a new imaginative territory, neither burlesque nor blandishment. We find our-

*We are in love
with the 19th
century ... we can
both revel in it
and struggle with it
... we stand in a
similar relationship
to operatic myth as
the Greeks in
relation to their
inheritance*

selves in the realm of myth.

The character of the Phantom is a synthetic compound of Byronic hero, and Dickensian ghost, melancholy, comic and sinister by turns. On this side of his Avernus-like lake he is perhaps that Dis from the underworld who craved for the spring-like Persephone. The lyrics, with their inverted images of darkness as life-giving, sound like a prosy paraphrase of *Tristan*. (A good deal of *Tristan* does, too.) Yet the amalgam of staging, music and character works to better effect than the words by themselves could possibly suggest. Christine, I

am in some ways sorry to report, is yet another passive creature who exists as Otherness. It seems to me impossible to focus on her career and discover in it, as Hal Prince claims to do, a 'rite of passage' - presumably from her obsession with Daddy to her 'mature relationship' with Raoul. (Americans will tell themselves these stories.) The Phantom completely dominates the show, and Christine exists for what she means to him and to the other male characters. Just what she means gives the work a dark erotic quality, very much of the present moment, taking us from the myths of the ancient world to the myth-language of the unconscious.

Back to the ambiguities of 'possession'. The managers— that comic duo—own the opera house - or so they think. They are shallow, fearful, rigid while the Phantom is labile, ingenious, charged with an energy unmistakably sexual. (His opera is called *Don Juan Triumphant* and depicts the libertine saved from the fires of hell and rewarded for his amatory feats.)

But this true owner, the dark power beneath who seems to offer genuine vitality, is in fact slavishly and utterly dependent on that Other, on 'woman' constructed as the giver of warmth and life. In order for her to give her riches however, she must be emptied out and entered into (the language of the libretto insists on the metaphor). She cannot be allowed to be an independent force. She must 'die'—be absorbed—to provide the Phantom, with life. Listen, or look again, at 'The Music of the Night.'

I do not insist on this sketch of an interpretation, which is only one among several possibilities, But the myth is so powerfully created that unless we are of the 'pure escapism' brigade, forever escaping, that is, from our own responses, such a scene is bound to provoke us into thought. Here, and in a few other places, *The Phantom of the Opera* becomes an opera, because it takes us into the operatic realm of myth. It works, just as, despite similar drawbacks in music and text, the last act of *The Tales of Hoffman* works.

Now to some different reflections on the lake in the basement of the Palais Garnier. As recreated in Paris, in the Musée D'Orsay, it can be seen,

together with the rest of the vast building, in a cross-sectional model. The Musée D'Orsay is a building with a strong narrative about representation. Down one side of a long promenade are the monuments of French official taste from the 'year of revolutions' to the outbreak of the First World War: the academic paintings, the monuments to statesmen.

On the other side of the gallery are the works of the rebels, from Daumier to Manet. A period's complacency confronts its questioners: one version of reality argues with another. What could be the climax of such a narrative, the visual focal point, the altar of this secular nave? The designers chose the Palais Garnier. According to Michael P. Steinberg, who tells us these things in a recent number of the *Cambridge Opera Journal*, the opera house is 'an automatic symbol of both darkness and light, indeterminacy and absolute control.'

What this implies is that the opera house when it is creative, is what we should now call 'a site of contestation', a place of creative questioning. It is not a place where meanings are inertly transmitted to supine audiences

The 19th century inheritance is now being called into question, squabbled over, revalued in a variety of ways. One of these ways, we have seen in the lightweight example of *The Phantom*, a work on the margins of opera, could be described as a joking relationship, a relationship (according to Radcliffe-Browne) in which there is mingled hostility, affection and a deep inter-dependence. Interesting modern production of 19th century works, and interesting re-workings of 19th century material, like *Sweeney Todd* enter into a complex relationship with their source material.

This is of course what should happen when a director offers to re-interpret one of the canonical works. The managements have so far spared innocent Australian audiences from most of what goes on overseas. But we get the occasional taste. The VSO has mounted, twice already, and again this year, Ken Russell's production of *Madama Butterfly*.

This opera nicely demonstrates three phases of audience reception.

For its contemporary audiences, *Butterfly* was realistic (more strictly, an instance of *verismo*). Over time, it was turned into a cherry blossom tour of Great Universal Themes like love and death and betrayal.

Russell's production, set in a brothel full of writhing limbs and wreaths of narcotic smoke restored the sordidness of *Butterfly*'s actual situation and connected Pinkerton's cruel seduction with his privileged position as an imperialist. Against the famous offstage humming chorus, where the libretto directs *Butterfly* and *Suzuki* to keep a vigil, Russell paraded instead a fantasy of her future life in America, complete with

The big number to which all this is leading, is 'Think of Me', and at least half the audience is waiting for it. Who should sing it first, however, but an over-ripe soprano

outsized consumer durables. Throughout, the audience was forced into a divided response, the music speaking of pathos and stifled nobility while the staging asked the awkward questions about just how those feelings are embedded in particular social relationships. Many in the audience, deprived of their 'poetry', booed. But many, sidestepping Russell's familiar excesses, were engaged by this production, and one at least, a young colleague of mine, deeply sceptical about the form, was converted to opera.

There is much more to say on



this whole question. Would there were space to praise Elijah Moshinsky's beautiful and intelligent production of *Werther*. Those who saw the scene where Charlotte's husband demands her presence at a formal dinner while *Werther* approaches death saw a nineteenth century set-piece so rigorously imagined that the continuities between their and our forms of repression needed no spelling out.

Would that there were space, too, to denounce *Les Misérables*, the world's first yuppie operetta, for its slithering over the painful history of the poor, its patronising of Hugo's — of all — generous ardour and its truly extraordinary demeaning of women.

We are in love with the 19th century, I suggest, because we can both revel in it, still, and struggle with it. It would not be fanciful to suggest that we stand in a similar relationship to operatic myth as the Greeks in relation to their inheritance. We still need to tell ourselves, over and over, these particular stories, and we need, constantly, to change them. ■

Bruce Williams teaches drama and opera at La Trobe University.

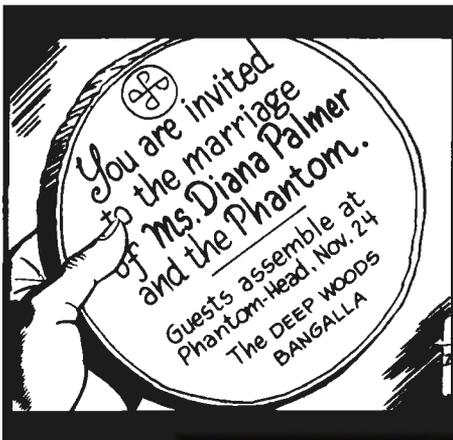
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The epistemological Phantom



The fraternal Phantom



The Emily Post Phantom

Nothing sacred

The Ghost Who Walks in the clutches of the postmodern marketeers

FOR THOSE WHO came in late, *The Phantom* was dreamed up in 1936 by a young college student named Lee Falk, who wanted to create a comic book hero of the kind fit to rub hefty shoulders with mythical heroes of antiquity such as Ulysses. Just two years before, Falk had left Missouri for New York, where he had sold King Features on a comic strip about a dapper magician named Mandrake.

The story of *The Ghost Who Walks* went into print on 17 February 1936 and is now published in 63 countries and about 600 newspapers, with an estimated readership of 100 million.

The idea is simple. Four hundred years ago, a man was washed up on a remote Bengal shore. He had seen his father killed and his ship scuttled by Singh pirates. Nursed back to health by a pygmy tribe, (on the Bengal shore), he swore an oath on the skull of his father's murderer to devote his life to the destruction of all forms of piracy, greed and cruelty.

His descendants have kept the oath and the current Phantom is the 21st of the line to sit on the fabulous Skull throne, surrounded by the Bandar, the loyal pygmy poison people in the Deep Woods. 'As the unbroken line continued through the centuries, the Orient believed it was

always the same man! So the legend grew.' The rest should simply be publishing history, but the fact is that in the comic publishing business *The Phantom* sticks out like a masked man walking around the jungle wearing his underpants outside a purple jumpsuit.

Jim Shepherd, the Australian publisher of *The Phantom*, reckons that the Ghost Who Walks is unique in comics, not being superhuman like superman, not a misshapen, green piece of work like the Incredible Hulk nor a millionaire slave to gadgets like Batman.

The Phantom, a.k.a. Kit Walker, just sticks to the simple life of the jungle, slugs it out with his fists, owns only a couple of .45 revolvers, has a trusty horse and wolf as side-kicks and a few old jungle tricks up his sleeve. Not even the villains are allowed to !|EM|!&! swear.

He's also a modest hero who eschews strong liquor and who was true to his fiancee, UN nurse Diana Palmer, through possibly the world's longest courtship. Confronted by a gang of women airpirates, the masked one lamented: 'This is the tightest spot I've ever been in. You're all women here and I couldn't slug a woman if I wanted to. Naturally, I want to save my own life.' Some

backsliding is on record. Once he (reluctantly) played up to the amorous intentions of the evil barones who led the air pirates, but only long enough to save the day and triumph over evil

The adventures of the Phantom take place inside an odd mix of the geographically real and unreal. His stomping ground, the Deep Woods, is in the Bengali jungle—somewhere in Africa—but close to the desert and the near east. The jungle is peopled by negro tribes, but only a solid gallop away are demi-arabic princes who live in mountaintop castles. There are lions and tigers.

Lee Falk, the Phantom's creator, has blurred the edges even further by having Mandrake and his offsider Lothar appear as guests at the fabulous wedding of the Phantom and Diana in 1977.

Falk, a millionaire at an early age who now modestly admits to being 79 years old, lives in a house called Xanadu, which is also the name of Mandrake's pad. He still taps out the odd Phantom story on a 50-year-old typewriter, has been spotted in downtown New York dressed as Mandrake and was photographed a few years back in full Phantom rig, his young bride on his arm.

The Phantom has slogged through tussles with the Japanese during World War II, and sorties against the Koreans in the 1950s when his makers also had to battle censorship. The changes in time bought changes in content: the Phantom battled drug dealers and eventually agreed that his new wife could keep working. As Diana explained: 'I want to keep my job. Dear, I know your mother and 20 generations of Phantom wives stayed in the Skull cave, but this is 1977.' The couple now have twin children a boy and a girl.

In 1987, the first Phantom comic was produced in Sweden by a group under copyright, in a move to augment new titles from the US. Sweden's Phantom Fan Club reportedly now has more members than the country's Boy Scouts.

The Phantom also had a two-part adventure in Australia, published in 1989, which came to a climax on location in the Sydney Opera House. The Australian publishers, Frew Publications Pty Ltd, now report a

'renaissance' for the nemesis of wrongdoing everywhere, and recently put out a bumper 1000th issue. Over one million copies of the comic are sold in Australia each year.

But sinister wraith-like figures with beady eyes have stalked the modern Phantom—yuppies in search of an in-joke! Befitting an era when Warren Beatty can play the grantite-jawed Dick Tracy on the big screen, Phantom marketing has moved beyond the innocent old days of the Phantom Club and skull rings.

The latest outpouring of Phantomania for the in-crowd was an exhibition at Sydney's trendoid DC art gallery. One exhibitor, Adam Rish, told of finding Phantom biscuits inscribed in pidgin when he was living in Papua New Guinea seven years ago: 'Suppos yu kai kai dispela biskit yu cum up strong alsem phantom.'

Rish said in an interview: 'The biscuits are just like boring Saos really, but the inscription means, if you eat these biscuits you'll become strong like the Phantom. They're crazy about the Phantom there.'

His exhibition piece vision was called the Birth of The Phantom 'inside a Giotto interior', with two little



Phantoms and Diana. Brett Whiteley chipped in with what was 'obviously a Mona Lisa in a Phantom mask.' Some works even suggested the Ghost Who Walks who was a man of the flesh!

About half the current Australian readership of the Phantom are reportedly "well-heeled white-collar workers" who often fax or hand-deliver detailed responses to the latest issue, while the biggest growth area is in the 40 years-and-over age group. A cartoon feature film of the Phantom is also planned, which may help win back some of the younger age group.

The Phantom ain't flashy, but he's got a longer shelf life than you average teenage mutant ninja turtle. ■

Mark Skulley writes for the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

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Failing as a nation

from A. Ecob

MAY I SUBMIT the following comment on Richard Curtain's conclusion. ('In search of ties that bind', *Eureka Street*, April '91). Curtain states that 'Most people, for example, accept that they have to pay taxes beyond levels at which they will benefit personally'. He then makes it clear that his use of the words 'have to' means, as justified by ultimate benefits to be received, as distinct from recognition of the overwhelming coercive powers of the taxation authorities.

I suggest that this is a highly misleading view of Australian attitudes towards taxation. A substantial minority (it could be 25 per cent) do, as they say, 'vote for a living'. Clearly, they expect to benefit personally beyond the levels that could be secured from the taxes they pay. An approximately equal minority (of mainly small business people) deeply resent the above and believe that this is where their excess of taxes paid over benefit goes. The 50 per cent in the middle generally do not think about it, but if asked to choose from a short list of opinions would select the view that 'taxation is a the price of a civilised society'. They have an unquantified feeling that the price is too high.

If my reading of the Australian attitudes is correct, then Curtain's advocacy of 'common action for common good' would, if applied in Australia, be at best ineffective. It could well prove to be far worse. The real measure of how much worse is

what we as a nation are failing to achieve in terms of the resources, gifts, and knowledge that are available to us. As an accountant I argue, for example, that more than half our national product (when related to what we could achieve) is but economic waste. And of the enterprises and resources which produce the 'goodies', an increasing proportion is becoming owned overseas.

As Peter Sheehan is reported as saying—our failure to achieve consensus about the sort of society we want and how we want to achieve it lies at the heart of the country's economic problems.

A. Ecob
Longueville, NSW

Ratzinger defended

From Don Carberry

I HOPE THAT in the process of doing the critical, social thing, *Eureka Street* will be a consistent voice for the teaching of the universal church.

May I mention *Solicitudo Rei Socialis*, *Redemptoris Missio* and *Mulierum Dignitas* as pointing to the vacuum in Australian social understanding that catholic exposition can fill. There is an equal need for a reasoned public guide to catholic teaching (which so often is presented only as prohibition) on contemporary moral issues, especially bio-ethical ones. I suppose that all this has already been the subject of editorial policy making, but the saying of it has its own importance.

Finally I ask that you exercise some editorial discretion (or even comment) with regard to the fashionable sneering comments about Cardinal Ratzinger. I wonder whether in his case Matthew 5:11-12, is not applicable. I realise that he is the whipping boy of the free-wheelers, their prince of devils, but I put it to you that comments about him should display the academic integrity that his own scholarship, his charity in exposition and the seriousness of doctrine that his office imposes all call for and desire.

Don Carberry
Pakenham, Victoria

More for women, please

from Sr Kath Burke, President of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia

Congratulations on *Eureka Street*. You have produced a magazine of quality with originality, style and a variety of content. If I have any negative comment I'll turn it into a positive for the future. It may be important to think critically about what would ensure a female readership. This is more in the area of style of presentation than of content.

Kath Burke RSM
Lewisham, NSW

Best dressed

from Fr Robert Carey, director, Adelaide Catholic News Centre

We were delighted to receive the first edition of *Eureka Street*. This is just a short note to congratulate you on a very well dressed publication and a splendid achievement.

Robert Carey
Adelaide

Eureka Street welcomes letters from its readers. Short letters are more likely to be published, and letters may be edited. All letters must be signed, with the writer's name and address clearly written. (A box number is not sufficient). Phone number should be provided so that letters can be verified.

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