EUREKA STREET

Vol. 9 No. 5 June 1999 $5.95

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EUREKA STREET

A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

Volume 9 Number 5
June 1999

Global violence: Armed Pakistani soldiers in *shalwar kameez* and berets await the helicopter arrival of former Indian Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, in Pakistan early this year. The cover photograph records the split second before one Pakistani attacked another in the violence that broke out during the visit. The attacker is a member of the intelligence police and his victim a member of a group of protesters. Photographs by Mathias Heng.

Cover design by Siobhan Jackson.
Cartoons pp8, 10, 17
by Dean Moore.
Graphics pp14–15, 28–31
by Siobhan Jackson.
Photographs pp24–27
by David Glanz.
Photographs p33 of Tim Costello
by Ponch Hawkes and of
Frank Brennan by Bill Thomas.

Eureka Street magazine
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Richmond VIC 3121
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EUREKA STREET
A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

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Eureka Street gratefully acknowledges the support of C. and A. Carter; the trustees of the estate of Miss M. Condon; W.P. & M.W. Gurry

Eureka Street magazine, ISSN 1036–1758,
Australia Post Print Post approved pp349181/00314,
is published ten times a year
by Eureka Street Magazine Pty Ltd,
300 Victoria Street, Richmond, Victoria 3121
Tel: 03 9427 7311 Fax: 03 9428 4450
email: eureka@jespub.jesuit.org.au
http://www.openplanet.com.au/eureka/
Responsibility for editorial content is accepted by
Daniel Madigan, 300 Victoria Street, Richmond.
Printed by Doran Printing,
46 Industrial Drive, Braeside VIC 3195.
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Unsolicited manuscripts, including poetry and fiction, will be returned only if accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Requests for permission to reprint material from the magazine should be addressed in writing to:
The editor, *Eureka Street* magazine,
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COMMENT

JON GREENAWAY

Indonesia votes

WHILE MANY ARE EXPECTING a repeat of the violence that ousted Suharto from power last year and resulted in around 1,200 deaths, others are less cautious about Indonesia's national election on 7 June. A major tourism operator in the region has been advertising a special election package. For US$200 a day all security concerns are taken care of while you take a 'close look' at Indonesian democracy in action.

Tourists travelling through riots in the streets of Jakarta in hermetically sealed pope-mobiles might add a surreal quality to the election campaign, but Habibie's Government took the threat of election-related violence very seriously by training 15,000 paramilitaries to work as an anti-riot squad in Jakarta alone.

Even before the campaign officially began on 19 May there had been deaths from clashes between rival Muslim parties during April.

With 48 parties contesting the 462 seats available and student organisations feeling like political heavyweights after the impact of their 1998 agitation (on the streets and pavements around Indonesia's universities), this campaign was always going to be rough. It seems inevitable that what has happened more recently in East Timor, Aceh, Ambon

This month, **Tim Costello** and **Frank Brennan** discuss the complex relationship between Church and State, in talks given for the **Transformations** series (see page 32).

Presented by Joel Becker Arts Management, **Transformations** is a series of public lectures exploring Australian society and culture as we move into the new millennium.

Next in the series is historian **Henry Reynolds: 'There's Nothing Racist about Equality'**

Sydney Monday 7 June 6.30pm-8pm, The Seymour Centre. Tickets available from the Seymour Centre Box Office, tel. 02 9364 9400.
Melbourne Tuesday 8 June 6.30pm-8pm, Collins Street Baptist Church. Tickets available at all Readings bookstores, tel. 03 9347 6633.

Supported by *Eureka Street*, the Research Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences (University of Sydney) and the National Centre for Australian Studies (Monash University).

and West Kalimantan should be joined by violence brought about by the June poll.

Prominent Muslim scholar, Nurcholish Madjid, was quoted in the Indonesian press in early May saying that 'violence will be prompted by many factors, including the fact the nation is now experiencing an explosion of free culture and politics, which had been banned for 32 years'. Violence would not come just from the radical edge, he suggested.

What is unknown is how things will unfold after 7 June. Not just which party will secure enough seats to broker a coalition that would control the National Assembly (MPR) and thereby appoint the next President at the end of the year, but how the new election rules and make-up of the MPR will affect these machinations.

The military has had its number of seats in the MPR reduced from 75 to 38 under the new regulations brought in at the beginning of the year. This does not necessarily mean that their influence in the assembly will be reduced. The number of overall seats has been reduced from 1,000 to 700 and several parties will be represented with no previous parliamentary experience and none with a majority of seats.

Their pull on things will be strengthened by the representatives of Golkar, the party that had untrammelled authority in the assembly under Suharto, with only the token presence of a few opposition parliamentarians. Golkar possesses the most efficient campaigning operation, one with an established network. Other parties have had to cobble a campaign together and only Megawati Sukarnoputri's PDI Struggle seems to have produced an on-the-ground machine to rival Golkar's. Perhaps most importantly, however, Golkar is the richest.

What is unclear is by what process the new President will be elected by the MPR during its November session. Since there will be more than the sole candidate this time, will it have to be a majority or simply the individual who polled the greatest number of votes? Also unsure at this stage is how other regional appointees will be elected to the MPR. The confusion suits elements within the military who are unhappy with the pace and direction the reform process has taken since Suharto's abdication.

The way in which national politics in Indonesia unfold during and after the elections may also test the success of military reform piloted by ABRI (now known as TNI) chief General Wiranto and his supporters.

At a conference in late March in the UK, Wiranto advisor Air Vice-Marshall Graito Usodo unveiled plans to reduce ABRI's involvement in Indonesian politics and society. Some of what he said then has been realised: for example the separation of the police force from the army. But many are doubtful that Wiranto will be able to curb the influence that factions within the military have on civilian affairs.

One of Usodo's pledges was that the military would not favour Golkar or any other party in the new assembly. On the evidence of Wiranto's inability to control disgruntled officers in his charge, it is difficult to imagine from where he drew the confidence to make such a claim. The most glaring example of dissent in the ranks was the East Timor peace agreement Wiranto brokered in April between pro- and anti-integration groups. He had barely flown out of the territory before the militia were back at their work, with members of the security forces not far away.

A less glaring sign of trouble in the ranks is the fact that a reshuffle—shifting opponents of the reform process from positions of power—was for some reason put on hold in April.

Not only does Wiranto have to face opposition from inside, he is also opposed by groups of retired generals who profited under Suharto and do not wish to see the military step out of public life. Two old East Timor hands, Benny Murdani and Try Sutrisno, are said to be his most strident critics among this group.

Global violence: It could be Dili, Belgrade, Srebrenica —the accoutrements are universal. The armoured and helmeted police, above, are in fact defending Lytton Road, Lahore, in Pakistan, during the violence which followed the historic visit of the Indian Prime Minister to Pakistan in February. Photograph by Mathias Heng.

But beyond speculating on the wilful intent of dissenting generals, one has to imagine how the military's elite officers, used to the power and influence that came with the job like the starched shirts and polished shoes, can drop out of political life on the strength of vague notions of democratic process.

They belong to a culture, a whole way of doing things, and if Wiranto is genuine in his attempts to change the armed forces, he is wanting conversions.

The two issues to confront a new administration immediately will be legislation to return profits from Jakarta to Indonesia's provinces and East Timor, Aceh and Irian Jaya. Wiranto will be hoping that the factions opposed to him are not in a position to decide what happens. ■

Jon Greenaway is *Eureka Street*'s South East Asia correspondent.

DEWI ANGGRAENI

East Timor waits

THE ESCALATING CRISIS in East Timor has brought calls from some Australian lobby groups for the Government to exert pressure on Indonesia, to stop atrocities in East Timor. These calls have been intensifying in frequency and urgency.

It is necessary, however, to understand how complex the East Timor crisis is and how intricately linked with the wider political situation of Indonesia—itself a country in major crisis, embarking on the first relatively free election in 32 years.

Currently, while there is theoretically an Indonesian Government, in reality there are several 'governments' competing to have their say. President Habibie may have promised Prime Minister Howard that his government would allow an internationally monitored referendum in the territory, yet the fulfilment of this promise is not guaranteed. The fact is, Habibie has little legitimacy and limited currency as head of the nation. It will depend very much on who is in government after the June election, and whether that government can work effectively with the Armed Forces, the TNI (formerly known by the acronym ABRI).

Since earlier this year, when President Habibie indicated that Indonesia would 'let East Timor separate from Indonesia', and Foreign Minister, Ali Alatas, was on the record as saying that Indonesia would give East Timor independence if the East Timorese refused the autonomy package, ABRI have been angry. It is common knowledge that a referendum, if conducted fairly and with international monitoring, would lead to independence.

Even General Wiranto, the Armed Forces chief, is believed to be reluctant to support the President and the government factions who support this idea. He has nonetheless been forced to, because they had to show a unified front to the outside world.

Most opposed to the idea of East Timor independence, unfortunately, are the local military brass in East Timor itself. Some are local East Timorese, others are non-East Timorese. Apart from the fact that they built their careers in this territory which to them is a legitimate Indonesian province, many of these military officers have got coffee plantations or other properties where they plan to enjoy their retirements. Independence would eliminate their dream plans and erase the record of their military achievements as well. They would come across not only as losers, but as much-hated villains in the history of independent East Timor; and in Indonesian history, it is likely they would be dismissed as an embarrassment, hence quickly forgotten.

The second problem is that some East Timorese have been benefiting from the Indonesian presence in the territory. In every occupied land, there are those who—for reasons pragmatic or otherwise—work with the occupying forces. In East Timor, a whole generation has been educated in the Indonesian system, under Indonesian rule. For these people, one major employer has been the regional government, meaning the civil service. Those in the private sector are most likely to have Indonesian or pro-Indonesian employers because their capital is closely linked with Indonesia. Many work at the properties of Indonesian military officers. This is where the two problems meet and become compounded.

While many in the employment of the regional government openly or privately express their support for independence, some prefer the status quo. They may have done very well in the civil service, and have a lot to lose if they are seen as rocking the boat.

There are also some who have been made to believe that if East Timor achieves independence, they will be the first to be removed, even murdered, because they would be seen as traitors or collaborators. Once this fear is instilled the next step comes easily: they can be persuaded that they must kill those who most likely will kill them. It is probable that they receive material and training support from the local military brass who employ them and likely—once they realise how they can wield power with the backing of these people—that they will become intoxicated with an illusion of power and the increasingly real sense of self-preservation. Unfortunately they also become further indebted to those who manipulate them.

INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS have dismissed these pro-integrationists as Indonesia's puppets. The fact that many of them are involved in atrocious acts in the militia alienates them even further from international consideration. Unfortunately, this only delivers them more firmly into the hands of those who oppose East Timor's independence.

However repellent the thought, however distasteful the idea, the world needs to acknowledge that those pro-integrationists are real people. A spokesman for this faction, Basilio Araujo, in an SBS interview with Mike Carey, and on ABC's *7.30 Report* with Maxine McKew, said, 'We want to tell people

that we exist.' They obviously got a clear message that all international sympathy would be poured to the pro-independence forces, so their 'removal' would occur without any international fuss.

For reconciliation to be achieved everyone may have to think again about denying their existence: they are also part of East Timor. If they are to be disarmed, by a UN peace-keeping force or other combined neutral force, they have to believe that their safety is guaranteed. Without this trust, no disarming can take place effectively. Bishop Belo and the independence leader Xanana Gusmao have promised that the worst that can happen to them is that they will lose their properties, but for true reconciliation, trust has to be rebuilt from ground level.

Dewi Anggraeni is a novelist and journalist living in Melbourne.

COMMENT: 3

DEANE TERRELL

Higher education crosses its fingers

THE 1999 BUDGET IS CAUTIOUS, which is not surprising. If the GST or the further Telstra sale is blocked, the surplus may be needed for the Government's spending program.

The closest to boldness in the initiatives affecting the research and university sectors was $614 million additional funding over five years to medical research, which will double the base of National Health and Medical Research Council funding by 2004. About half of it can be expected to go to universities.

There were no further cuts in university block funding, as some had feared; none, that is, beyond the final one per cent tranche of the Vanstone cuts. However, neither was there any additional support for wage supplementation. In an enterprise bargaining environment, with unions seeking significant salary increases, this is a major problem for university administrations. Australian institutions are already behind their global competition in salary levels and are under considerable pressure. If competitive salaries have to be found from within existing resources, the breadth of operations will inevitably shrink.

$93.3 million additional funding over three years for research infrastructure looks like a gain. It holds funding at present levels. However, the current ratio of research infrastructure funding to grant funding is 26 cents to one dollar. The West report recommended 40 cents to the dollar as an appropriate level, and the United Kingdom level is 60 cents to the dollar. With the agreed levels of grant funding, the Australian ratio will drop to 21 cents from 2000, putting considerable pressure on research infrastructure.

$59.8 million over three years for Strategic Partnerships with Industry-Research and Training (SPIRT) Scheme continues the existing program of support for industry–university collaborative research at current levels beyond 1999. This prevents decline but does not add significantly to current levels.

It is disappointing that the Government has not recognised that it needs to increase research funding significantly if Australia is to be in a position to take advantage of opportunities in the 'knowledge economy'. The chance to benefit from the current revolutions in information technology and biotechnology will be at a maximum over the next few years. Entering the field later will take greater investment and the available benefits will be diminished.

Many OECD governments, including the US, Japan, Germany, UK and Canada, have recognised that public investment in research is essential for economic development and are making major new public investments.

The value of block grants currently available to universities is effectively 15 per cent less than their 1996 value, due to funding cuts and non-supplemented wage and salary increases. This has had a negative effect on the resources available for research and research training. It makes major new funding initiatives imperative. ANU's recent paper on the case for increased investment in basic research found that in order to keep pace with increased investment in the UK, for example, an additional $350 million per year needs to be spent on basic research alone.

Maybe the Government will address these needs in coming Budgets. The first Budget of a term is never a big-spending one. Provided that the GST does not lead the Government into a double dissolution, it is likely to see out a full term, given that there are major celebratory events right through until the end of 2001. There will then be scope for major funding increases in the two budgets before the next election. Universities and other research institutions will have to press their cases hard, however, if Australia is not to fall behind.

Deane Terrell is Vice Chancellor of The Australian National University.

FRANCIS SULLIVAN

Health holds its breath

FEW BUDGET WEEKS could rival the May '99 one. The Howard Government's first Budget of its second term was in stark contrast to its maiden attempt in 1996. The absence of severe funding cuts and the conservative spending of the surplus eased the anxieties of business and social services groups alike. Yet by week's end, the turmoil over the GST only confirmed the precarious balance our community must negotiate as the benefits of the new economy are distributed.

The Budget papers reveal an impressive surplus forecast. This year's $5.4 billion pales before the anticipated $11.4 billion in 2003. Little wonder the financial markets breathed a heavy sigh of relief on the night. However, the lustre quickly dulls when the budget is viewed from the 'underside'.

Some health spending, specifically that for private services and research, was boosted. There was no new money for public hospitals, mental health, rehabilitation or palliative care. Aged-care services were expanded, particularly into the home. The withdrawal of public capital funding for nursing homes remains. Disability support, home and community care and legal aid services went begging. Rent assistance for low-income families was further squeezed. The modest increase in family assistance to support unemployed youth did not adequately compensate for previous Government cuts to the youth allowance. There were no measures to address poverty traps of the unemployed.

Seen in this light, the Budget did not offer overwhelming promise for people on low incomes who rely on the certainty of public services, the sustainability of safety nets and the affordability of basic necessities.

Some—the 'you can't please everyone' brigade—will argue that this is the luck of cutting the pie. What is unarguable is that the balance still favours the prosperous, the fortunate and the influential.

In the health portfolio, the major strategic policy was the introduction of Lifetime Health Cover. This is a deliberate strategy to encourage greater uptake of health insurance, particularly by the better off in the community. Basically, it penalises late-comers to insurance by charging them higher premiums. It treats the over-65-aged group more sensitively, but sends strong financial signals to well-off singles and families to insure early. As a measure to address the decline in health cover it may just work. As a policy to ensure equitable access to health care it's not enough.

The majority of Australians rely on public health services, middle to low-income families particularly. The Government's initiative, as with others in employment, housing, and community services, reveals a belief in promoting self-reliance before community obligation. In other words, wherever feasible, people should pay as they go. The policy purists see this as breaking the 'culture of dependency'.

The danger is that legitimate entitlement programs, like universal health cover, are reduced to safety nets for the deserving poor. The degree to which those safety nets are adequately funded then becomes a moot point. And this takes us to the difficulty of tax reform.

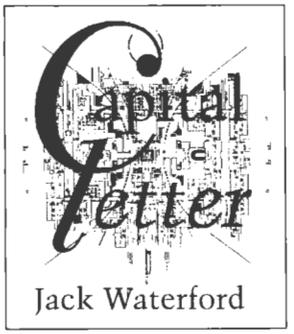
The Government has a mandate for tax reform. The parliament, it is hoped will ensure that reform is fair. When a major plank of the reform requires the introduction of a regressive consumption tax, the sustainability of compensation is all important. Within that scenario lies the treatment of the necessities of life. Social safety nets and entitlement programs help guarantee access to these necessities. But where the durability and effectiveness of the safety nets and entitlement programs is questionable, so too will be the argument for sustainability of compensatory measures.

The balancing act for any government is to discriminate according to basic need. When it comes to life's necessities this is a hard ask. Why should the purchase of health insurance remain GST free, but that of food not? What makes access to nursing home care more crucial than basic shelter? Why is the former GST free and not the latter? For that matter, why are GP visits for the affluent GST free, yet clothing and utilities for the poor not?

These questions weigh heavily on those who see tax reform, like budgets, as more than an economic concern. They go to the heart of what we believe our society to be. They challenge us to come to terms with the implications of equity and the demands of distributive justice. More importantly, they call for a solidarity with the less well-off in our community.

Advancing the case for tax reform involves clever budget-making, but it also requires a preparedness to safeguard life's necessities so that we all may truly prosper in the new economy.

Francis Sullivan is Executive Director of the Australian Catholic Health Care Association.



Jack Waterford

Howard's high stakes

IT IS ALWAYS A GOOD IDEA to have a plan B. And even if one does not want to contemplate having resort to it, or encourage others to think that it is an option, it's not a bad idea to leave enough room to manoeuvre so that a retreat to plan B cannot be cast as an utter defeat.

It was ever a wonder whether Brian Harradine was going to support a goods and services tax. He is always cunning with his vote and frequently leaves people guessing until the last moment. But the best guide to what he intends to do is what he has said, and there were indications from the very start that he had fundamental objections—ones which might not be so strong were the compensation package to be strengthened, but formidable nonetheless. The Coalition—John Howard really, since he took charge of coping with Senator Harradine—always seemed to assume that ultimately he could be rented or bought. In doing so, it painted itself into an awful corner, from which it will be difficult to escape with any great political credit, even if, ultimately, it ends up with a GST.

John Howard could always have attempted to buy off the Democrats, but he boxed them out of the action almost as effectively as they did themselves. The staring down has failed, and now they are critical to the survival of Howard's package. It was a bad strategy anyway, if only because the composition of the Senate changes next month and he needs to have a *modus vivendi* with them.

Howard is immersed in the idea that he showed spectacular courage in proposing tax reform in the first place, and in taking it to an election. In his doing so, he gave the absurd impression that the GST was the cornerstone of all essential economic reform over the decade—and that it was, for him, the culmination of a lifetime's public service. This has made his failure something of a personal one, in an environment where he has few friends and admirers even in his own party, and where he cannot seem to make political headway even in good economic times and with an Opposition as inept as anything put up by the Coalition in the 1980s.

Whether, in fact, he can say that the electorate voted for his GST is in any event moot. First, though he won a majority of seats, he did not win a majority of votes. Second, the Democrats, who gained seats in the Senate, had always made clear that they would hold out on indirect taxes on food, and their doing so may actually have made it easier for voters to go for the Coalition. Certainly, there is little appetite in the Coalition for a third election focused on taxation, let alone for any grandstanding crash-through-or-crash campaign focused on Senate obstructionism. They won't want to run the risk of taking the timing of the next election out of the Prime Minister's hands. Whoever the Prime Minister might be.

If Howard were to go, the likely beneficiary would be Peter Costello, but, were there to be a contest, his detractors would ask what the debacle has shown about his own capacity to negotiate change. Peter Costello has a good line of bluster, and the capacity, like Paul Keating, to seem utterly convinced of the truth of whatever Treasury line he is parrotting at the moment. But he has yet to show anything like the capacity for wheedling, or for making the best of bad circumstances that Peter Reith has shown. Moreover, Peter Costello has so far presided over an economic boom—one that the Treasury seems to think will go on forever. But if America sneezes, or if anyone notices how pale and pinched Japan still looks, the fanciful economic projections and large Budget surpluses could melt away. Some of the casual Costello boastings from this year's Budget have all of the capacity to cause Costello the pain that bringing home the bacon did for Paul Keating.

Yet there is ample space for negotiation. First, the tax cuts which were the real selling point of the package do not depend on GST revenue—they were primarily to be funded from the projected surpluses. Second, while the loss of food makes a difference to the GST bottom line, it should, at the end of the day, make less than a 10 per cent difference. And even that difference should be reduced by the fact that it makes easier the process of compensating those who are adversely affected.

ONE OF THE PIECES OF GENIUS in the general tax plan was the way in which the Federal Government had proposed to make over GST revenue to the states, giving them a guaranteed income base against which the Commonwealth would phase out tied grants. This made even Labor states deeply interested in the tax. To pull back now, moreover, would involve the Commonwealth in fresh funding arrangements which could be ruinous with a GST-style tax. At the time the tax changes were being planned, the High Court had ruled out a host of state excise-style taxes, and made it clear that only the Commonwealth could raise such taxes. The GST solved that problem and, while serving an important (and desirable) purpose of generally broadening the whole Australian tax base, had, by repatriating the money to the states, taken some of the heat away from the Commonwealth.

There are other aspects of the packages, not least diesel fuel rebates to rural exporters, which are absolutely critical for the survival of the Coalition. And, of course, the general surplus which is supposedly going to be sitting there. The idea that the Government would consider dropping changes either out of pique or so as to increase pressure on the Democrats is quite ludicrous—the Coalition itself would implode first.

So what, if from the Government's point of view, the package is no longer pure? It had ceased to be even before the ink was dry on the proposals, simply because politics is about making bargains, compromises and keeping the end in view. Sometimes it is necessary, in the course of seeking those compromises, to talk tough and pretend that it would be absolutely impossible to make concessions in a particular area. But one should choose one's words carefully, because there is a real risk, if compromise there must be, that it will be labelled in exactly the terms by which it has been previously damned. ■

Jack Waterford is editor of the *Canberra Times*.

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Partners I

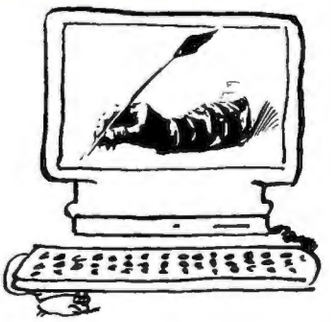
From Henk Bak

Sir Gerard Brennan's tentative set of values that may shape Australia (*Eureka Street*, April 1999) offers thoughts for further development.

First, what emerges is a dynamic pattern of values rather than a set: egalitarianism seems to work best in political matters, freedom in cultural issues, and too much deregulation in the economy leads to widening gaps between wealthy and poor, employed and unemployed, etc.

Second, our political and cultural values seem to be rather firmly established: A dynamic mix between egalitarianism and freedom goes a long way toward the tolerance we cherish. But it is a tolerance that seems to make us tolerate entrenched unemployment and increasing poverty as well.

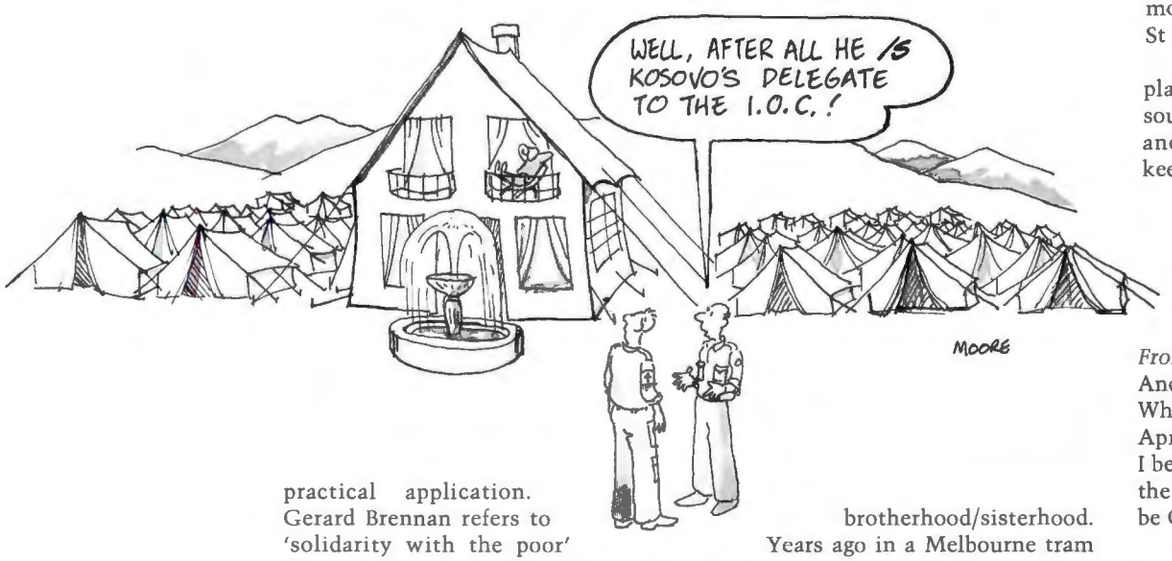
Therefore, thirdly, we may need to generate a value that would work best in the economy. Such a value is not absent in Australian society, but it obviously needs a higher profile and practical application. Gerard Brennan refers to 'solidarity with the poor' (Oceania Synod), and then leaves the subject and switches to the theme of conscience.



If we take solidarity as a helpful expression of a guiding value for the economy, then the potential of this concept can be further explored. For example, solidarity implies mutuality without requiring sameness. Solidarity with the poor will have to be such that the poor can develop solidarity with the wealthy and both with everyone in between. The concept can be widened to include, for example, solidarity between producers and consumers, loggers and greenies, local and global traders, etc. My own favourite is 'partnership in nature'—it transcends the gender divide of brotherhood/sisterhood.

Years ago in a Melbourne tram I was writing down a kind of manifesto on the economy and used this phrase. A girl just from high school sitting next to me apologised for reading what I was writing and thought 'partnership in nature' was well put. There may be better words, or sets of values governing a mature, inclusive economy. By including solidarity in his tentative set of values, Sir Gerard Brennan made a welcome start.

Henk Bak
Trentham, VIC



Baby, it's cold inside

From Alan Gill

Andrew Hamilton, in a tongue-in-cheek commentary, said that there was nothing new in Paul Brazier and his colleagues visiting churches, notebooks in hand, to report irregularities in patterns of worship (*Eureka Street*, April 1999).

The Anglicans, he said, had experienced similar problems in the 'High' versus 'Low' church battles of the 19th century.

To which I would add: 'And in the 20th century too.'

A wrong garment or word out of place in the liturgy could bring about a complaint to the Archbishop, who himself could come under fire. An example which comes to mind is the 'ticking off' allegedly received by Archbishop Hugh Rowlands Gough for daring to wear a pectoral cross on first arrival in the antipodes in the 1950s.

About 15 years ago, an evangelical Anglican bishop was taken ill, and fainted during a service in the moderately Anglo-Catholic church of St James, King Street, Sydney.

He was carried to the vestry, and placed on a table, where some kindly soul covered him with a cope—then and now a forbidden garment—to keep him warm.

Alan Gill
Drummoyne, NSW

Partners II

From Glen Marshall

Andrew Hamilton's article, 'The Spy Who Didn't Love Me' (*Eureka Street*, April 1999) impressed me because I believe that whenever and wherever the Word of God is preached there will be God teaching us.

A decade ago, as a non-Catholic person, I responded to an advertisement to learn more about Catholicism—that decision to learn was one of the best things I have done in 70 years.

I have been very active in the Christian church for many years and for much of those years I have felt an urgent presence of God when people of different faiths worship, celebrate and hear the Word together. In a world which seems to enjoy being divided into haves and have nots, into sects and cults, into a plethora of likes and

dislikes, surely God is saying '*Be united in at least one thing in remembrance of Me.*'

In the small town where I live the community works co-operatively, enjoys co-operative recreation and survives the vicissitudes of seasons, crops, politics and media's intrusive wranglings; but we worship quite separately. Why?

At the grass root level (the lay level?), there is a stirring which is leading to a questioning ... why are we worshipping separately?

I am certain that God is encouraging people to ask why do we worship separately? Perhaps God intends us to rediscover his Word and in that discovery tear down physical things such as churches so that truly sacred things, common to millions of diverse groups throughout the world, are revealed and the presence of God made manifest, not hidden by human rituals and prejudices or within bleak walls of bricks and stones.

Glen Marshall
Culgoa, VIC

God on whose side?

From Tom Round

Though I have little sympathy with either faction of the Catholic Church in the current General Absolution controversy, I still question Andrew Hamilton's absolutist conclusion ('The Spy Who Didn't Love Me', *Eureka Street*, April 1999) that 'spying'—or what could less judgmentally be labelled 'attending a religious gathering with intent primarily to observe and report rather than to worship'—is *intrinsece mala*.

'The presence of God demands a proper reverence with which spying is incompatible', says Fr Hamilton. Ah, yes, but *which* God? Suppose, for example, one hears rumours that the priest/minister/pastor of East Westland congregation has been preaching White Christian Identity and delivering sermons emphasising Noah's curse on the sons of Ham. What's the preferred response here? Suspend judgment and ignore the matter entirely? Send a polite 'please explain' letter? Or attend the service wearing buckled black hat and shoes, carrying a quill pen for your clipboard, and with a name-tag that reads '*Grand Inquisitor, confess to me*'?

Clearly none of these options would be effective to uncover what most right-thinking Christians would agree is a serious heresy that needs to be dealt with. In this case, it would seem, the end does justify the means—you *can* attend incognito, observe, remember and speak about what you've seen and heard, and still face yourself in the mirror. So, once again, an argument of 'irrespective who's right and wrong, this side's methods are unacceptable' really does depend on who's right and who's wrong.

Tom Round
Salisbury, VIC

See here

From Fred Bendeich

Recently in our parish, copies were distributed of a 'letter from the Australian Bishops to the Catholic People of Australia'. The letter claims to be a response to 'conflicting reports' about recent meetings of the Australian bishops in Rome, and appears to have been intended to soothe our feelings.

It is gratifying to learn (from paragraph 11) that the bishops have finally acknowledged the existence of, and condemned, the 'letter-writing squad'. It is interesting that it is the Pope himself who is making trouble about the third Rite or Reconciliation (paragraph 12). But for the rest, the letter is quite remarkable in its vagueness, and so hardly calculated to setting our minds at rest.

A meeting was held (paragraph 4) 'to discuss certain matters concerning the pastoral situation of the Church in Australia'. What matters? Were these the ones mentioned in paragraph 9: 'understanding of the person of Jesus Christ, the nature of the Church, the role of conscience, and various moral problems'? And if so, what were the moral questions involved? And what are 'the Dicasteries of the Holy See' (paragraph 5)? I consulted three reputable dictionaries: one did not list 'dicastery' at all, the other two referred only to the court of law in ancient Athens. Presumably the bishops were on trial, and before six different papal courts, courts apparently of a pre-Christian and pagan model. Could we know what were the changes?

The Pope says (paragraph 5) 'The Church in Australia faces a complex situation which calls for careful discernment on the part of the bishops, and a confident and committed response on the part of all Catholics'. What is that supposed to mean? We already

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knew life wasn't meant to be easy.

Afterword: Since I wrote the above, the Archbishop of Melbourne has released a pamphlet about the Australian bishops' meeting in Rome. This new document treats us as intelligent adults, and nothing I have said about the earlier letter applies to the later one. I would hope that the distribution of the new document is not confined to the archdiocese of Melbourne.

Fred Bendeich
Camberwell, VIC

Dollar dazzler

From Frances H. Awcock, Chief Executive Officer & State Librarian, State Library of Victoria

In response to Dr Edward Duyker's letter 'Mean Melbourne' (*Eureka Street*, March 1999), I would like to clarify the situation with the locker facilities at the State Library of Victoria.

Since 1997, lockers at the Library have operated on the same principle as those at the State Library of New South Wales—the $1 coin is refundable. I regret the situation if Dr Duyker has had an experience with one of the lockers not returning the coin after use. While our security staff check the lockers daily for obvious malfunctioning, we hope that our library users will report specific difficulties they may experience so that our Buildings and Facilities Division can act promptly to have other problems fixed.

As part of the redesign of the foyer in the Library's redevelopment program, we are planning a return to staffed cloaking facilities which will remove the need for lockers. In the interim, I trust that Dr Duyker's experiences with our current facilities will be more positive ones.

Frances H. Awcock
Melbourne, VIC

Leaving it to the kids

From Gerry Harant, Friends of the Earth Anti-Uranium Collective

Ian Hore-Lacey (*Eureka Street*, April 1999) claims to know with certainty that Professor Frank Fisher's figures on the hidden costs of nuclear power are wrong. There is no need to defend Professor Fisher's facts, because he has done so very adequately (same issue). The arrogance with which the nuclear industry, which Hore-Lacy represents, claims to have precise knowledge where uncertainty prevails is truly breathtaking.

One of the most costly aspects of the nuclear industry is the disposal of nuclear waste. Physicist Dr Alan Roberts likened the decision to construct nuclear power stations before means of waste disposal had been developed to sending astronauts into space before having any notion how to retrieve them. That was many years ago, and nothing has changed since.

Mr Hore-Lacy claims to see no problems with this; in various versions of the letter he keeps sending to media he either describes waste disposal as 'straightforward' or, in the case of decommissioning of reactors, simply suggests leaving their radioactive remains lying around for future generations to cope with. Currently, yet another nebulous proposal to store US waste at Yucca Mountain is on the table and has been costed at US$33 billion; it is likely to prove inadequate as well as unacceptable. A study by the Sussex University Science Policy Unit has guessed the cost of disposal for Britain's handful of reactors at somewhere between A$100 billion and A$170 billion (*New Scientist*, 13 December 1997). Nobody, including Mr. Hore-Lacy, can establish the direct and indirect cost of waste disposal, simply because it has never been done successfully anywhere.

Hore-Lacy insults our intelligence by suggesting that the nuclear industry would not exist if it were not a net producer of energy and a money-spinner. The financing of the nuclear industry is as shrouded in mystery as the rest of this secretive operation. Its very origins as well as its continuance lie in the untold billions spent on nuclear weapons in the past and present. Anyone doubting this should look at the current obscene hurry by our federal government to spend some A$500 million on a replacement 'research' reactor built to a long-superseded design in suburban Lucas Heights. No cogent explanation has been given for this 'investment' which contrasts sharply with the government's miserable treatment of research in other fields.

It is criminal to pillage more Aboriginal land at Jabiluka for an industry-predicted nuclear future given that, as the Sussex study concludes, 'the conventional wisdom of the nuclear industry is false'.

Gerry Harant
Blackburn, VIC

Do-rite woman

From I. Goor

The *Catholic Weekly*, 18 April, features a 'general note' on the Sacrament of Penance.

The article was embellished with two pictures depicting the confessional, both showing the requisite male priest, but in both, the penitent pictured is a woman.

Coincidence, thoughtlessness or sign of unintentional (or intentional) affirmation of underlying hierarchical philosophy?

I. Goor
Moonbi, NSW

Spiritual Europe

From Kate Rodgers

I must admit to a mild sense of outrage after reading John Coleman's short piece on churches in Italy and France ('Left at the Altar', *Eureka Street*, April 1999). Mr Coleman laments the lack of people attending Mass in the Madeleine Church in Paris, and takes it as a sign of current 'affluence and materialism'. I was in Paris for a week earlier this year, and visited three churches during that time. The first, St Germain-des-Prés in the 6th *arrondissement*, is a beautiful church, parts of which date from the 12th century. It is also a very big church, but when I attended Mass on a Sunday evening it was full to capacity, mostly with young people aged between 20 and 35. Another, much smaller church in the 6th *arrondissement* is the Chapel of the Miraculous Medal, which sees a constant stream of visitors who come to pray, reflect or attend one of the many daily masses. The third church I visited is on the Right Bank and is the parish church for a community of lay people who work in secular society but who have chosen to express their spirituality by living and praying together. There were at least 30 members of this community present at the vespers service I attended, as well as numerous members of the public.

I would like to reassure Mr Coleman that affluence and materialism has not taken over all of Paris, indeed far from it. I would suggest that instead of finding one example to suit his already-formed opinion, he cast his eye more broadly and have the humility to acknowledge that things may not be as he believes. On a final note, I find it somewhat ironic that despite Mr Coleman's complaints about the prevalence of materialism, his description of churches he visited in Italy dwell only on the architectural and historic aspects of these buildings. All very fascinating, but not much spirituality here.

Kate Rodgers
Northcote, VIC

One among many

From Warren Featherstone

After more than 50 years of dispossession, the Palestinian people have started a campaign for compensation and restitution and I would like to draw your readers' attention to this fact. This international campaign is being co-ordinated by the BADIL Resource Centre in Bethlehem and brings together Palestinian community and political organisations, human rights activists and scholars from around the world.

The restitution campaign aims to raise the right of return for all Palestinian refugees to their ancestral lands, pre-1948, return of properties and compensation for material and non-material losses. The right of restitution for the Palestinian people has been reaffirmed 110 times by the United Nations. Further, as recently as November 1998, the UN General Assembly reaffirmed in Resolution 52/644 the principle, based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international law, that Palestinian refugees are entitled to all revenues from their property. BADIL has also the support of some Jewish and Israeli individuals and organisations.

We are challenged as Christians to respond with justice in *all* instances of oppression, dispossession and human rights abuses. Let us not forget the plight of Palestinians amidst the many instances of abuses against peoples. Our Lord, I believe, demands this of us. In Australia, further information can be obtained from PREA (Palestinian Refugee and Exile Awareness), PO Box 2080, Templestowe Heights Victoria 3107 email: ajudeh@alphalink.com.au BADIL's address is PO Box 278, Bethlehem, Palestine. email: badil@baraka.org; website: www.badil.org.

Warren Featherstone
West Preston, VIC

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NEIL ORMEROD

Changing the guard

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC University has appointed Rev. Dr Tony Kelly CSSR as its second Professor of Theology. The position became vacant when the foundation Professor, Frank Moloney, was made an offer he could not refuse from the Catholic University of America in Washington DC.

Moloney was one of Australia's leading biblical scholars, a specialist in the study of John's Gospel, and had been in the ACU post for about five years. His departure was a surprise—he had not long been reappointed for a second five-year term—and created considerable interest among Australia's theological community as to who would replace him. On Wednesday 21 April the University announced that Kelly had been appointed.

When priests and religious are no longer available, as will soon be the case, who will replace them? Can lay theologians, many desperate for employment, hold on until theological colleges are forced to employ them?

There are many points of contrast between the two figures. While both have solid international reputations, Kelly is a systematic theologian with an interest in things more philosophical, scientific and doctrinal than biblical. He has published a major work on the Trinity and his more recent book, *An Expanding Theology*, integrates theological concerns with modern scientific advances. In addition to his numerous academic articles, he has also written more popular works on Australian Spirituality. Kelly also comes to the position with considerable administrative experience, having been president of the Yarra Theological Union. Moloney had less administrative background. Finally, Kelly's flamboyant personality will provide ACU theology with a different style from Moloney's more direct 'call a spade a spade' approach.

It was always clear that Kelly was a top contender. The final stages of the race, however, were an interesting reflection of the constitution of the Australian theological community. The three people shortlisted for the position represent three distinct groupings within that community.

Kelly is a clerical theologian. He is 60—the average age of clerics in Australia. His training was that of the classic clerical theologian—seminary-based, then post-graduate studies in Rome. He is representative of the senior levels of Australia's theological community—men at the peak of their intellectual powers, trained in the days when seminaries were full, but now having no clear clerical replacements coming through the ranks.

A second shortlisted candidate was Dr Elaine Wainwright, a Catholic nun working at Pius XII Seminary, Brisbane. Wainwright, too, was an impressive candidate, with an Australian doctorate and having studied in Rome, the USA and Jerusalem. She has a solid and growing international reputation in Biblical Studies, and is a specialist in Matthew's Gospel, with a feminist approach. She is representative of a second grouping within the Australian theological community. These are members of religious congregations who have served their time in schools and have been given the opportunity for a second career in theological education. Generally educated in North America or England, they have returned with doctorates, seeking employment fitted to their qualifications. They are mostly in their 50s, with a solid teaching background and wanting to establish themselves in their new careers. Wainwright is the pick of this group; she is now fully established not only in Australia but overseas.

The third shortlisted candidate was Dr Robert Gascoigne, Associate Professor in Theology at ACU. He has a doctorate in the history of ideas from Oxford, a Master in Theology from Melbourne College of Divinity and has studied in Germany with the assistance of the von Humboldt fellowship. He has been working in ACU and its previous incarnations for 18 years and his area is fundamental moral theology and fundamental theology, with writings in ethics and theology in a public arena. He too has growing international links.

Gascoigne represents a third grouping. These are lay theologians who have often come to theology from other disciplines and have pursued it out of their own interest and at their own expense, with little institutional support. They are typically in their 40s or younger, and married with a family. Some, like Gascoigne, have secure jobs within the university sector; others cobble together employment among the declining number of theological colleges.

Now consider the theological market. As those from the first group—like Kelly—move into retirement, theological colleges are turning to those in the second group to fill their places. This is best illustrated by the recent experience of the Catholic Institute of Sydney, the Sydney diocesan theologate.

It recently advertised for three positions, indicating the lack of suitable diocesan clerical personnel who would normally have been appointed to such a position. Two of the three appointments were members of non-clerical religious congregations. The economic strictures on theological colleges mean that they will nearly always appoint a religious—who gets paid only a stipend—over a lay person who requires standard wage rates. The problem is, when priests and religious are no longer available, as will soon be the case, who will replace them? Can lay theologians, many desperate for employment, hold on until theological colleges are forced to employ them? And will the student market begin to pay properly for theological education, currently subsidised by clerical religious orders?

Kelly himself is keenly aware of the problems. A couple of years ago he instituted the 20-20 group, whose purpose was to address the question, 'Who will be teaching theology in the year 2020?' How can they be identified, trained, nurtured and given career opportunities that will make theology an attractive option?

As a government-funded university, ACU can afford to employ lay theologians and does so. What then of the appointment of Kelly as head of Theology? In five years time he will be 65, the normal but not mandatory retirement age. If he chooses to retire, who will replace him? Will another

clerical candidate be found with the right academic standing? Will a religious of the standing of Elaine Wainwright get the nod? Or will a lay person succeed, given that the ACU is the only place that can afford a lay Professor of Theology, and that its *sole* task is the training of lay persons in the theological disciplines? The appointment of the next Professor of Theology at ACU will be an interesting contest.

Neil Ormerod is a lay theologian and Dean of Studies at the Centre for Christian Spirituality, Randwick.

THE CHURCH: 2

MICHAEL MCGIRR

Re-orientation

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S Synod for Oceania, held in Rome last November, and the Vatican's statement on the Australian church, released shortly afterwards, have stirred unprecedented reaction in this country. Less attention has been paid to the Synod for Asia which was held six months earlier.

Given Australia's regional position, and the profound and positive effect of Asian migration on the Australian church over the last 20 years, it was surprising that no Australian bishop was invited to attend the Synod for Asia. The occasion might well have opened their eyes to what was likely to happen to them later in the year.

The Synod for Asia brought together 252 bishops from 50 countries. Those countries are home to 3.5 billion people, two thirds of the world's population, but only 97 million Catholics. The bishops brought with them a wealth of experience in inter-religious dialogue, cross-cultural theological reflection and non-European spirituality. That experience was of little interest in Rome.

Fr Adolfo Nicolas, the former provincial of the Jesuits in Japan, was present in Rome during the Synod for Asia, as an adviser to the Japanese bishops.

'They took the Vatican by surprise,' he says. 'The curial officials thought the Asian bishops would be compliant and softly spoken. Instead they found articulate bishops who said what they wanted and repeated time and again that they didn't like what they were receiving from the administrative bodies in Rome.'

The main bone of contention was the question of appropriate forms of evangelisation. Emphasis on 'proclamation' was in tension with emphasis on 'witness' and 'dialogue'.

'Evangelisation has been hitting brick walls all over Asia because it is packaged in a rational and distant theological language which is simply incomprehensible in many cultures,' says Nicolas. 'The idea of inculturating western theology into Asia is hopeless. The western church has a rich heritage, but you cannot inculturate the particular journey of one particular church and make it normative for all.

'The western tradition tends to be rationalistic and intellectualistic. The ethos of most Asian cultures is much more internal and bodily and mystical. It is very difficult for the Roman curia to understand Asia. When you don't understand, you fear. So when they hear a theologian talking about the uniqueness of Christ or other central issues of our Faith in ways which do not echo our familiar theology, there is a tendency to discover in them all too soon seeds of heresy.'

Archbishop Ikenaga of Osaka told the synod that a significant part of the failure of Christianity in his country was that it preached a masculine God without stressing God's 'maternal traits': 'the fatherly figure divides and selects; the motherly figure unites and embraces all'. Korea's Cardinal Stephen Kim said, 'While in full union with the church universal, we are to become Asian in our way of thinking, living and sharing our own Christ experience'.

Bishops from Vietnam and Chinese cultures developed the example of an evolving church attitude to ancestor worship. Far from being reviled, as it once was, ancestor worship has been able to enrich Christian understanding of the communion of saints. The general secretary of the Vietnamese bishops' conference, Nguen Son Lam, said, 'the churches of Asia must put on Asian clothes'. Bishop Orlando Quevedo from the Philippines said, 'Catholic systems of belief are western and foreign. Catholic uniformity must be replaced with Catholic diversity.'

Bishop Francis Hardisumatra spoke on behalf of the Indonesian bishops' conference: 'What we need is trust: trust in God and trust in each other ... Bishops are not branch secretaries waiting for instructions from headquarters. We are a communion of local churches.'

'There was a remarkable confluence among the bishops,' says Nicolas. 'They were asking for more autonomy, more creativity and more space to exercise leadership and responsibility.'

Nicolas points out that it was the Pope himself who appeared to listen most carefully. Curial cardinals caused grave insult to Asian sensibilities. Having invited their guests to Rome, they read them a lecture and often disappeared. Many bishops were affronted by the games that were played behind the scenes. One game involved manipulating language. If the Asian bishops asked for subsidiarity, the curia heard a request for democracy and denied it. When the bishops asked for inculturation, the curia refused to countenance separation. When the bishops asked for autonomy, the curia rejected independence. Indeed, a standing joke among the bishops, introduced by a very moderate Filipino canonist, was that the Vatican had special software for deleting certain terms from conversation.

'The curial officials thought the Asian bishops would be compliant and softly spoken. Instead they found articulate bishops who said what they wanted and repeated time and again that they didn't like what they were receiving from the administrative bodies in Rome.'
—Fr Adolfo Nicolas

'The church stands to miss out on so much,' concludes Nicolas. 'We need the example of Asian mysticism to help us integrate thought and life.' Bishops all over the world are also asking how much longer the curia can remain outside the church.

Michael McGirr SJ is *Eureka Street*'s consulting editor.


The Month's Traffic



Cause for applause

YOU CAN TELL how a meeting is going by watching the water jugs on the top table. If the speakers keep reaching for water, you know that they are nervous and likely to stay that way. When the meeting turns a corner, they stop drinking.

It was like that at the Sydney Town Hall one bleak night in April. A lay ginger group, Catalyst for Renewal, who run sessions in pubs about spirituality, had taken the town hall (seating: 2048) to get discussion going on Australia's relations with the Roman curia. At issue was a document, *Statement of Conclusions*, which curial apparatchiks laid on Australian bishops at a meeting before Christmas, heavily critical of the local style of Catholicism.

Would anyone come? When you book the town hall, that's always a concern. No worries: with 30 minutes to go, the floor of the hall was filled and by starting time there was standing room only. But would there be any punch-ups? The temperature of Australian Catholicism has gone up several points recently, so no-one can guess what might happen at a big public meeting. As the speakers filed on to the platform they filled their water glasses and began to sip. What they saw from up there, however, should have reassured them.

Here was the Vatican II generation in conclave—grey-haired, educated, well-fed Anglo-Celts, many of them women. And passionate in commitment to their Australian Catholic identities. A big meeting is like a big animal: it reacts slowly but massively. At this meeting you had to watch the movements, as well as listen to the words, in order to read the meaning of what was going on. (The Words, by the way, will appear soon from Catalyst for Renewal.)

They were polite and understanding when two bishops, Brian Heenan of Rockhampton and Geoffrey Robinson, a Sydney auxiliary, told how they had been sandbagged in Rome. Well, they knew that already. Similarly, Sister Annette Cunliffe RSC, president of the religious orders' peak body, got an attentive, polite hearing. There seemed to be a lot of her constituents in the hall and she did them proud.

The big beast really moved when Robert Fitzgerald got up to speak. He's been the head of St Vincent de Paul and the Australian Council of Social Service and is a polished, exciting speaker. This night, the star of the evening, he enjoyed himself. Al Gore's mother once sent him a three-word card before a big speech: SMILE—RELAX—ATTACK. That is the formula Fitzgerald followed.

He joked that in 19th-century Rome it was said that Pope Gregory XVI had first blessed his subjects, then imprisoned them; Pius IX blessed them, then shot them. Fortunately, there was no danger of that happening in the archdiocese of Sydney, '... though I don't know about Melbourne.' The meeting put its head back and roared. On the platform the other speakers stopped reaching for water. Robert Fitzgerald had got through.

Now, with the crowd awake, he turned to the Roman criticisms. They had said there was a crisis of faith in Australia. No, said Fitzgerald, it was a crisis of confidence in the ability of the church to deal with questioning. The meeting applauded. From then on a reporter's notebook was studded with 'applause', like this: Doesn't acknowledge leadership failures (applause). Crisis of institutionalisation of the faith as we currently experience it (applause). Obsession with power and authority (applause). Our church is a church of great hope so we should be hopeful because there is room for diversity (great applause and cheering).

Not everyone applauded. There were some young fogies in the town hall who didn't seem to be enjoying themselves. They sat on their hands. Two of them occupied gallery seats above the standees at the back of the hall, waiting for the next speaker. This was Father Michael Whelan SM, executive director of Catalyst for Renewal and a columnist at the Jesuit magazine *Madonna*. His many fans applauded him even before he arrived at the microphone. There were some boos also. And now the two boyos at the back of the hall had the opportunity they had come for. But their incessant heckling could not get the better of Whelan's strong lungs. He had caught and now voiced the mood of the meeting. The Roman curialists had put Vatican II into reverse. They spoke of dialogue but refused to listen. The curia had become a

Conversation starters

MORE THAN 600 PEOPLE TURNED OUT for the launch of *Call to Change*, an initiative of the Catholic Archdiocese of Hobart, on 27 April. The Stanley Burbury Theatre at the University of Tasmania was charged with anticipation as the Tasmanian church began a new chapter in its commitment to positive change.

Call to Change emerged as a response to issues confronting the local church, and as an expression of the deepening conviction among the people that *all* share responsibility for its life and future. Tasmanian Catholics were invited by Coadjutor Archbishop, Adrian Doyle, to participate in a wide-ranging conversation. Eleven Catholics, representing various faces of the Tasmanian church, took part in the conversation, MC-ed by Melbourne's Dr Maryanne Confoy. What ensued was not a debate, and not about point-scoring or winning arguments. It was a model of constructive exchange between people of diverse opinion, experience and interest, and a demonstration that such an exchange is possible.

Following the event, Catholics around Tasmania have been invited to form grassroots 'conversation groups' in parishes, workplaces, among family, friendship and interest groups, in informal settings so they can continue the conversation begun at the launch. The groups will be made up of Catholics who worship regularly and those who do not. Mechanisms have been put in place to ensure that Archbishop Doyle becomes fully involved in the ongoing conversation.

Hope and optimism characterised the launch of *Call to Change*. People obviously believe that this is a conversation worth having, that the challenges facing all the people in the Tasmanian church—indeed the whole of the Australian Catholic Church—are also opportunities, and that constructive dialogue—faithful both to the Gospels and the times—is not only possible but inevitable. ■

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sort of counter authority to the authority of the bishops. Their real agenda was about power. The audience made it plain that he was speaking to their deepest feelings. Whatever Rome might say, they do not think that they are living inauthentic Catholic lives.

By now it had become obvious that the people weren't there to ruminate over the words of a document or to ask who wrote it or who signed it. They were there to voice their distress that, having committed their lives to the vision of a Vatican II church, they found this vision being repudiated by men in the Vatican. These sons and daughters of Rome's far-flung ecclesiastical empire want to be treated as members of the household, not as helots. St Augustine would have known what they were on about. He thought the central moral failing of all empires was what he called *cupiditas dominandi*, the love of control.

Nevertheless, for all its feeling of being a piece of history in the making, it was a very genial meeting. Similar history-making meetings in the past have been more inflamed. In 1859, when Sydney laity tried to cashier Archbishop Polding's Administration (to be met by threats of excommunication), there was blood in their eyes. The 1966 meeting of the laity, which rebuffed Bishop Muldoon's insults to a visiting nun, was choleric. By contrast, the mood of the Sydney Town Hall meeting was cheery—cheery in the way a monsignor gave up his seat among the VIPs to a little Vietnamese nun in a pretty grey habit; cheery in the way once-upon-a-time pupils greeted former teachers; cheery in the way everyone put up with the incivilities of those hecklers; cheery in the way they belted out the hymns, 'Come, Holy Ghost' and 'How Great Thou Art', although there were some who refused to sing that George Beverley Shea hit from the Billy Graham crusades. Beneath the cheer, however, lay a mood that could be read in the growls and rumbles and applause of the big beast. Being a Vatican monsignor is the lowest form of ecclesiastical life; and there was anger running deep through the town hall against those curialists who had had the gall to call them inauthentic Catholics. Yet, despite the righteous anger, the evening was noticeably grown-up.

Part of the reason for this was the suave chairmanship of Geraldine Doogue. Affable yet firm, she has enough steel in her to keep a meeting on track. There were no floor mikes at the town hall, lest they became an occasion of sin for gasbags. Instead, written questions were collated at a side table and directed to speakers by Doogue. Noticeably, she made sure that the Catholic Right got a fair go.

There were seven speakers (the other was Marea Donovan, president of Catalyst for Renewal). A Bible reader might call them the Seven Thunders of the Apocalypse—whose actual words, according to the Book of Revelation, were less important than their clamorous sound. Will the sound of the thunder down under on this historic night be heard elsewhere?

—Edmund Campion

Fate of the union

In December last year, Dr David Kemp, the Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs, announced that legislation would be introduced giving university students the right to choose whether or not they belong to their Student Union. The compulsory amenities and services fee that is collected annually from all students would become a matter of choice for individual students. The issue of Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU) was on the table once again.

I say again because, when I started at Melbourne University in 1994, a VSU debate was well under way in Victoria, courtesy of legislative moves by the Kennett Government that were similar to the current federal ones. The legislation was partially thwarted by the Keating Government, which agreed to make up the funding shortfall for certain 'allowable' services that student unions provided. The outcome was the choice about whether you wanted to belong to the Union or not, and a compulsory fee irrespective of that choice. At Melbourne University, the fee dropped from $324 to $305. Campus life settled down to an outcome with which—in the true spirit of compromise—no-one was really happy. Life moved on.

Until now. Dr Kemp claims that 'this legislation is all about choice'. Cynical observers may argue that it is all about trying again to weaken organisations that are a traditional training ground for earnest young ALP operators (Kim Beazley, Bob Hawke and Gareth Evans all headed their student associations in their fresh-faced days). Moreover, these organisations are often ardent opponents of Liberal policies. Rose Tracy, the National Union of Students (NUS) President in 1998, describes VSU as a 'vengeful quest to destroy student organisations'.

Whatever his motives, Dr Kemp uses two main arguments for making student union membership voluntary. First, that no union should have compulsory membership—forcing people to join any association is wrong. This argument works if you regard student associations, guilds and unions as being like trade unions or your local sports club. Opponents of VSU don't see them like that, and liken the compulsory fee to local council rates, paid to supply services to members of the university community.

In my experience, the latter view is the more valid one. Comparing student unions with local councils—or to state and federal governments for that matter—seems reasonable. They are all institutions concerned with caring for a community. The 'choice' element, which Dr Kemp so emphasises, lies in choosing to attend a particular university, rather than in whether

to be a member of that university community.

Once a member of that community, one has the chance to become an active participant in the democratic process, to ensure that those services that either cannot or should not be provided on a user-pays basis are available as effectively as possible. Or so the theory goes. Yet even if the practice doesn't always go so well, the principle is too strong to abandon. This position has been articulated well by both the National Union of Students (NUS) and the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee (AVCC), yet some remain unconvinced.

Dr Kemp's second rationale goes like this: if you put the onus on the student associations to show that membership is worthwhile, they will become more responsive and effective organisations. That they are commonly unresponsive and rarely

Duncan Yardley

effective for many students I do not question. What is doubtful is the wisdom of an economic, market-based approach to solving this perennial problem.

A once-a-year choice about becoming a member of the student union is hardly going to shape these organisations into effective customer service entities. One only needs to see a little of student politics to know that there are many participants keen to put their own objectives or those of their party ahead of the overall strength of the association. Some would even prefer to see an association that is marginalised, catering only for certain students. Students' decisions will hinge on their beliefs or apathy or mates, as often as the 'return on investment' they receive. Students at any campus are there for too little time, with too many priorities, for the heavy stick of capitalism to provoke the desired outcomes.

So as the legislation goes before a Senate Committee, and 'Hey hey, ho ho, VSU has got to go!' is being chanted by activists around the country, I find myself for compulsory student unionism. However, I am wary of the smug rhetoric of the NUS and other student organisations: it does not sit well with their general unwillingness to cater for all students.

That unwillingness is a failure of representative democracy. Dr Kemp has his solution. Mine would be the retention of compulsory membership, with the addition of compulsory voting. Compulsory voting is a hallmark of our democratic institutions as it forces elected representatives to take all members into account. During my years at Melbourne University, voter turnout was always around 15-20 per cent of students. This meant a group needed to represent only 10 per cent of students to gain power. Further, it meant that the best way to maintain that power was to marginalise other members, so they became increasingly apathetic. I wouldn't say that groups had it as a grand plan, but some did seem to operate that way.

University life is often considered not to be the real world. However, the reductive approach to university communities that the Coalition is taking will be real enough for future university students, who may have to take a cash-in-hand approach to the diminished experiences on offer. Further, the soft solution of being allowed to opt out of a community, instead of making its decisions more representative of its members, does not bode well for the mindset that we, as citizens, may take to broader issues in the future.

—Tim Moore

The end of the line

Wattle Glen is a very small place. Usually if you say you live in Wattle Glen, most Melbourne people nod sagely and pretend they know where you are talking about. They are mostly (a) lying, (b) thinking of Wattle Park, although they probably don't know where that is either, or (c) thinking of Yarra Glen, and, although they have an idea of where it is, they have never actually been there.

Wattle Glen is the second last stop on the Hurstbridge line. Its claim to fame is that it is between Diamond Creek and Hurstbridge. Actually, its real claim to fame is that an episode of *The Henderson Kids* was once filmed there—still much talked about. It was very exciting when Wattle Glen opened its first shop. Prior to that it had been the station, the CFA, the tennis club and the primary school. That was it. People who live in Wattle Glen are very proud of it and no-one can quite understand why—unless they've lived there.

The station was always a big part of Wattle Glen's life. When I was little my father caught the train to the city every day. He was joined by a horde of other fathers, who all seemed to know each other, but I could never quite work out how. Everyone caught the train, because there was only one car and wives needed it. At around 6pm, wives would dutifully appear at the station waiting for their husband's train, ready to shift into the passenger seat for the ride home. If you were really lucky, like my mum, and you lived near the station, you could wait until you heard the bells and get there just in time.

There used to be a proper station. I have vague recollections of quite a large wooden construction with a ticket office and a waiting area and, I think, toilets. It used to be staffed by a woman called Queenie. There was something about women at that time who worked in places like railway stations—they all seemed to wear too much eye shadow, call everyone 'Love' and have names like Queenie. Queenie was part of the Wattle Glen tableau. You could often see her running hurriedly across the street to the station when the train was coming, because she'd been across the road at the neighbour's, having a cup of tea. But that was all right, because the train always waited. Queenie knew everyone's name and, no doubt, everyone's business.

I don't know what ever happened to Queenie. We had a few casuals after her, but it was never the same. The station began to be staffed less and less as the years went by, until it was just at peak hours, and then not at all. The old station building burned down, I think, and was replaced with something smaller. Now it's just a shelter and a ticket machine, and a phone in a permanent state of vandalism.

I recall one occasion as a university student getting off the train at Museum Station (as it was once known) and being greeted by an unpleasant and belligerent inspector. Usually in that situation you just had to say you boarded at Wattle Glen and they would send you on to the ticket office to buy a ticket. Cunning rats behind you who had boarded at Heidelberg without a ticket would try the same thing, usually successfully. On this occasion however there was a little too much power in a mind a little too small. I was unceremoniously escorted to the office where he insisted on telephoning Wattle Glen station, which,

not surprisingly, was still on the internal phone list. I explained that there was simply nothing there. Nothing. An empty space. He did not believe me. I started to enjoy it—watching him trying to escape with pride intact from a battle I knew I could not lose.

Wattle Glen station is currently enjoying more attention from the railway authorities than it has in a long, long while. I've left Wattle Glen, but my parents are still there, and when I drive home sometimes very late in the evening I see a man in the station shelter, struggling to stay warm and awake. He's a security guard, hanging around day and night, making sure that no-one damages the automatic ticket machine. And he's actually a different person every day, every night. No-one knows their names, probably no-one really cares.

Even in its halcyon days Wattle Glen station was never the subject of this much attention. You would never have found Queenie there late at night. She would pack her boys off home and then head home herself. But now the station finds itself home to a succession of strangers. If these men are there to protect the machine which sells the tickets, call me naive, but why can't they just sell tickets? Doesn't this defeat the whole purpose of the machine? Cut out the middle-man, or in this case, the middle-machine.

We used to have one person, part of the community, part of a permanent workforce, who used to sell tickets to people whose names she knew. Now we have a string of different, anonymous men, not employed by the railways, but contracted to them, who are not there to serve, but to guard. And not really to guard us, although I guess they would if they had to. They're not dishing out any kindness and certainly not in receipt of any. Just sitting there on the bench, cold and lonely, probably working twice the hours Queenie did and costing half as much. The guard is there to protect the interests of the machine and those who own it.

When I have thoughts like this I worry that I am yearning for days gone by, that as a twenty-something I am already longing for the 'good old days'. I don't think that's right. But Wattle Glen has changed. People from interstate tell me how fantastic it must be living in Victoria now, with all the great things happening and all the edifices being constructed. I tell them that Melbourne has changed, in its heart, and not for the better. They just nod sagely and pretend they understand.

—Josh Puls

Staring down the Gorgon

I REMEMBER SITTING UP LATE ONE NIGHT to watch a movie (the name of which escapes me) about the trial and rehabilitation of a demure church-going woman who committed a most heinous and violent crime of vengeance against another woman. The very last scene takes us inside a counselling session years after the event. 'I'm a monster,' she says to her therapist. 'No you're not,' he replies, 'You're just like the rest of us.' As the camera zooms in on her lips she whispers, 'Is that supposed to comfort me?'

In her article 'Count nothing human foreign' (*Eureka Street*, May 1999, pp12–13), Kate Manton quotes from Inga Clendinnen's recent work, *Reading the Holocaust*. The passage cited gives the impression that the author largely shares the consensus view with respect to Holocaust uniqueness. However, for precisely the reasons Manton so helpfully sets out, Clendinnen respectfully and sensitively cautions *against* claims of uniqueness for the Holocaust, fearing that it may be bracketed out of history—that forum wherein the actions of our species are most reliably consulted and interrogated. This, she argues, we cannot afford, for '[w]e need to know both ourselves and the worlds we are capable of making if we can hope to change any part of either' (p20).

In the wake of Kosovo, East Timor and Denver, these objectives have clearly lost none of their urgency, and Clendinnen challenges the view that the only decent way to appropriate such abominations is with 'awed incomprehension'. Instead she is committed to the quixotic notion that 'the human actions of the past are sufficiently amenable to retrieval, analysis and interpretation to generate usable truths for the present' (p26). Undaunted by the nature of the task, Clendinnen's investigations into the perpetrators of the Holocaust lead her to the chilling thesis that their actions 'stand at one extreme of the continuum which begins with the familiar and extends to the profoundly strange' (p31).

But *Reading the Holocaust* is no facile pampering of the instinct identified by Lawrence Langer 'to establish a principle of causality in human experience' (p45). Indeed, in Clendinnen's view, the finest Holocaust literature is that which resists the temptation to closure—'a privilege reserved for art' (p204)—that of Tadeusz Borowski, Primo Levi, Charlotte Delbo, for example, who 'present us with "fiction" made out of [irreducibly individual] experience' (p190). Likewise, good history must not yield the grand narrative, the panoramic view, nor treat as 'an Event' even a phenomenon so apparently unitary (when viewed from the perpetrators' perspective) as the 'Final Solution' (pp21–22).

Even with the capacity for nuance which, at their best, these two forms of discourse exhibit, the author (an historian) believes that 'there are innate difficulties in the successful literary representation of the ... Holocaust' (p188). What is interesting in view of Manton's claim for just this achievement by the celluloid fable *Life is Beautiful* is that Clendinnen's sense of art's limitations as an investigative tool are most pointed with reference to film. Some notable exceptions notwithstanding (in particular, Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*) Clendinnen confesses to 'a mistrust of film as a vehicle for conveying authentic, which must mean unstable, historical understanding' (p196). Although incomparable in terms of its simulation of reality, film 'remains a drunken giant, inept for the delicate imaginative and critical work of transmitting our uncertain understandings of the worlds which have closed behind us' (p198).

Whether it be history or art, Clendinnen is insistent that, like Perseus, we must take the risk of staring down the Gorgon: '... we must do more than register guilt, or grief, or anger, or disgust, because neither reverence for those who suffer nor revulsion from those who inflict the suffering will help us overcome its power ... and to see it clearly' (p205). And if, when we look, we see with Clendinnen the alarming possibility that 'we are a long way from monsters here' (p130); if we agree that automatically to retreat into pathological psychology or invoke metaphysical concepts of evil when faced with moral opacity is to be stared down ourselves; if we share her conclusion that 'civilised values are a chosen state, not a natural condition' (p181), then how much more vital the 'struggle of memory against forgetting' becomes (Milan Kundera's phrase, p206)—a struggle to which she and Manton alike are right to enjoin us. ■

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Resistance is useless

RESISTANCE IS RAPIDLY BECOMING one of the world's nastiest problems. Not political, religious, social or economic resistance, but the resistance of disease-causing bacteria to antibiotics.

At present, our hospitals are under siege from drug-resistant members of the species *Staphylococcus aureus* (golden staph). Tuberculosis is on the rise as resistant strains spread across the world. And many other diseases thought to have been licked by antibiotics and vaccines since World War II are now coming back to haunt us.

But researchers in the Centre for Marine Biofouling and Bio-Innovation at the University of New South Wales are investigating an area that may provide an answer to the problem of resistance—bacterial communication. They are trying to stop bacteria from conversing in order to prevent them from behaving badly and becoming resistant.

During the past decade, researchers all over the world have found that communication between bacteria is common. Bacteria use chemicals to initiate and co-ordinate joint action. It's a means of overcoming the limitations of their small size. One or two bacteria have little impact on their surrounds. But millions of individuals working together may well be able to alter the environment to their advantage. A few bacteria releasing corrosive enzymes are hardly a match for a wall of tooth enamel, but a whole horde working together causes decay, and all benefit from the nutrients released when teeth break down.

To co-ordinate such actions, a typical bacterial communication system works this way. Each member of a species of bacteria makes, releases and detects a particular chemical. In regions where only a few members of that species are present, the environmental concentration of the chemical will be very low. But as the numbers of bacteria build up so will the level of the chemical. In fact, the chemical concentration is directly related to the population density of the species. And above a certain level, it acts as a switch, turning on genes within the bacteria which can change the behaviour of the individuals within a population. Sometimes they turn feral. The genetic lung disorder cystic fibrosis, for instance, is often exacerbated by the bacterium *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, which releases destructive enzymes and clogging fibres within the lungs only after its population builds up to a level where the action is likely to overwhelm the body's defences.

But if bacteria have found a clever way to take on the world, you can bet that their victims have found a way of fighting back. So reasoned marine ecologist, Dr Peter Steinberg, when confronted with the bacteria which form films over all marine surfaces and thus pave the way for fouling by larger organisms such as barnacles and algae. Steinberg found what he was looking for in *Delisea pulchra*, a small red seaweed which lives on the south coast of New South Wales. *Delisea* is remarkable in that it keeps its fronds clear of bacteria, and it does so by manufacturing and secreting a chemical known as furanone.

When Steinberg, his colleague microbiologist Professor Staffan Kjelleberg and their students tested furanones on bacterial species in the laboratory, they found these compounds had the capacity to jam the chemical communication system, to clog the switch. In fact, they provided a means of controlling the density-dependent changes in bacterial behaviour. And that opens the way to combating resistance.

In any one bacterial species, genetic mutation provides a huge array of individuals which differ from their parents and each other. So it is almost inevitable that in any species attacked with an antibiotic, there will be some individuals which can resist it. As the other members of the species are wiped out, these individuals are left to breed the next generation. Clearly, over time, the species itself will become more and more resistant to the antibiotic. And that is just what is happening now. By controlling behaviour, we can stop bacteria from harming us, without killing them. In that way we will not efficiently pick out the bacteria which are resistant to our defence measures. This should make it difficult for bacteria to counter those drugs which interfere with chemical communication.

The picture of bacterial communication which is beginning to emerge is very complex. Lots and lots of chemical messengers stimulate many different responses, within species and between species. It all provides an enormously sophisticated tapestry of communication to jam, corrupt or otherwise subvert to human advantage. The uncovering of the role of furanones in *Delisea* is just a first step along the way. ■

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Written by the winners

THE HALLOWED HALLS of the Australian War Memorial, with their milling crowds of respectful visitors, do not at first appear a likely setting for heated political debate. But according to one visiting academic, institutions such as the Memorial are the site of a free speech struggle that threatens the very survival of democracy itself.

Professor Martin Harwit resigned as head of Washington's National Air and Space Museum of the Smithsonian Institution in May 1995 following the controversial scrapping of an exhibition dealing with the atomic bombing of Japan. It was centred around the Enola Gay, the US Airforce B-29 Superfortress that dropped the first bomb on Hiroshima.

The Smithsonian incident made headlines around the world and sent shock waves throughout the international museum community, proving what can happen when curators step on the toes of powerful lobby groups.

In Canberra for a speaking engagement in May, Harwit described the controversy—which saw US veterans groups outraged by what they took to be an anti-American exhibition—as an example of the politics of patriotism interfering with the sacred mission of museums to tell the truth.

'In a democratic society there has to be some place where people can go for dispassionate, accurate, objective information,' Professor Harwit said.

'Countries also need to have places where they concentrate on teaching patriotism and perhaps propaganda for national self image. But there ought to be a clear division between institutions that raise patriotic fervour, which is important for most nations, as distinct from educational facilities where people can go and feel that they're really getting the straight story—as well as one can put it.'

It's a view that poses uncomfortable questions for many Australian institutions—most obviously the Australian War Memorial, with its specific remit to combine those very two functions: to be both a museum detailing this country's military history, and the sacred altar of national war commemoration.

The argument is also a curious one in that it seems to fall somewhere between traditional and postmodern views of history. Two legitimate versions of the truth coexist: one for the important function of

raising patriotic fervour, the other for listing the facts.

In the first, history is a construct intended to support the discourse of nation and patriotism. Such a view might normally see museums as that construct's most obvious edifice: a place where 'history' is literally built or assembled from selected physical remnants of the past. But Harwit regards the museum as a repository for his second version of truth: facts displayed for the education of the public.

The Enola Gay exhibition set out, as its curators saw it, to list the facts—to tell the whole Hiroshima story. As well as dealing with the horrific death and destruction caused by the bomb, it delved into the debate within the Truman administration over whether the bomb should have been used at all. Perhaps most controversially, it came close to entering that debate by claiming that, at the time, official estimates of American casualties in a land invasion, seen as the alternative means of ending war, were around 63,000 rather than the 500,000 to 1 million originally claimed. That is less than half the number of (mostly civilian) Japanese killed or injured when the Enola Gay unleashed its deadly cargo (not to mention the casualties at Nagasaki).

Veterans, Republican Congressmen (then in the ascendancy after their recent electoral landslide), and the conservative press were outraged. Even President Bill Clinton, picking up on the country's new conservative mood, questioned the museum's judgment in staging such an exhibition in the 50th anniversary year of the war's end.

In the face of such overwhelming political pressure, the Smithsonian buckled, the exhibition was effectively cancelled and Harwit resigned.

For Harwit those events provide a salutary lesson in the dangers to free speech and democracy of mixing two versions of historical truth, both of which have distinct purposes.

'I think one ought to make clear what the functions of museums are, particularly in a democratic society ... When you mix [that] up then you run into the danger of people not knowing whether they are being shown an exhibition in order to increase the patriotic fervour or in order to inform the public.'

Not surprisingly, Dr Peter Stanley, principal historian at the Australian War Memorial, disagrees. Although he acknowledges that there is a tension between the Memorial's educational and commemorative functions, he says combining the two in one institution actually enhances both.

The Memorial, like most other museums around the world, learned important lessons from the Enola Gay saga. 'It goes to show that historians ought to talk to the people whose stories they tell, and they ought to listen to what they say and take their views into account,' Stanley says.

In this case 'those people' are the veterans—those who actually fought in the war. Stanley consulted widely with veterans' groups in assembling the Memorial's new World War II Galleries, for example.

Olympic seats available: a pair of banana lounges in prime position at Melbourne's former Olympic Village, West Heidelberg. Photograph by Greg Scullin.

It's an approach that seems to have worked well for the memorial if its success in avoiding Enola Gay-style controversies is any guide, but where does that leave the truth?

'History isn't about having a monopoly on truth. I believe it's about having a diversity of interpretation, and the veterans' view has a place in that.' That is not to say Stanley always agrees with those views, or even finds them palatable, just that they need to be acknowledged and respected.

The Smithsonian listened to the views of those whose stories it sought to tell, it was just that some of them were Japanese. Its mistake was political rather than historiographical: it gave too much weight to the Japanese view and not enough to that of those who wielded influence in Washington.

Harwit says that America's failure to face up to the Hiroshima tragedy is akin to Japan's notorious reticence in acknowledging its own guilt for wartime atrocities.

'These are really issues that any democracy has to face. Each country has certain things that it's not terribly proud of and the question of how to deal with that is really what was epitomised in the Enola Gay controversy,' he says.

Australia too has a conflict buried in its past that it has trouble confronting: the war of occupation waged against Aborigines. Debate about whether to acknowledge that conflict at the War Memorial has flared periodically within the institution for the last 20 years, just as it has within the wider community.

The real question for Australian museums is not so much which voices they will allow to speak, as which stories they will choose to tell. When will they tell the founding war story that lies at the very heart of Australian history?

Stanley says the Memorial will move in step with the rest of the community and the government of the day.

Despite his incorporation of competing voices and history-by-negotiation approach, Stanley rejects the postmodernist tag, describing himself as a 'straight down the line' liberal historian. But perhaps that compromise, while understandable for someone in his position, makes him more of a historical pragmatist.

In Harwit's terms such compromise is dangerous for democracy because museums play a vital role in the very community debate from which the Memorial waits to take its cue. It represents a blurring of the patriotic truth of national identity and the factual truth museums have a sacred duty to uphold.

Such blurring, Harwit says, 'is dangerous because a democracy only really works well when you have an informed public. People need to know what they're voting on—they need to have the opportunity to make up their own minds having been truthfully informed.' **—Jim Dickins**

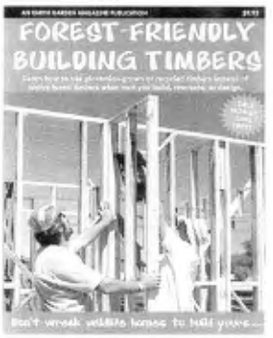
Out of the woodwork

THERE IS A SAYING that publishers pray to have their latest effort banned in Boston: sales will rocket, because banned books are bound to be *risqué*.

There is nothing remotely lubricious about *Forest-Friendly Building Timbers*, so it was a surprise to some when there was a strong effort to prevent its distribution.

Alan Gray is the editor and publisher of *Earth Garden* magazine, so the look of the book is very influenced by magazine design. The cover shows two blokes doing carpenterish things to a wooden framework on a sunny, lucky-country day.

Globetrotting British TV botanist, David Bellamy, famously said that Australia is the only First World country that is *mega*-biodiverse. But the kind of wood you work with, the book argues, could change that. 'Don't wreck wildlife homes to build yours', says the front cover, and the inside goes on to back up the slogan with short summaries and extracts of scientific studies and government reports before giving a fully explained list of plantation and recycled timber products.



It is possible, the book argues, to build a house from foundations to roof without ever having to use native forest timber or its by-products. According to contributor Judy Clark, a Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies at ANU, the plantation industry is growing apace. 'Australia's plantation industry is a big investor; its world-class mills add value ... and create jobs', she writes.

Although all of the scientific information contained in *Forest-Friendly Building Timbers* (*FFBT*) has been published before without incident, the book has been challenged by the Executive Director of the National Association of Forest Industries (NAFI), Dr Robert Bain. On 1 April 1999, Earth Garden Books received a letter, dated 31 March 1999, from NAFI's Canberra solicitors, Ken Cush & Associates, asserting that *FFBT* contained many statements that were false, misleading or deceptive, contravening sections 52, 53 and 55 of the Trade Practices Act (TPA). It is more usual, if a book offends, for its author and publisher to be sued for defamation. Why the TPA was used here is something all the parties involved must now be asking.

The letter went on to require that the book be withdrawn immediately from sale and sought an undertaking from the recipient that they should cease publication, distribution, advertising and promotion of the book by close of business 1 April to avoid a Federal Court injunction. Similar letters were sent to Gemcraft Books and Gordon and Gotch, the book's distributors, to the Wilderness Society and BBC Hardware and to Alan Gray and Anne Hall, the editors.

Under advice from barrister Brian Walters, Earth Garden Books replied to the letter, refusing to accede to its demands. Walters' comment later was, 'I regard their claims as laughable.'

In the meantime, things had been moving in other quarters. BBC Hardware, a large nationwide chain, had been selling and promoting the book in their stores. At the bottom of the back cover one reads, 'This book is published with the support of the Wilderness Society and BBC Hardware.' BBC conducted the Canberra and Hobart launches, and an undated media release stated it was 'proud to promote and stock "Forest Friendly Timbers" (sic)'. According to Alan Gray, BBC was strongly involved in *FFBT*'s production: they took out three full-page advertisements in *FFBT* and provided Earth Garden Books with camera-ready copy and research material about products discussed in the book.

Before receiving their version of the 31 March solicitor's letter, BBC had already been contacted by a representative of the native timber industry. On 22 March, BBC received a fax, signed Graeme Gooding. He is Executive Director of the Victorian Association of Forest Industries (VAFI), a state branch of NAFI. Part of this letter was quoted by Senator Nick Bolkus in the Senate a month later as the dispute deepened:

> While you may gain some sales from 'green' builders or consumers influenced by the misinformation in this book, you could lose as much in any backlash, if the people you are harming choose to campaign against BBC.

Things began to heat up on 6 April when ABC Radio presenter Terry Lane, as president of the Free Speech Committee, issued a media release expressing alarm at NAFI's attempt 'to ban the distribution and sale' of *FFBT*, calling it 'censorship by the spurious use of Trade Practices Law'.

On 8 April, BBC put out a media release announcing that it was withdrawing the book from its stores, '[following] a threat of legal action against BBC Hardware by the National Association of Forest Industries, which took exception to the publication'.

There was consternation at Earth Garden, the Free Speech Committee and the Wilderness Society and widespread speculation on just what had made BBC swing 180 degrees from its previous course.

By the following Sunday, Professor Alan Fels, Director of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), was being interviewed by Lane on Radio National's program *The National Interest*. Lane asked Professor Fels if NAFI's threat of legal action was a legitimate use of the Trade Practices Act. Fels' answer was no—that publishers and authors, as providers of information, were clearly exempt under section 65A of the Act. He went on to express surprise that NAFI had sent the 31 March letter alleging that Alan Gray was in breach of the Act, and said: '... I would have thought they were under some kind of ethical obligation, to say the least, to tell Mr Gray and BBC the full provisions of the Act, not just 52.'

On 13 April the ACCC met with representatives of Earth Garden Books, the Wilderness Society and NAFI. An ACCC media release for the day said in part: 'The ACCC is investigating possible breaches of the Trade Practices Act 1974.'

Politicians began to take notice. As one would expect, Greens Senator Bob Brown sent off flurries of media releases, but there were some surprises: in WA the book was launched by the State National Party Director, Jamie Kronborg, on 20 April. And on 21 April there was a lively discussion in the Senate under Matters of Public Importance. Senator Brown raised the matter, having provided a copy of *FFBT* to every senator. He claimed that this was not the first time that the native forest industry had tried to stop dissenting views with threats of legal action: he had been told by a 'spokesperson from North, the biggest woodchipper in the Southern Hemisphere', that everything he said was 'put before a bank of QCs', and that a colleague of his, Peg Putt, was threatened with legal action for making 'a public statement that [the native forest logging industry] did not like in defence of forests'. Later Senator Nick Bolkus added a claim of his own:

> In 1991 I, as Minister for Administrative Services, wanted to restrain the use of old

forest timber in government constructions and I also wanted to restrain the import of rainforest timber. I was met with a similar sort of reaction from NAFI and Dr Bain. I got a letter from a solicitor threatening me with defamation proceedings. (Australian Senate Hansard for 21 April 1999)

A minor diversion was caused by Senator Winston Crane's offer to table a NAFI statement to the effect that the ACCC had not found any breach of its rules by NAFI. The following day the senator was granted leave to put further material on the record—a *later* statement from the ACCC. Senator Brown obligingly read out part of the material—the ACCC's statement that it was:

> particularly concerned that NAFI, while alleging misleading and deceptive conduct in the book's content, ignored section 65A of the Act, which specifically excludes publishers and information providers from those very provisions.

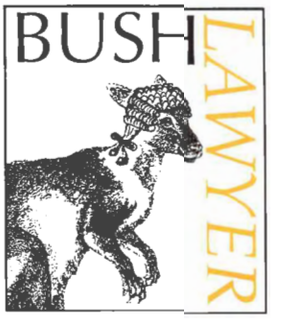
At last inquiry however, it turned out that the ACCC would not take action against NAFI over this matter, but had pointed out its concerns. It is unlikely that the TPA will be used against a publisher in quite this way again, but corporations can still sue for defamation if they believe they have been damaged: in Australia it is much easier to bring a defamation action than to defend it. For businesses the costs are actually tax-deductible. Not so for the hapless recipient of the writ who may be an ordinary citizen activist trying to publicise a particular point of view.

Just this time however, the tide has flowed the other way. Alan Gray told me that he really should thank NAFI: *Forest-Friendly Building Timbers* is now on *The Australian* bestseller list and looks as if it will break even in three months instead of the three years they had expected.

Forest-Friendly Building Timbers, Alan T. Gray and Anne Hall (eds), Earth Garden Books, 1999. ISBN 0 9586397 0 1; RRP $9.95.

—Juliette Hughes

This month's contributors: **Edmund Campion** teaches history at the Catholic Institute of Sydney, Strathfield; **Tim Moore** was a member of the Student Council of the Melbourne University Student Union in 1995, and also a delegate to the National Union of Students that same year; **Josh Puls** is a tutor at Newman College, Melbourne; **Jim Dickins** is a Canberra journalist; **Juliette Hughes** is a freelance writer.



SÉAMUS O'SHAUGHNESSY

My brain hurts

IN HIS ELEGIAC NOVEL, *Birdsong*, Sebastian Faulks has one of his characters, a Great War British soldier, reflect longingly on his young son dying in a London hospital:

> He saw him as a creature who had come from another universe; but in Jack's eyes the place from which the boy had come was not just a different but a better world. His innocence was not the same thing as ignorance; it was a powerful quality of goodness which was available to all people; it was perhaps what the Prayer Book calls a means of grace, or a hope of glory.

The innocence of children is a theme which runs through our culture in deep and rich seams. We have always understood that to hurt children or to expose them to experiences which exploit their innocence, not only tends to destroy their innocence, but in doing so, hardens them. We recoil from people who do that, but we make distinctions. It is one thing to tell kids that there is no Santa Claus but entirely another to subject them to drunken rages or sexual abuse.

I have encountered a number of children who have been exposed to horrendously violent circumstances when infants. 'Sam', now 14, is the son of a violent, alcoholic father and an emotionally and physically battered mother. One of his elder brothers was convicted at the age of 16 of murder. Another brother was convicted of manslaughter.

A growing body of neuro-biological research shows that the first three years of a child's life are critical for brain development. The wiring of neurones is dependent not only on genes but on the use to which the brain is put, and the experiences a child has during that first three years. At birth, the brain is dramatically immature, but over the next three years it evolves at a staggering pace. It is highly selective and adaptive as it lays down permanent pathways in the brain synapses. At this age, children are not resilient, but malleable.

Faulk's soldier believed that 'his fellow human beings were not the rough, flawed creatures that most of them supposed. Their failings were not innate, but the result of where they had gone wrong or been coarsened by their experiences; in their hearts they remained perfectible.' Unfortunately, the research indicates that in the first three years, these beautiful little *tabulae rasae* do, if maltreated, develop innate faults making them extremely difficult to perfect.

'Sam' was eventually locked up by another magistrate, all the available remedial alternatives having been tried. He, I believe, is proof positive of the thesis that violent environments adversely affect children's brain development. He is like a forest animal—he trusts no-one. He is predatory and defensive. He seems programmed to survive in a hostile environment. And why wouldn't he be if violence or the threat of it was all he knew as a baby?

If the research's tentative findings are accurate—and there is very good reason to believe that they are—early intervention with families whose children are exposed to violence is critical to the long-term well-being of those children and their families. Children do not have to be 'stolen'. In the US it has been found that home visits to support single parents with children under three can significantly reduce the long-term risk of those children becoming involved in anti-social and self-destructive conduct, and improve their chances of having a good life.

In Australia, the issue has been taken up by, among others, Professor Graham Vimpani, head of paediatrics and child health at the University of Newcastle, and a group of colleagues. They have received a sympathetic hearing from both the federal and state governments, who have promised funding for programs specifically designed to assist families and children under three.

In the meantime, what is to be done about the 'Sams' filling our juvenile institutions? The evidence seems to be that the only thing which works is intensive, long-term cognitive therapy, designed to alter thinking and learned behaviours. It is costly, but it would be money well-spent if it kept these kids out of expensive jails. ■

Séamus O'Shaughnessy is a country magistrate.

DAVID GLANZ

Firmly on the ground

The case of the Yorta Yorta people highlights the irony and complexity of indigenous land rights claims. How can a people establish connection with the land from which they have been violently removed?

THE WOMAN SITTING OPPOSITE is clearly suffering from a sad delusion. Monica Morgan firmly believes that she is a member of an ancient people whose relationship with the land has evolved over tens of thousands of years. She considers that she is among the inheritors of one of the world's oldest cultures. She maintains that she is living on her own country, the country of her ancestors. A Federal Court judge, on the other hand, has declared that, conceptually speaking, she and her fellow Aborigines do not exist.

Eight of Monica's relatives, representatives of the Yorta Yorta people, filed a native title claim over what they regard as their traditional lands and waters, which span the Murray River in Victoria and New South Wales and include the towns of Shepparton, Mooroopna, Echuca, Mathoura, Yarrawonga and Wangaratta. The claim was not, of course, for people's 'backyards', but involved a scattered mosaic of undeveloped public spaces. It was not intended as a declaration of war against farmers, industrialists or residents. Yet some 500 individuals, shire councils, clubs and corporations lined up to object, backed by the sympathies of the local media and with the governments of Liberal-run Victoria and Labor-run NSW uniting to lead the charge.

Monica Morgan, of the Yorta Yorta people.

In Melbourne on 18 December last year, Justice Olney took just one minute to rule against the claim. Its basis, he said, had been washed away by the tide of history. But Monica and her relatives refuse to be washed away. They refuse to be declared legally invisible.

'The reason why we're here is that we're taking over the struggle of our ancestors. We've resisted over many generations. It's taken the form of walk-offs, sit-ins, petitions to parliament, take-overs,' says Monica. 'We've not ceded our sovereignty. We've never given way to the invasion.' 'We played by the rules,' says Yorta Yorta activist James Atkinson, 'and all of a sudden someone makes a decision that takes less than a minute to put down.'

The native title claim was, the Federal Court was told, the Yorta Yorta's 12th attempt to regain their country. Their collective pride and identity have withstood the intrusion of the Europeans' smallpox, the Europeans' exclusionary system of land tenure, the Europeans' heavy-hoofed cattle and sheep. They have no weapons except solidarity and, perhaps, those scraps of Australian law that might work to their advantage. They are appealing to the full bench of the Federal Court, with a hearing expected this winter. Whoever wins, expect the case to go to the High Court. The Yorta Yorta have been attempting to claw back their rights since 1824, when Hamilton Hume and William Hovell became the first whites to cross their country. They have learnt a little patience. They have also learnt to resist.

The Dharnya Centre, which displays and interprets Yorta Yorta culture, is in the Barmah Forest, on the Victorian side of the Murray. As you walk up to the front door, a hand-written sign explains, 'This complex is under occupation by the Yorta Yorta nation. Free entry.' The centre belongs to the Victorian Government, but Yorta Yorta people took control of it last November in protest at Victorian legislation complementing the Federal Government's Native Title Amendment Act. In a small victory, the state government continues to pay the two part-time workers, Yorta Yorta women, who run the centre.

The occupation is, in some ways, no more than a skirmish in a battle that has been going on for some 160 years, an account of which is given in Justice Olney's written decision. In the 1830s, as settlers

began to bring livestock in or through the area, there was sporadic resistance. In January 1838, Joseph Hawdon was overlanding cattle to Adelaide when he and his men met a group of Aboriginal people near the junction of the Campaspe and Murray Rivers (the site of Echuca). Hawdon's record of this meeting indicates that the Aborigines wanted them out. Justice Olney writes:

> The letters, journals and 'reminiscences' of the first decade of settlement suggest a high level of initial conflict with the indigenous people, particularly in the eastern part of the claim area although individual squatters developed more positive relationships ... By the end of the next decade [1850s] all of the land between the Campaspe and the Goulburn had been occupied from Seymour to the Murray. Conflict occurred at numerous stations. In many cases large, organised groups of Aborigines were involved. Even [early squatter Edward M.] Curr, who generally enjoyed a good relationship with the indigenous people, on establishing an outstation on the northern side of the Murray had his shepherds attacked and sheep driven off.

By the middle of the 19th century, warlike resistance had been extinguished by weight of numbers, disease and displacement. But that was not the end of the story. In 1939, the Yorta Yorta became among the first to reject the mission system, with a walk-off at Cummeragunja, on the NSW side of the Murray. Cummeragunja had been founded in 1888. It rapidly became an insanitary disgrace. Some 170 people lived in 20 two-roomed shacks with no sewerage. Disease and malnutrition were rife and the mortality rate high. No child was permitted to be educated past third grade. The Communist Party newspaper, the *Workers Weekly*, hailed the walk-off in its edition of 28 February 1939, with a tier of headlines, 'First Mass Strike of Aborigines ... TREATED LIKE ANIMALS ... Govt. Tried To Hush Up Affair By Arrests.' A photocopy of the front page is stuck on the wall in the dining room at Dharnya.

For Monica Morgan and the others, such incidents are evidence of a continuity, of a chain of life and resistance—each generation holding the hands of the previous, as far back as oral history will allow, and then further. The idea that today's Yorta Yorta have no connection to the Aborigines encountered by the first white intruders is simply laughable. But in December, Justice Olney was not smiling. The crux of his judgment was that the living chain had been broken.

In his determination, he argued that there was no point initially in trying to discover where and when native title might have been extinguished and where it might survive. His assessment of native title legislation was that the threshold question was whether the claimants could demonstrate a continuing connection with the land, and a continuing observation of traditional customs. If they could not, all other considerations were irrelevant.

Could the Yorta Yorta cross the threshold? They thought so. They put forward 18 'known ancestors' as evidence of the genealogical line of descent. Their witnesses cited traditional beliefs and customs and described the importance of burial places, middens and other sites. 'The onus was on us. We took them [the court] all around our country, places we'd never taken people to before. It was a very emotional time for many of us, [especially] for older people who grew up in mission times,' said Monica Morgan.

Justice Olney brushed their case aside in short order. He had precedent on his side.

The law is rigid and the law is dogmatic. It demands that people who have experienced up to 211 years of contact with a dominant and self-assertive foreign culture retain their own intact. It makes no allowances for Aboriginal spirituality or culture to grow and adapt to changed circumstances. It makes no allowance for suffering.

The Mabo High Court decision in 1992, which overthrew the doctrine of *terra nullius*, based its decision on systems of land tenure in the Torres Strait. Crucially, Eddie Mabo and the Meriam people had to prove their organised use of the land at the point at which Australia claimed sovereignty, which in the case of their islands was a century after the flag was hoisted in New South Wales. Compelling and accurate proof was easily to be found.

What of the Yorta Yorta? The British claim of sovereignty over their land came in 1788—a full 36 years before black and white came face to face in the region, and half a century before the squatters' land grab and their subsequent memoirs aimed at justifying and glorifying their feats. Justice Olney laid great store by two works by Curr, the early squatter. But the first was published in 1883, the second in 1886—35 years after he quit the Yorta Yorta area. How could the Yorta Yorta prove continuity of occupation from 1788 when there were no written records and the oral transmission of history had been disrupted by smallpox, displacement and inter-breeding? The answer, in the opinion of the court, was that it was, regretfully, impossible. 'What means the most to us as Yorta Yorta people is they didn't take notice of our oral evidence. They wouldn't accept that our oral evidence was as good as whites',' said Monica Morgan.

Justice Olney dismissed all but two of the 'known ancestors' from contention. For the most part, they were rejected because, although they were born in the

Above: Yorta Yorta kids playing at Dharnya.

claim area, there was no evidence that they were of local stock. On this basis there will be few, if any, successful native title claims. The Aboriginal people of Victoria in the mid 19th century were a people in shock, savagely reduced in numbers and dispersed by threats, disease and the introduction of livestock. The very act of dispossession meant a break in the historical record—yet the break in the historical record now becomes a reason to confirm their dispossession.

In the Balkans, as this article is written, many Kosovars are refusing to be dispersed across Europe for fear of losing connection with their families. If record-keeping is deemed so unreliable in Europe at the end of the 20th century, why should our expectations for Australia in colonial times be any higher?

The question of proof of the continuity of customs and traditions has a similar catch-22 ring about it. The Yorta Yorta lost out on two grounds. Either they no longer carried out the customs as

THE DEBATE OVER the constitutional preamble has raised the question of Aboriginal custodianship of the land. For the Yorta Yorta, this is not an empty phrase. Their battle for native title is fuelled by a very immediate concern that their country is being degraded past the point of recovery. The granting of native title would help them claim a place at the table when the Murray-Darling Basin Commission is deciding on water allotment. As Monica Morgan (see main story) put it, 'Unless we have some control over our waters, our country won't survive.'

According to James Atkinson, the number of bird species in the Barmah Forest region has fallen by more than three quarters in nine years. Reduced water flows have led to blue-green algae problems, and the water that is left is increasingly saline. On average, 5.5 million tonnes of salt enter the Murray River a year.

A walk around the forest with Des Morgan, a Yorta Yorta man and the state-funded heritage co-ordinator for the north-east region of Victoria, is highly instructive. What looks to the untutored eye to be prospering woodland and pretty riverfront turns out to be something quite different.

Although it is obvious that most of the older trees have been logged, there seems to be plenty of new growth. But the saplings are too close together—the result of the ringbarking of the parent tree, which forces it to drop its seeds at once. This is done deliberately as trees that grow close to each other grow straighter, and are more useful to loggers.

There is supposedly a time limit on taking timber in both the forest and the adjoining state park. But Des says the loggers have the right of appeal and expects them to get renewed access. The National Association of Forest Industries has certainly been cheered by the Yorta Yorta's defeat in court. At stake was much of the 'redgum resource in Victoria and NSW'. The association's newsletter commented:

> The immediate threat to resource access in the claimed area has been removed ... The Yorta Yorta appeared to have a much stronger association with the claimed land (particularly the Barmah/Millewa forest) than Aboriginal groups in most other areas of forested public land, therefore the likelihood of successful claims over other forestry areas appears to have been diminished.

Des Morgan in Barmah Forest explaining a tree from which a canoe has been taken.

The running of cattle through the forest is another problem. In the long term, the Yorta Yorta would like to see a phasing out of both cattle-raising and logging. What both industries have in common is a love of the higher ground, above the flood level. Yet that is exactly where the bulk of Yorta Yorta sites and burial grounds are.

Before the diversion of the Murray's waters, the area would have been inundated regularly and for long periods, with the local people moving from dry area to dry area by canoe. That makes high ground culturally important, if not sacred ground.

Along by the lake beds, the reeds are luxuriant and thick. That looks good—but according to Des, it is an indication of further problems. Salt in the river allows one reed variety to dominate at the expense of others. Its spread reduces habitat for wading birds. The salt also weakens the river banks, making erosion easier.

Without native title, the Yorta Yorta cannot exercise custodianship, whatever the politicians' poets might say.

—David Glanz

described in the squatters' memoirs, which given their forcible inclusion into European-style religion, education and 'morals', was hardly surprising. Or they indeed had distinct cultural concerns, but these had developed after 1788 and therefore had no standing.

A sense of condescension carries down the years. Compare Curr with Justice Olney:

> I recollect, on one occasion, a certain portion of country being pointed out to me as belonging exclusively to a boy who formed one of the party with which I was out hunting at the time ... As I was always prone to fall in with the views of my sable neighbours when possible, I offered him on the spot, with the most serious face, a stick of tobacco for the fee-simple of his patrimonial property, which, after a short consultation with his elders, was accepted and paid. (Curr)

> The advent of extensive logging of, and the introduction of cattle into, the forests in the claim area together with the interference with the natural flow of the river systems for irrigation purposes are all matters about which contemporary Yorta Yorta have expressed concern ... But these are issues of relatively recent origin about which the original inhabitants could have had no concern and which cannot be regarded as matters relating to the observance of traditional laws and customs. (Olney)

In the 1840s, Aboriginal concern about custodianship of their land was regarded as a joke. In the 1990s, it is apparently proof of a qualitative shift in culture—a shift which justifies further estrangement from the land in question.

YET WHAT SHINES THROUGH all of this is the resilience of the Yorta Yorta in the face of apparently overwhelming odds. Among the claimants and their families are victims of the stolen generation disgrace. Among them, too, must be some who remember the events of 1957, when police evicted without notice families living in shacks on Mooroopna tip and some 200 people living on the river flats, and burnt their homes. For many years, until the late 1980s, Yorta Yorta children were barred from Barmah school. When they were finally admitted, many white residents withdrew their children, leading to the school's closure. No wonder Monica Morgan can say, 'The invasion occurred for us in the 1830s. Since that time our people have had a very long, at times bloody, at times exhausting, struggle to get to where we are today.'

That struggle will continue. What are the Yorta Yorta's chances of success? Justice Olney's decision may turn out, on appeal, to have been too narrow. It may be ruled that he gave too much weight to written sources as against the oral testimony. Arguing just that is the Yorta Yorta's game plan. But whatever the outcome, the case demonstrates how this decade's native title legislation—Labor's version no less than the Liberals' meaner amendments—is designed to frustrate and impede Aboriginal aspirations.

In the name of certainty, Labor agreed that the use of Crown land for structures extinguished native title. The result is that the Dharnya Centre, established to defend and extend Aboriginal culture, is itself now 'evidence' that native title has been extinguished on the land that it occupies and needs for its services. In the name of certainty, the Liberals legislated that the granting of pastoral leases should wipe out native title rights. The result is that two areas in the Goulburn state forest, over which leases were granted early this century, are now outside the Yorta Yorta claim, even though the leases expired 78 years ago and the land is indistinguishable from the forest around it.

The Aboriginal people of Victoria in the mid 19th century were a people in shock, savagely reduced in numbers and dispersed by threats, disease and the introduction of livestock. The very act of dispossession meant a break in the historical record—yet the break in the historical record now becomes a reason to confirm their dispossession.

But the biggest burden is that of proving continuity of occupation and of tradition. The very people whose land has been most closely settled, whose collective being has been most fractured and dispersed are the ones who under both generations of Native Title Act have the least claim. The law is rigid and the law is dogmatic. It demands that people who have experienced up to 211 years of contact with a dominant and self-assertive foreign culture retain their own intact. It makes no allowances for Aboriginal spirituality or culture to grow and adapt to changed circumstances. It makes no allowance for suffering. Justice Olney commented that his role was not one of social engineer, making good the injustices that had certainly taken place. If the law cannot engineer away even a fraction of that injustice, then it is a bad law.

Eight years ago, people of good will cheered the Mabo decision. Seven years ago, people of good will warmed to the first Native Title Act. The outcome of the Yorta Yorta case suggests that those fond hopes were misplaced. 'Native title is very limited. It always was,' says Monica Morgan. The law is a cruel deception. It dangles hope in front of indigenous people, only to jerk it away. It demands that they lay bare their most important secrets and traditions and then rejects them on the faded word of a long-dead squatter. ■

David Glanz is a freelance journalist.

Kosovo options

__Adrian Jones__ argues that Kosovo must now become independent, the holy city of Peć should remain open to all Serb pilgrims, and Serbs who choose to remain in an independent Kosovo must be constitutionally protected.

NATO'S OBJECTIVES for the war in Kosovo no longer make sense. Independence is the only realistic option now that war in Kosovo has been waged in earnest.

NATO is fighting to enforce the Rambouillet accords that only they and the Kosovar Albanians signed. Slobodan Milosevic didn't even bother to attend. Rambouillet envisages that Kosovo will remain part of Yugoslavia, though it will have full autonomy and the rights of all ethnic groups (including the Serb minority) will be protected. President Clinton and NATO are still insisting on Kosovo's remaining part of Yugoslavia. A meeting of G7+1 Ministers have recently confirmed this decision.

This policy cannot continue. It's like insisting on abolishing women's refuges and requiring battered wives to live once again with their abusing husbands. Bosnian Muslims after the Dayton accord at least had their sovereignty restored; Kosovar Albanians gain nothing of the sort if Rambouillet is implemented. The Rambouillet agreement no longer makes sense. Kosovo must now be made independent.

There are many Balkan precedents for such an imperfect solution. Bulgaria, for instance, became independent in 1878 after Europe had been shocked by atrocities committed there by the Ottomans—in response to nationalist aspirations which Europeans had fanned in one way or another. But first the Russian army had to intervene unilaterally in 1877–78 (the role NATO is playing today) to blunt Ottoman revenge killings and to defeat local Ottoman armies. Then, in the interests of preserving the European balance of power, Bismarck and Salisbury felt they had to intervene (at the Congress of Berlin, June 1878) to restrict the scope of the Greater-Bulgaria that Russian arms had brought about.

NATO peacemakers will face similar challenges. For Kosovo to become independent, a balancing act will have to be performed if Macedonia and Montenegro are not to be destabilised. While still enjoying a measure of democratic government, both states have large and disadvantaged Albanian minorities. Albania will need to be relieved of idle dreams of a Greater-Albania. The obstacles here are religious (conflict between Catholic, Muslim and Orthodox Albanians), cultural and financial. Albanians also have competing languages, competing capitals of home and exile, plus Tosks who are clan-minded and Ghegs who are urbane. Finally, Greece will need to be reassured about changes to its north. Since the 1770s, Greeks have viewed Albanians as hostile to Greek nationalism, warring with them in the 1820s, 1912, and 1939–40.

This does not mean that the Rambouillet agreement and NATO policy have been poor policy. They made sense when NATO believed that Milosevic was only bluffing about Kosovo, and when NATO believed that a short sharp air strike would pull him up. With the wisdom of hindsight we can see that both views were in error. Though NATO is being lambasted now for its supposed naivety, it is better that they were cautious, hopeful and naive at first, rather than bellicose from the outset. The USA and Western Europe have few material interests in the central Balkan region (unlike Iraq). No-one there or here seems to want to volunteer to serve in a full-scale invasion force. We know the dangers of guerrilla war in the Balkans. Recall the fate of many crack German and indifferent Italian divisions which invaded and occupied Yugoslavia, Greece and Albania in 1941–44.

NATO's predicament resembles Chamberlain's at Munich in 1938. NATO seems to have done better than Chamberlain, however. NATO still called the dictator's bluff even when they didn't really want to go to war. Like Munich, the Rambouillet deal was sordidly realistic. Few people in the West wanted war then or now; Americans, after all, have whipped themselves into a frenzy over just three bewildered, blundering captives. Few policy-makers realised the extent of Hitler's or Milosevic's infamy. Perhaps, though, our generation should have known better, for we had seen what Milosevic ordered in Vukovar and Srebrenica. Most Western policy-makers before Munich hadn't yet seen the flagrantly vicious evils of *Kristallnacht*. Moreover, few people then understood the pivotal issues at stake in such a 'far-off' (Chamberlain's words) place in Europe. Kosovo Albanians were as stood over by the Americans and Europeans at Rambouillet in 1999 as were Benes Czechs at Munich in 1938. Like the Czechs, the Albanian Kosovars signed. What choice did they have?

We know that the West eventually went to war with the Axis powers over Poland in August 1939. Their prompt was the guarantee they had made to Poland after Hitler violated the Munich agreement. The occasion was Hitler's seizure of the rump of Czechoslovakia in March 1938. Milosevic's irregular armies of thugs and jingoists similarly thumbed their nose at the principled impracticalities of the Rambouillet agreement. NATO's slow-and-steady airborne response was measured. It was realistic, given the West's paucity of interests in a very backward part of Europe, but also given the widespread disgust at a cynical powerplay and a humanitarian outrage. If only Chamberlain had been as principled, decisive and restrained in 1938. And yet, when Britain finally went into that war, its very naivety at Munich helped strengthen its war effort (long-term!): it fashioned an unprecedented consensus between classes and between nations as diverse as the USSR, Britain and the USA. NATO's cause is the same today. Those prosecuting the First World War, Korean and Vietnam Wars were not so fortunate.

History is also repeating itself in other ways. War aims change. The great irony of

the Second World War in Europe was that a war fought to liberate Poland ended up with the annihilation of Polish Jewry, with Poland suffering the highest *per capita* death and destruction rate, and with Poland experiencing first fascist and then communist domination. During the Second World War, Allied war aims had to change; nothing could really be done about Poland, even though the war was ostensibly fought for Poland's sake. Kosovo should not be the same. NATO must adjust its war aims and secure the independence which is the only viable solution to the Kosovo question today. Ground troops will be required long-term; though in fairness to US and Western European lives I would still not despatch them until airborne assaults can do no more, or until the Yugoslav army and its murderous irregulars are pulled out. And NATO will have to deploy its power wisely if it is not to be used as an instrument of Serb, Greek or Macedonian Slav paranoia about Albanians, or of Albanian Kosovars' desire for revenge against Serbs. (The Kosovo Liberation Army must not be given *carte blanche*.)

The rights of Serbians who choose to remain in an independent Kosovo must be constitutionally protected and the holy city of Peć must remain open to all Serb pilgrims. Their rights were often abused when Kosovo was—pre-Milosevic—an autonomous province in the old Serb socialist republic in Yugoslavia.

The model of the Dayton accords in Bosnia is clear: an imperfect solution, determinedly applied, that brings peace is better than an imperfect solution, hesitantly applied, that brings still more war. NATO must not hesitate. Kosovars should not be expected to go back into Yugoslavia, even if they are given a worthless something called 'autonomy'. ■

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THE WORLD: 2

After Mandela

***Jim Davidson** reports from South Africa on the jockeying for position in the lead-up to the June election.*

When the South African parliament rose in March, it was an amazingly dignified affair. As the New National Party whip remarked—even as memories sprang up of fisticuffs on the floor of the house—they had all learned to turn enemies into opponents. Courtesies were extended all round: a spokesman for the Freedom Front, the right-wing Afrikaner party, gave a considerable slice of his speech in English and, addressing the members as colleagues, allowed himself the droll observation that he couldn't quite come at comrades. The tributes to Nelson Mandela, whose last parliamentary appearance this was, were almost unqualified in their praise. White politicians ended their speeches with a flourish of Xhosa; while the abrasive Tony Leon, who did not, nonetheless compared him with Gandhi and the Dalai Lama, and said he not only graced the House and the country, 'He graces humanity.' Small wonder that Mandela's own speech should seem anticlimactic. But despite the standing ovation, and the later singing and ululations, those stiff steps down from the podium indicated that an era was about to end.

Beyond parliament the ground was still being pawed for the next election by a series of court cases and appeals to the Independent Electoral Commission. These would drag on for weeks. One concerned the government's insistence that only voters who had specially registered could participate in elections. The aim here was to prevent multiple voting—which certainly occurred last time—and to standardise voter identification. Opposed by the main white parties, fearful that some of their disheartened supporters simply might not bother, the government carried the day. Less impressive was the outcome of another court challenge. The government, publicly stating reasons of expenditure, announced that—unlike the 1994 election—expatriate South Africans would not be able to vote (unless registered). Some suspect that this decision was intended to wipe out a considerable element of opposition support. Whatever the case, it did not look well when, as a result of a further challenge and a legal loophole, prisoners established their right to vote in the election.

As a result of these manoeuvres, it was some time before the date could be fixed with any certainty as the second of June. But with Mandela's stepping down, and the insidious attrition produced by the court cases, South Africa's second democratic election could scarcely be less like the euphoric first one of April 1994. While voter registration, after a concerted advertising campaign and numerous extensions, eventually reached an impressive 80 per cent, less than half of 18 to 20-year-olds had bothered to enrol; a case of universal apathy, perhaps, but also indicative of postmodern amnesia, and, more alarmingly, of a widespread feeling that, because the government has not yet made much of a difference, perhaps it cannot.

There have also been serious problems arising from the nature of the new system. To guarantee minorities a voice, it was

sensibly decided that the Assembly should be elected by proportional representation. But the problem with this is that the link between member and constituency has been severed; the member is responsible to the party bosses, and beholden to them for his position on the list. The lower his place, the less likely the tide of voter endorsement of the party will sweep him into one of its allocated seats. So, as the election neared, there was the unseemly spectacle of members abandoning their parties—partly because of genuine dissatisfactions—but clearly because in many cases they were guaranteed a higher position on a rival party's list. The feeling that some people would do almost anything to remain on the gravy train induced one former MP to suggest that politicians should be compulsorily weighed, at the beginning and the end of each parliamentary session. The results would then be published.

THE RACIAL COMPOSITION of South Africa has meant that its elections, as much as its politics, have always been peculiar. There were some held in the apartheid era in which, even though whites alone voted, the English or Afrikaans character of electorates could be so pronounced that a reasonable spread of parties might only be found in half of them. Similarly the African National Congress (ANC) has not the slightest chance of losing the election, although that beefy battering ram Louis Luyt, now heading a party of his own as if it were a rugby team, professes to believe it will.

The ANC is the party of the struggle, the party which vanquished minority rule, and until it starts to fall apart (as it may do rather quicker than Congress did in India), it can claim an almost reflexive loyalty from the greater part of the population.

Walking down the street recently, I passed an African holding a sun umbrella, striped in green, yellow and black. 'ANC colours,' I remarked as we passed. 'What are you voting for?' he replied, 'Democratic Party or NNP?' His assumption that a white person would be voting for a white party was disappointing, but accurate. A recent poll showed that less than half of one per cent of ANC support now comes from whites. Indians and Coloureds are not much more enthusiastic; 93 per cent of the party's support comes from blacks.

While Mandela remains an iconic figure whom few would criticise in front of strangers, since he commands so much love and respect throughout the country, it is quite otherwise with Deputy President Thabo Mbeki. To say that most whites fear him would be no exaggeration. Mbeki is personable and suave, extroverted but controlled; there is a guardedness about him which is not reassuring. He has a reputation for being sensitive to criticism, for ruthlessly outmanoeuvring his enemies, for having a preference for working behind the scenes—as he could be said to have done in the grandest sense for the last two or three years, since he has in effect been running the country. He gives nothing away. When interviewed after a colloquium in Cape Town with an American delegation headed by Al Gore, it was Gore who was expansive and made astute observations; Mbeki put up a smokescreen of generalities. When interviewers pop personal questions, Mbeki will fend them off until they drop them. He is a man who studied economics at Sussex, simultaneously writing a thesis on Shelley and Keats, and who is a natural, lyrical orator; but one who also spent a year in the Soviet Union undergoing military training, and who, as the son of a famous activist father, Govan Mbeki, is in a very real sense a child of the revolution. The struggle deprived him of years of family life, and claimed the lives of a brother and his only son. The existence of this son was so little known that when it was referred to in a recently published biography, a leading Sunday newspaper decided to run it as the main story.

IT HAS BEEN STRIKING how quite recently the word 'transformation', signifying the change of the country to the point where the interests of the African majority become paramount, has now moved to centre stage. 'Reconciliation' was Mandela's watchword, 'transformation' is Mbeki's. But clearly black expectations cannot be cancelled or postponed indefinitely. 'I am convinced,' Mbeki believes, 'that we are faced with the danger of a mounting rage to which we must respond seriously.' Believing, as he does, in an 'African renaissance', Mbeki also cites the example of the Meiji restoration. Thus the government has, at an increasing pace over the past five years, built 680,000 houses; it has also supplied electricity and running water to over two million homes. It is this delivery of services to hitherto neglected areas which is the basic thrust of current policy—at the expense, if need be, of maintaining established services in white areas. And so the ANC is going for broke, expecting not to be simply returned at the forthcoming election, but aiming at a two-thirds majority.

The opposition parties are determined to stop them. A poster has appeared in Johannesburg, stating 'Mugabe has two-thirds', a reference to the dismal fate that has overtaken Zimbabwe. The ANC claims that it is necessary to have a clear mandate if it is to accelerate the pace of change, and denies that it intends anything more than minor tinkering with the constitution. But Mbeki's impulse to authoritarianism—recently dismissing three ANC premiers, and filling important posts with placemen (and women)—causes apprehension. True, to change the rules for amending the constitution would require a three-quarters majority, plus the consent of six of the nine provinces, so the role of elections, political parties, and official non-racialism are effectively inscribed in stone. But two-thirds would be sufficient to neutralise various checks and balances and to suborn the Reserve Bank; and if the requisite six provinces were added (the ANC currently controls seven), then the Bill of Rights could be amended, as could the clause protecting private property.

Leading the charge against the government is the Democratic Party, the present incarnation of the party of Helen Suzman. But no-one calls them Democrats; the image of white privilege, of bridge parties and cucumber sandwiches, still clings to them. Their leader, Tony Leon, is as energetic as an ambitious executive; flaunting a jutting jaw, he is highly articulate and always on the attack, pausing for a moment to elaborate a point or to show sympathy in a tone which is never quite right, before rushing headlong on to the next target. Leon attacks crime: 100,000 South Africans have been murdered since 1994. Leon does Workers' Day: What are you celebrating? 500,000 people have lost their jobs—since 1994. Hostile to corruption, he believes the state should be lean and clean. Privatisation is the only answer, he asserts; never mind that if public services were scaled back any more, South Africa might fall apart.

Crime, jobs, and corruption are real issues; all parties agree on that. But Leon turns them into grievances. The ANC, since it upholds affirmative action, is 'obsessed about race'. For him, almost as much as for Luyt, reconciliation means kissing, making up, and forgetting, to avoid transformation.

Eager for the Democratic Party to become the official opposition, Leon doesn't care from where he garners his votes. The insensitive slogan 'Fight Back', which went up on DP posters early in the campaign, unintentionally exposed the party's basic assumptions. Seeing the way the wind was blowing, the party's only black MP quit the Democratic Party some months ago. Meanwhile former Nationalist politicians have come over, and the DP is now said to attract more white votes, including Afrikaner ones, than any other party. In consequence Leon has drawn the ire of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. She likens him to 'a chihuahua barking at the moving car of the ANC', and has cast doubts on his sexuality. Here Leon had the last word: he was not gay, but if Winnie were the only woman left in the world (he said), he would definitely change his sexual orientation.

Sadder altogether these days are the Nationalists (NNP), who have fallen in a heap since De Klerk took them out of the Government of National Unity three years ago. Their leader, Marthinus van Schalkwyk, has the self-sufficient round face and spectacles of a student nerd—so that he has come to be known as *Kortbroek* (short pants). Although now styled the New Nationalists and relying very heavily on Coloured support, the party cannot live down apartheid—even though Van Schalkwyk has manfully described it, in a phrase particularly resonant for Afrikaners, as 'a concentration camp of the mind'. Pik Botha, the former foreign minister, said recently that the NNP is doomed. Polls indicate that it may attract only half of the 20 per cent of the vote it won last time.

Part of the NNP's problem is that Afrikaners have adapted to the new South Africa in a manner no-one could have anticipated. There are still right-wing fanatics, such as the Boere Weerstand Beweging, which recently sent aid to the Serbs on the grounds that, like them, they were Christian and nationalists. But these days even Eugene Terre'blanche has sought to make peace with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Afrikaners in general are casting off restrictive notions of what it means to be a member of the *volk*: increasingly it seems to be accepted that the use of Afrikaans as your home language is the prime, and may be the only, point of identity. Thus the Afrikaans-speaking poor whites of George (where P.W. Botha smoulders in retirement) did not turn to the NNP to discuss possible state assistance, but convened a meeting directly with the ANC themselves. Others may resent the new order, but know it cannot seriously be contested. The government recently made it plain that, while it would do little to encourage an Afrikaner *volkstaat*, it was prepared to establish a unit within the President's own office to monitor complaints arising from language issues. In this climate, even the Freedom Front has realised it needs to be inventive in order to hold attention. 'Save the Afrikaner', proclaim its posters, 'then the rhinoceros!'

IN AN INTEMPERATE MOMENT, Nelson Mandela once referred to the smaller opposition groups as 'Mickey Mouse parties'. But a new kid on the block, the party to watch, is the United Democratic Movement (UDM). It is led by an impressive duo: Bantu Holomisa, the former Transkei's military ruler, and Roelf Meyer, the respected chief negotiator for the Nationalists in the early '90s. Admirers point to Holomisa's steeliness; equally apparent is a bluntness shading into shortness of temper. Holomisa crossed Mbeki and, as a cabinet minister, was sacked from the ANC three years ago. The resulting rift is so deep that even Mandela cannot talk about him without losing his cool. Stories circulate—or are circulated—to the effect that when in power he was present at the execution of a political opponent. Certainly Holomisa has, in the Transkei, a strong regional base, strong enough to have some leverage in the simultaneous provincial election if not in the national one. But the UDM may do better elsewhere as well. Although it has shown up with a mere 2 per cent in recent polls, it is said with some justice that the assassination of UDM leaders encourages people to keep quiet about their voting intentions. More telling, perhaps, is that the party has, with a paid-up membership of 115,000, more than a third of that of the ANC already. Sixty-five per cent of them are black, making the party truly multiracial. Libertarian whites, impressed by its emphasis on merit rather than affirmative action, believe it to be the only party capable, in the long run, of providing opposition to the ANC. 'Parties concerned only with white or black interests', said the *Financial Mail*, 'can never be anything more than lobbies.' Moving on to endorse the UDM, the magazine urged individuals and businesses to ensure that the party is 'adequately funded'.

Polls suggest that the Inkatha Freedom Party, the main headache of the nation and the ANC in 1994, could lose control of KwaZulu-Natal. In that case, it would probably go into coalition with the ANC on the provincial level, as it already has on the national one. For this reason, it has become possible to hold a series of meetings and make an agreement to ensure a non-violent election campaign. The IFP leader, Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, seems to have been lulled into something approaching acquiescence by the prospect of becoming Deputy President in the new government. (There has even been speculation about a possible merger of the two parties.) The recent location of a large arms cache, intended by the late regime for Inkatha just before the last election, has come at a good time: it may have a salutary effect. But the government is taking no chances, here or elsewhere: there are numerous flashpoints across the country, and as 2 June nears, some 80,000 police and defence personnel will be moved into position to keep the peace. They may very well be needed when, as is now expected, scores of unregistered voters are turned away from the polling booths.

The 1999 election may come to be seen as transitional. Cynics will say that under Mbeki the ANC will strengthen its grip on the country, and rule it with an iron fist, as Winnie Madikizela-Mandela has recently stated. But it is even more likely that by 2004 the National Party will have disappeared, and that largely race-based parties (such as the Democratic Party has rapidly become) will have less significance. This trend will be exacerbated should the ANC fragment, as one day it must do. Apart from the tango with Mango (the alliance with Inkatha) the ANC is already in coalition with the South African Communist Party and COSATU, the trade union movement. This broad front is a legacy of the liberation struggle. But as new tasks and new policies present themselves, committed men and women of the left may come to spit out the bitter medicine of the government's economic rationalism, and break free from party discipline. The populist demands they might then articulate are likely to be much more vociferous in five years' time than they are now. ■

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Church, State & meddling clerics

In 1998, former Prime Minister Paul Keating revived the age-old castigation of clergy who take a role in politics, when he branded Frank Brennan a 'meddling priest'. The influence of Senator Brian Harradine has also prompted questions about the nation's mix of religion and politics. This month, two of Australia's best-known religious spokesmen, ***Tim Costello*** *and* ***Frank Brennan****, talk directly about the proper extent of their roles in politics and public debate.*

Tim Costello

BOTH OF US BEING lawyers and clergy causes me to reflect how deeply disturbing it is for many lay people that people can both practise law and still wear the cloth. They say, now wait a minute, law and grace don't fit together: you'd better decide what you are.

I sometimes tell the story (I hope Frank won't be offended) of a blind snake and a blind rabbit that met in the clearing of a forest. Being blind, they couldn't run around and play so they sat and talked. And when you talk trust develops, even indeed a relationship develops. The snake said to the rabbit, 'I'm blind, I can't see you. Would you mind if I reached out and touched you?' The rabbit was scared, but enough trust had developed so the rabbit said all right. The snake felt the rabbit all over its body and said, 'You've got this lovely soft fur, you've got these cute whiskers, you've got these really gorgeous long ears and this absolutely stunning bobtail—could it be that you are a rabbit?' The rabbit said, 'That's it, you've got it.' They kept talking and the rabbit said finally, 'Well, you know what I am; you know I am blind; I can't see you; would you mind if I actually reached out and touched you?' The snake was apprehensive, but had to return the favour, so the rabbit felt the snake all over its body and just recoiled with revulsion, saying, 'You are slimy, and scaly all over your body. You've got no legs. That means you slither through the dirt, the mud, the dust on your stomach. You have got these huge venomous lethal fangs. Could it be that you are a lawyer?'

When Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister she was deeply distressed that the Archbishop of Canterbury, in the celebration for the victory over the Falklands, actually prayed for the Argentinians.—Tim Costello

I want to do a bit of a broad-brush view of church and state, both in New Testament and some chapters of history. Let me start with the Australian context.

I remember visiting Roger Hallam, the Minister for Finance and Gaming, in the Victorian Government, two years ago. In Victoria the Ministries of Finance and Gaming belong together, as now 15 per cent of recurrent state revenue comes from gaming. We have seen an extraordinary convergence of political and financial power.

The combination of political muscle and financial muscle that led to what the Premier proudly called the gaming-led recovery, with Crown Casino representing the new spirit of Victoria, led many of us in the church to object. So when church leaders visited the Minister for Finance and Gaming, knowing he came from a church background, we asked if we could begin the meeting with prayer. He looked surprised at that—prayer is always very subversive—but willingly agreed. After prayer we argued that there be some regional caps on where the pokies go and showed him a map of Melbourne, saying, 'Isn't it curious that the pokies actually infest the poorest areas? Actually, if you track what is happening with gambling, there is a massive and efficient transfer of money from the poorest people into state government coffers and into the pockets of the captains of the gaming industry.' We suggested that if the State were to have more pokies they could go into Toorak instead of Footscray.

Minister Hallam was surprised by the position we were putting to him. With some degree of alarm in his voice he said, 'This government does not believe in interfering with the market. The pokies go where the market dictates.'

I said, 'Minister, it seems to me your approach to government is Jeffersonian' (quoting Thomas Jefferson: 'the government which governs least governs best'). Mr Hallam looked at me surprised, perhaps because he did not hear me correctly, then raised an eyebrow and asked, 'Did Jeff really say that?'

I saw smiles around the room, so I replied, discreetly, 'No, it was another famous statesman, actually.'

Church and state is an issue as old as the church. In truth the church by its very existence is inescapably political. The word 'political' comes from the Greek word *polis*, meaning city. Those who are political are those who carry a concern for the city. The Greek city-states were the context for this activity and became a primary influence on the development of democratic politics. Those who have concern for the city are political.

The Hebrew scriptures are full of examples of priests, prophets and kings acting in a political way, and addressing a theocratic society through their religious experience. The *shalom*, or well-being, of the nation is their preoccupation. There is a wonderful text in Jeremiah 29, where Jeremiah the prophet is left in Jerusalem when most of his fellow Jews have been carried off into Babylon. He writes to these exiles who have deep doubts that God can hear their prayers in Babylon, because gods were understood to be turf-constrained and bound. Deportation, as we are seeing with ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, has much to do with destroying religious feeling—which defines a culture. Can God actually hear your prayers when you have been removed from that place where you worship God? This was the Israelites' question in Psalm 137, 'How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? Can God hear us?' Jeremiah writes a letter and says to the exiles, 'Seek the *shalom* of the city ... in its peace you

shall find your peace. Build houses, plant vineyards, take wives, have children.' Seek its *shalom*.

This is a breathtaking statement, because he was actually talking about the political well-being of the city that was the evil empire for Jews. Babylon had conquered, destroyed and deported them. This word *shalom* is a foundational word for political engagement. It does not simply mean peace: it includes the much richer notion of justice, a notion of prophetic engagement, of speaking the truth. That's why the Hebrew prophets, when they talked about *shalom*, said, 'Let there be *shalom* in your weights when you measure out grain, let there be *shalom* in your gates when you dispense justice, let there be *shalom* in your relationships.' Politics is about power, who has it, who doesn't and who gets what they want. Let there be *shalom* in how you go about your politics.

THROUGHOUT HISTORY the church, sadly, has often interpreted its political vocation as being a chaplain to the nation, a chaplain particularly to national power. When Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister she was deeply distressed that the Archbishop of Canterbury, in the celebration for the victory over the Falklands, actually prayed for the Argentinians.

The Orthodox Church, whether it be Greek, Russian, Romanian or Serbian, plays the role of chaplain to the nation. It came home very graphically to me, as I watched a current affairs program a few weeks back, hearing an Orthodox priest declare, 'Serbia is the temple of God and Kosovo is the altar for that temple.' This expression of the chaplain's role in legitimating some of the 'ethnic cleansing' in the fight for Kosovo was deeply chilling. This isn't to suggest that all Orthodox think like that at all.

The Evangelical or Lutheran Church in Germany has been a chaplain to power, and much has been written about the 'two kingdoms' theology. This theology has the noble intention of separating out two distinct spheres, so that the spiritual can more rigorously apply its influence and pressure on the secular sphere. However, it has been blamed for rendering the church quiescent and passive under Hitler. The Reich's bishops certainly did teach that what Hitler does is the kingdom of the left hand (the state) and the church stays out of it.

Some church leaders and theologians, who were to be known as the Confessing Church, didn't agree. Karl Barth was perhaps the most notable, and when the Confessing Church leaders met in 1934, in the small village of Barmen, Barth is credited with penning what was later known as the Barmen Declaration. Its first article says: 'There is one word that God has spoken and that word is Jesus Christ. Him alone will we listen to and obey.' For that declaration Barth had to flee back to Switzerland for his life.

Of course, the Baptists in America, though there is strict church/state separation, have also had their share of civil religion. At the front of most Baptist churches there is a Church flag and an American flag and the emblems, even in that place where there is a strict constitutional separation, often get confused. Sometimes very badly confused.

George Bush (who isn't a Baptist) was debating Bill Clinton (who is a Baptist) back in the presidential election that Clinton won, two terms ago. Bush was speaking to a huge gathering in Texas, made up largely of the religious round table—lots of Baptists, who are the dominant church there. He finished his election speech by declaring, 'Has not Jesus himself taught that America is to be a light unto the nations?' And they stood and they applauded him. A comical but disturbing example of civil religion where the church is the chaplain to national power.

In the New Testament we read how the ministry of Jesus continued the tradition of the prophets. But the ministry of Jesus was more than spiritual—you don't get executed by the state for just proclaiming that God loves everyone. The religious leaders who Jesus contradicted were also the judges and politicians within Israel. His rejection of their religious vision was a contest of power and politics. The temple he cleansed of money-changers was the equivalent of the Judean stock exchange. In this violent act Jesus suggested that economics must serve God, and that in his ministry the acceptable year of the Lord—otherwise known as Jubilee when the debts of the poor would be forgiven—was dawning.

I think it regrettable that on a critical issue like tax reform, the Prime Minister can be in a position to rebut Opposition objections by quoting a church leader to the effect that 'there is no such thing as a Catholic position on something like taxation reform'.—Frank Brennan

The most critical thing for all of us in the church, particularly those like Frank and me who are thought of as political priests or clergy, is actually to focus on the role of the church. That role must first and foremost preach grace and dispense grace. We do not exist to pull the levers of power and usurp the function of the state. When the church tries to act like a political party or to wield power and influence, it is in danger of compromising its task. The church is entrusted to proclaim a gospel of love and model this through discipleship and service. Just as the state must not try to do for us what we can do for ourselves, likewise the church must remain faithful to being the church that is aiming to touch and change lives, not just to change laws.

But in the dispensing of grace, the church confesses that there is a kingdom still coming and its lure disturbs the present.

Therefore, the status quo is never sufficiently just. In this restlessness, prophetic engagement and political activity is born. Grace isn't a purely privatised grace where faith resides only in the heart. It must connect with the world. As G.K. Chesterton noted, when the state and the church become too cosy, it is good for the state and bad for the church.

In January next year, the Baptist World Alliance is gathering in Melbourne. There will be 20,000 Baptists in Melbourne, which is a terrifying thought. As part of my reading in preparation for speaking at that Congress, I was fascinated to find a report of a US delegate who was at the Baptist World Alliance Congress in Berlin in 1934.

He sent back this report of what he found under Hitler's regime. He said: 'It was a great relief to be in a country where salacious sex literature cannot be sold, where putrid motion pictures and gangster films cannot be shown. The new Germany has burned great masses of corrupting books and magazines along with its bonfires of Jewish and Communistic libraries.'

The same delegate defended Hitler as a leader who did not smoke or drink, who wanted women to dress modestly and who opposed pornography. This is a very clear example of when grace becomes privatised: it sees only the individual private moral virtues. I think privatisation that happens economically often does have a shadow side religiously. When the Premier of Victoria says to me that I really should just focus on getting people back into the pews and stay out of commenting on politics because he runs the state and is the political expert, then he is buying into this privatised idea that somehow grace doesn't connect with a political culture.

One of the most powerful people to emerge in challenging the church was Dietrich Bonhöffer. His influence was felt well after his death, and he was read by many in the East German Church under the communist regime. These people poured out of the Nikolai-Kirche after a prayer meeting and started weekly marches around Leipzig with candles. The movement spread and eventually toppled the Wall. Bonhöffer wrote the following in July 1944 in his prison cell:

> The church is the church only when it exists for others ... To make a start it should give away all its property to those in need. The clergy must live solely on the free will offerings of their congregations or possibly engage in some secular calling, the church must share in the secular problems of human life, not dominating but helping and serving ... In particular our own church will have to take the field against the voices of hubris, power worship and envy which are the roots of all evil.

Those words were read over and over by Christians in the East German Church. They were echoed by Martin Luther King when he said, 'The Church is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state; it must be the guide and the critic of the state and never its tool.'

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Church, State meddling clerics

Frank Brennan

When considering the relationship between church and state, it is necessary to consider the limits on state intervention in church affairs and the limits on church intervention in state affairs. The latter, which is my major concern here, might be termed the self-imposed limits on the activities of meddling priests. It raises four issues and four problems.

Rights versus the Common Good

Even in a pluralistic and secular public domain such as the Australian public forum, there is a legitimate place for the church as an advocate for the poor and disadvantaged. Our concern is not with the church as lobbyist in its own cause—as when issues of school funding and hospital funding are raised. But I would argue for a church role in articulating a more comprehensive or more richly textured notion of the common good or public interest than is often heard in the secular domain with its focus on individual rights and personal autonomy.

An example of the problem arose with the Wik debate, which was so much more complex than Mabo. Mabo was a straightforward exercise of advocating the rights of the Aborigines on vacant crown land, deciding a future regime for dealings between Aborigines and mining companies. Wik added another dimension, with a conflict of existing rights between native title claimants and pastoralists who had interests in the same areas of land. Not all pastoralists were rich and powerful. Not all Aboriginal organisations were poor and dispossessed. The public interest and the common good demanded a balancing of rights and interests. Advocating the balance could be perceived as an abandonment of commitment to the Aboriginal cause in the domain of ambit claims and pressure group politics.

When to Speak

Even before the church takes a stand, there must first be a decision when to speak and when to remain silent. At the height of the Wik debate, respected Aboriginal leader Aden Ridgeway said:

> There is no doubt that Fr Brennan has immense respect and affection amongst Aboriginal people throughout the country. More significantly, he is widely listened to by Australians generally because he is believed to speak for Aboriginal people. This has created a desperately difficult dilemma for indigenous leaders. Fr Brennan's support and advocacy are much needed; but where he takes a stand which differs from that of Aboriginal people themselves, especially over difficult issues of political judgment, the very fact that he is believed by the general community to speak for Aborigines suggests that he should be silent on such topics.

More recently, Aboriginal leaders have been silent on the issue of the constitutional preamble. Is there a place for church personnel to be out there trying to improve the Howard recipe, maintaining the pressure, trying to create the space for future agreement between government and the Aboriginal leadership? Given the recent Tandberg cartoon on the front of the Melbourne *Age* that had me telling the Prime Minister, 'It's quite simple really ... God was here first, the Aborigines second and I'm God's representative', I believe there is a task for church people here, even though it is a high-risk political strategy. I readily understand that other church people of good will and political acumen would choose to remain silent. But we must remember there is no point in proceeding with a preamble question at the time of the republic referendum unless the wording has the public support of key indigenous participants at the Constitutional Convention. If that support is forthcoming, the preamble question would presumably be supported by all major political parties and would be a symbolic aid to national reconciliation. The issue of continuing rights flowing from indigenous status did not have sufficient support at the Constitutional Convention to effect a reversal of the Prime Minister's position. The key issue is whether there can be a description of indigenous custodianship and unique contribution to national life which satisfies Aboriginal leaders and the government.

A constitutional referendum is very different from the legislative process in that it will succeed only with cross-party support. The non-Labor side has always been the most successful side of politics in constitutional reform, precisely because of their conservativeness. So the Prime Minister is holding the trump cards. If the indigenous leaders are not interested in a compromised document, they should abandon any call for constitutional change. Compromise is not antithetical to reconciliation in this instance.

Distinguishing Law, Social Policy and Morality

There is insufficient consideration by those speaking and acting in the name of churches about the different roles of morality, law and social policy. Just because I and my co-religionists believe something is wrong does not mean there ought to be a law against it. We also need to distinguish tolerance, acceptance and endorsement. In a pluralistic democratic society, there are many activities of others which a person with a religiously informed social conscience will not want to endorse but which she will tolerate, respecting the other's right to participate in the life of the community and to enjoy basic rights and freedoms. She will accept the other but preserve to herself the choice about when in good conscience she wants to endorse the actions of the other. For many Catholics, the preferred law and social policy on issues such as abortion, euthanasia and gay rights remains a perplexing challenge while the morality of particular actions is not in doubt.

Church position or personal position

Often it is difficult to discern whether there is a church position on an issue or simply personal positions held by those in church authority. For example, it is fashionable at the moment to portray Archbishop George Pell as the Pope's man, and he may well be. But he is more than that. He is a rugged, Australian individualist who is prepared to mix it in the political domain regardless of whether there is a Catholic position, and perhaps even in opposition to the Catholic position.

A church leader with a developing national profile like Archbishop George Pell can move the motion for a particular republican model at the Republican Convention urging the Prime Minister to show leadership while later negating any detailed church position on a GST, saying politics is for the laity and that 'there is no one Catholic position on an issue as complex as taxation'. There is presently no coherent position of the Australian Catholic hierarchy about the issues on which they will speak, either for the church or for themselves, and neither is there agreement about the degree of specificity of their comments and interventions. Imagine the reaction if a Catholic Archbishop were to urge a position on tax reform or federal–state relations according to the tenor of Archbishop Pell's key intervention at the Constitutional Convention when he moved the motion for a very specific model of republic, 'That this Convention supports the adoption of a republican system of government on the bipartisan appointment model in preference to there being no change to the Constitution.' He declared:

> I submit that we stand in need of leadership—and strong leadership—from our elected leaders, especially in the federal parliament. I come from a church which knows about hierarchy, from a church which respects office and office holders, although there is no doubt that we have produced many rebels too. So it is with respect that I submit that the delegates have a right to know where the leadership of the federal government and the federal opposition stand on the great issue which is before us in this House today and in the referendum that will be put. Are they for or against this bipartisan model? (Report of the Constitutional Convention, Transcript of Proceedings, Volume 4, p965)

Archbishop Pell was a prime ministerial nomination of a church leader to the Constitutional Convention. Once he was on the floor of the Convention, Archbishop Pell might have argued that he was simply expressing his personal opinion (much as I do on Aboriginal issues). Others would claim that an archbishop in such a forum is never simply expressing a personal opinion.

When the church tries to act like a political party or to wield power and influence, it is in danger of compromising its task.—Tim Costello

I think the bishops got it right with their ten principles of morality and justice in relation to tax reform, published on 28 July 1998. But that document would be a dead letter in the political debate nine months on unless there were an authorised church agency which could speak authoritatively and make judgments as to how the detailed government proposals measure up. Such an agency must also be at liberty to agitate publicly and privately, in the name of the church, for the maximum recognition of those principles. Church leaders ought to do more, or at least resource others to do more, than simply take the approach adopted by Archbishop Pell after the release of the bishops' ten principles.

Conceding that the ten criteria for equitable tax reform 'naturally ... remain in place', he went on to say, 'There is no one Catholic position on an issue as complex as taxation. Opinions will continue to differ. Time is still needed to study the detail and the consequences. This is best done by the political parties and interest groups. The Government's tax package [is] a serious attempt to address the problems of an ailing tax system.' He then urged 'all Catholics to make an informed assessment'.

But how are they to make such an informed assessment? Ought not the church

dedicate resources to a competent group to make such an assessment and then offer it publicly to the faithful for their consideration? Could not such a group properly speak in the name of the church?

According to Bishop Manning, who gave evidence to the Senate Select Committee on a New Tax System, the Central Commission of bishops and the key church agencies did reach agreement on the principles to govern the tax debate. Manning told the committee that Pell 'did not see eye to eye with the position, and so he went out and had his say'. The result was a public perception that there was no church position on the way the principles were to be applied to the political issue at hand.

When questioned by the Opposition in Question Time on 30 March 1999, John Howard was delighted to be able to quote the Pell dictum: 'Whenever any of us start invoking the name of the church, we ought to remember that there is no such thing as a Catholic position on taxation reform.'

There is insufficient consideration by those speaking and acting in the name of churches about the different roles of morality, law and social policy. Just because I and my co-religionists believe something is wrong does not mean there ought to be a law against it.
—Frank Brennan

Appearance of position speaks volumes in the political process. I think it regrettable that on a critical issue like tax reform, the Prime Minister can be in a position to rebut Opposition objections by quoting a church leader to the effect that 'there is no such thing as a Catholic position on something like taxation reform'.

As I understand it, Archbishop Pell said this during the election campaign in order to negate any prospect of other church personnel positioning the hierarchy to take on a position opposed to the government. But this was too simplistic because there is a Catholic position on tax reform, namely the ten principles or outcomes enunciated by the bishops. The two critical principles are: that low-income families and individuals are better off in absolute terms; that to the maximum extent possible the essentials of life remain free of tax.

Therefore, if the essentials of life are not to remain free of tax, it is essential that low-income families and individuals be no worse off. That is a credible Catholic position in the present debate—a position which has been taken by most of the hierarchy. Provided the other eight principles are complied with, they are THE Catholic position.

Four Problems

This overview leaves us with four problems which I have been unable to resolve to my satisfaction after 20 years' involvement in the field.

First, the enunciation of principles is fine, but how does the church play a constructive and responsible role in moving beyond principle to scrutiny of proposed laws under the auspices of a competent mandated agency without running the risk of party political alliances?

Second, what is the role of the honest broker in an era of ambit politics? Stakeholders who want 'x' at the end of the democratic process start by claiming '2x'. They perceive the honest broker who claims only 'x' as the unwitting accomplice who will ensure the delivery of only '1/2 x'. This was eloquently expressed by Aboriginal leader Noel Pearson during the Keating negotiations on native title in 1993. He offered this assessment of my approach:

> I always have a go at Frank for being too cynical about politicians. Sadly, white politicians seem to find it easier to talk about Aboriginal issues with someone like them. It's more comfortable for them to talk to someone like Frank than to come and talk to us. He's a very influential player, and if he suggests the middle ground as the position for politicians to take, then what actually happens is less than that. I think he doesn't realise how much weight white politicians put on his imprimatur. He tells them what they can get away with. It's important that he doesn't aim too low, because inevitably he will get less than he asks for, and it can drag the aspirations of the Aboriginal people down. Still, I am always saying that if black people think Brennan is striking an unacceptably conservative position, then it's up to them to articulate how a less conservative position might work.

Third, the secular humanists seem to enjoy a stranglehold over the thin notions of public interest and common good which are permitted in the public forum. The euthanasia debate is a good example. Those for and against euthanasia are agreed on the need to protect the vulnerable. They disagree on the extent to which you limit individual autonomy of all in order to protect the vulnerable few. They disagree completely on the extent to which you limit individual freedom so as to maintain the quality of the doctor–patient relationship, the quality of the relationship between all dying dependent persons and their responsible relations, and the state's commitment to resourced palliative care given that active euthanasia is not an option even in the interests of efficiency. To what extent should religious notions of the common good and public interest hold sway when the good to be achieved is more than the protection only of the poorest and most vulnerable?

Fourth, there is little consideration by those speaking and acting in the name of churches about matters of political morality. By the time Wik got to the Senate the third time, the question was not primarily, 'What should the law be?' The question was, 'To what extent was one independent Tasmanian Senator entitled and able to amend the government's proposals honouring the limits on the Senate and the significance of the proposed legislation?'

Some church personnel who are strong supporters of Aboriginal rights were adamant that the Senate should reject the government's Bill, even though they were of the Keating school of thought that the Senate is unrepresentative swill.

Church people active in the political process of the State have to be principled pragmatists who are always prepared to articulate the moral principles on which their preferred outcome is premised, professionally disinterested in which party is in power, consistent in their articulation of the parameters on power to be exercised by the various cogs in the machinery of State, calculating in their assessment of what is achievable, and unstinting and impartial in their efforts to achieve the outcome. If social conscience is an expression of the believer's right to participate fully in society, the believer must be prepared to have dialogue with anyone and to welcome any intervention made in good faith.

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These are edited transcripts of talks given on 27 April in Sydney and 28 April in Melbourne as part of the 'Transformations' series. See page 4 for details of the series.

PAUL RULE

Learning from China

The Analects of Confucius, Translation and Notes by Simon Leys, W.W. Norton, 1997. ISBN 0 393 04019 4, RRP $24.95
A Dragon not for the Killing, Brendan Lovett, Claretian Publications, 1998. ISBN 971 501 792 4

CHINA HAS ALWAYS been a mirror for the anxieties and dilemmas of the West. The two books discussed here, while superficially very different in content and method, demonstrate this admirably. In discussing China they comment on our society and exploit modern Western ideas to illuminate ancient China.

In his version of the sayings of the Chinese sage known in the West as Confucius, Simon Leys, in the translation itself as well as the introduction and notes, obliquely comments on the great issues of our time—the source of values, the price of economic development, the place of education in a civilised society. Brendan Lovett, a Columban priest resident in the Philippines, looking at China today through the eyes of a social scientist as well as a Christian theologian and missionary, asks the same questions in a very different way but with a surprising convergence of the answers.

The extent of agreement with Leys is surprising because of Lovett's rejection of what his theological mentor, Bernard Lonergan, calls 'classicism', or 'the fallacy of misplaced normativity', to use Lovett's words (p137). Confucius does not even get a mention in the index to Lovett's book, and the only mention that I can find in his text is a conventional reference to Confucianism's allotting the state prime responsibility for maintaining the culture of a society (p10). He favours a fundamental rethinking of values in an age of globalisation and masses an army of contemporary commentators in his support, with Lonergan always at the head of the motley array. The scatter-fire of Lovett's approach, ranging from cosmology (illustrated on the cover by a magnificent picture from the Hubble in-space telescope of the Orion Nebula), through development theory, sociology, philosophy and theology, is a little wearying at times, and its relationship to Christian presence in China is tenuous. The broad thrust, however, is clear. The future of China is the future of the whole world. We are all caught up in a destructive race for consumption. Can China, can we, find a way out? Can Christianity help negotiate the way? These are all urgent questions and Lovett poses them with urgency and a fine passion.

In his second chapter, Lovett discusses the extraordinary phenomenon of 'culture Christianity' in China, a movement of intellectuals, mostly not themselves believers, who, impressed by the role Christianity has played in Western culture, by Christian altruism, the Christian myths of sin and repentance, faith and hope, advocate it as a way for China to follow. Their writings, much muted since 1989, remind me of an elderly professor I once worked under who would frequently lament the loss of religion in our society, always prefacing his remarks with: 'I am not a believer myself, but ...'

Lovett is, of course, a believer, but he seems to me at times to come close to an instrumental reading of Christian mission and to a secularising of the gospel:

> Moralistic appeals to the common good, subsidiarity, and a just wage are hardly sufficient. Nothing less will suffice than the attempt to develop a new macro-economic knowledge of the production process, to be placed at the service of the values incarnate in agapic praxis and prophetic narratives. (pp65–6)

It is somewhat surprising, then, after many pages of very Western, very academic discussion, to come upon something like this: 'But the block [to a breakthrough in Chinese consciousness] is the necrophilia of the Western academy, making only another version of truncated subjectivity available to Chinese universities' (p163). Lovett is probably right in terms of the kind of Western writing popular in China, but except for economics and science, the most influential writers seem to me to have been not academics but popularisers like Alvin Toffler. And the 'Kala OK' bars, discotheques, drugs and pirate videos of American films that have proliferated in Chinese cities testify to the influence of an ecumenical pop culture and a consumerism that owes nothing to the academy.

Nevertheless, Lovett is always provocative and much of his critique of contemporary society, his plea for ecological sustainability, his focus on the human person, is as relevant to our interaction with China as anywhere on earth. 'Is there another way?' he asks, quoting the poet R.S. Thomas' 'Bleak Liturgies'. 'Is there another way of engaging?' The engagement may be a little abstract but it is nonetheless real and sincere.

Pierre Ryckmans, the sinologist, has chosen to put his Simon Leys *nom de guerre* to his translation of the *Lun Yu* (*The Sayings*, badly, but conventionally entitled *Analects*) of Confucius, which at first sight puzzled me, as did his claim in the Foreword that it was primarily a writer's translation. A close reading, however, especially of the notes, brought enlightenment as to his choice. His Confucius is a politician, first and foremost, not primarily a philosopher or even a teacher. 'Politics is an extension of ethics', Leys writes in the Introduction (page xxv) in a section entitled 'the politics of

Confucius'. And the politics are those of our day, of the West as well as China, as shown by the notes which are so much more than the usual philological and historical commentary. It is Leys the sardonic commentator on today's China and today's Australia who dominates this translation of a text two-and-a-half millennia old.

Here, for example, is a passage from the third page of an extended annotation on two lines of the *Analects* (19:13). These lines read in his translation: 'Zixia said: "Leisure from politics should be devoted to learning. Leisure from learning should be devoted to politics."' The translation here is brilliantly right. It captures the brevity of the original and the essence of Confucianism, the inextricable entanglement of politics and culture. Leys comments:

> Now the great paradox of our age, of course, is that, whereas the wretched *lumpenproletariat* is cursed with the enforced leisure of large-scale, permanent unemployment, members of the educated elite, whose liberal professions have been turned into senseless money-making machines, are condemning themselves to the slavery of endless working hours, day and night, without respite—till they collapse like over-loaded beasts of burden.

The commentary is ironic (the nod to Marxism), polemical (Voltairean is an adjective that has been applied to the writings of Simon Leys), learned (laced with allusions to European writers and thinkers) and ultimately over the top. But I would prefer it to the ponderous platitudes of most Western as well as Chinese commentators. He takes Master Kong seriously, which is the greatest compliment one could pay him.

Sometimes, alas, the commentator nods. For example, a note on 4:6 refers to Spinoza—'it took another two thousand years before Spinoza would ponder again the puzzling fact that we do not desire what we know to be good'—which ignores Augustine's famous discussion long before in the *Confessions* of just this issue. Leys is right, however, to remind us in the preceding note (on 4:3) of the danger of unconscious Western—that is, ultimately, Christian—misreadings of Confucius which even such as Arthur Waley fall into.

This is not the place to discuss sinological minutiae. In any case, I decided that my minor quarrels with the translation were on matters of taste rather than fundamentals. Where there is real and important ambiguity the notes alert us to the fact. There were times when the English struck me as a little Frenchified—for example, the 'Is it not?' at the end of 1:10 smacked of *'n'est-ce pas*?'. I personally would translate *zheng* as 'government' not 'politics' (1:10) which sounds too modern for the fifth century BCE; *qi* as a 'tool' not a 'pot' (2:11, but both acceptable readings), *ren* as 'humaneness' not a bland 'goodness' (4:3,4,6).

I found his constant preference for the readings of Arthur Waley over D.C. Lau (the Penguin Classic *Analects*) curious. One could argue that Lau, philosopher as well as linguist, over-philosophises Confucius—his Confucius is a philosopher more than a politician. Again a matter of taste, or rather fundamental orientation. Still, I found the lively colloquial renderings generally appropriate. Even if they are philosophy, they are philosophical sayings, *obiter dicta*, not truncated treatises, and certainly not what 'Confucius says' in Western folklore.

I was pleased to see due weight given to my favourite passage from the *Lun Yu*, 11:26, where Confucius asks his leading followers what they would most like to be. He is amused at their brashness and ambition, false modesty and apeing of his views. It is the choice of Zeng Dian, who significantly has been strumming his lute in the background, which gains his approval:

> 'In late spring, after the making of the spring clothes has been completed, together with five or six companions and six or seven boys, I would like to bathe in the River Yi, and then enjoy the breeze on the Rain Dance terrace, and go home singing.' The Master heaved a deep sigh and said: 'I am with Dian!'

This is far from the puritan workaholic of Chinese and Western tradition. But I am not sure that one can call Confucius, as Leys does in the notes on this chapter, a mystic. A man with a mission, yes, even a religious mission, but for him Heaven does not speak directly to men (17:19).

There are many opaque passages in the text. Leys frankly admits when he is baffled. There are a few places, however, where he brings an episode to life brilliantly and convincingly. In 5:7 Confucius talks about building a raft and setting out to sea on it. This is usually read as ironic and his disciple Zilu's enthusiastic offer to accompany him as folly and rashness. Leys points out that the Chinese at that time did sail the seas on rafts, that the scholar was also a man of action (my students are constantly puzzled when I tell them that many great Chinese philosophers were also statesmen and generals), and so that Confucius was possibly quite serious even if not necessarily proposing an immediate voyage. Arthur Waley in his commentary refers to the notion that the sage has a mission to spread civilisation to the barbarians (like us?) who inhabit the 'four seas'. This also explains the not-so-well-hidden condescension of many Chinese in Australia towards our barbarian culture.

One point Leys makes about the significance of the *Analects* in Chinese history is important—the emphasis on education, on its transforming but non-utilitarian function in society, its centrality in moral and social development. Not so long ago, the president of a Hong Kong university asked me in genuine puzzlement: 'Isn't your government concerned about economic and social progress? Why is it cutting educational funding at a time when we are increasing ours?' I suspect both Leys and Lovett would query some of the implications of that question but the genuine incomprehension comes from Confucian assumptions.

There are many Confuciuses and the recent transmogrification of the Master into an economic rationalist, while remarkable, is by no means the most bizarre. In many ways the statist, authoritarian Confucius of much of China's history is even more aberrant. Yet the power of the text of the *Analects* to liberate remains. I think Lovett's master, Bernard Lonergan, would have approved of much of the Confucius that Simon Leys has revealed: humane, reflective, inducing insight in others by showing them one of the four corners, emphasising inner conversion, respecting heaven as revealed in the world, eschewing false religiosity, loving, inner-directed. We can know this Confucius only through close attention to the text and Simon Leys enables those who read no ancient Chinese to do this. It requires meditative reading, but, as the last line of the *Analects* (in Leys translation of course) puts it: 'He who does not understand words is incapable of understanding men.'

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The **winner** of the *Eureka Street* Gift Subscription Competition is Mrs June Leahy of Portland, VIC. Mrs Leahy wins a Panasonic Portable CD player.

Peter Craven

Singing up a storm

Opera Australia 1999. *Billy Budd; Il Trovatore; Pelléas et Mélisande; Fidelio; Roméo et Juliette.*

Billy Budd might have stood as a rejoinder to anyone who thought Opera Australia was not capable of 'excellence'. I came to it with a recent dose of prejudice against the director, Neil Armfield, whose production of David Hare's Oscar Wilde play, *The Judas Kiss*, had seemed to me, to say the least, over-praised. *Billy Budd*, in contrast, was a triumph.

It is a difficult work, this brooding untuneful morality drama which Benjamin Britten seems to have made out of his Christianity, his sense of the terribleness of human judgment, and the associations such things might have (easy to guess at, impossible to know) with the sexualisation of cruelty and the feeling for male beauty during a period—the early '50s—of heightened moral rigour.

At one level *Billy Budd* is a flog opera, at another it is a kind of Hegelian tragedy. But it is remarkable how deep the collaborative layers of homoerotic intensity go to produce a music drama which is bracingly masculine and 'straight'—this is a late, lame stretch of a masterpiece out of Melville with a libretto by E.M. Forster (and Eric Crozier) to Britten's music performance by Peter Pears and an all-male cast. Perhaps with such impacted provocations it's not surprising that *Billy Budd* is as chaste as it is.

Not that Britten fails to do justice to the sinister schadenfreude which is at the heart of Claggart's desire to destroy Billy. The perverseness of the overwhelmingly sexualised aspect of the characterisation is so effective precisely because of the starkness of the Christian allegory. He is perceived, rightly, as evil, and in such a way that the homosexual nature of his inclinations become at once trivial by comparison and acceptable as the *écriture* of his denial of the light. Never mind that he sums up, by negation, what is written all over this world with its 'brute beauty'.

I don't wish to make *Billy Budd* sound like more of an allegory in a changing room than it is, still less to campify it. It is, with stark and snarling brilliance, and great depths of pessimism as well as intermittent bursts of something like sunlight, a cryptomodern parable: a wicked Master at Arms falsely accuses a lovable sailor (who, yes, hath a daily beauty in his life which makes him ugly) and thus provokes the knockdown blow that kills him. And Vere, the captain, knowing that Billy is good and Claggart evil, is forced to sentence the stammering innocent to death.

It would have been a terrible thing if Neil Armfield had minced his way through this material, which is as stark as David's lament for Jonathan and less lovely. He doesn't. The production is full of the contrast of Napoleonic war naval dress, with *bicornes* and heavy cloaks, and a minimalist stage with a deck that tilts at whatever angle is necessary to the storm and vertigo of the drama. It's a production which captures the harshness of the naval discipline that slashes and bellows from this score. Armfield achieves a marvellous sense of dynamic and indeterminate space which tallies both with the ship-at-sea setting and the bleakness and agony in which the moral choices are enshrouded.

Above and below deck with *Billy Budd*.

This is a 'state of the art' production by any international standard. It does ample justice to Britten's opera and to a score which is characterised by intensity and dramatic coherence rather than attractiveness and lilt. There is an extraordinary vigour in the massed chorus, with their strife and struggle and seaspray, and a flickering menace in the way Claggart's evil is largely written in the minor mode. But Britten's music is as unrelentingly unpretty as the Melville vision he has made his own by the Borges-like procedure of re-endorsing it point by point. In fact (given the dynamism of the musical translation) *Billy Budd* is one of the great operas built on a literary text, as empathic in its way as any Verdi animation of Shakespeare or Schiller.

If Armfield does Britten's vision proud he has singer-actors of stature to give substance to his direction. Robert Tear is one of the great Britten singers (admired by the composer himself) and his Captain Vere is masterly—full of agonised restraint. Tear's voice is no longer in its prime but it is a stronger voice than Peter Pears' and every inch as expressive. The image of Vere, stripped of naval regalia, giving his wondering, meditative lament for the injustice in which he has been complicit, is one of the most remarkable things I have seen in the musical theatre. Tear and Armfield apparently disagreed over the conception of the Captain and his dilemma, with Armfield opting—with what might be thought of as predictable sentiment—for the view of Vere as the honourable man who adheres to the principle of *fiat justitia*, and Tear believing Vere was a coward. The latter conception did not unambiguously prevail, but Tear did give the final characterisation a searing depth of self-reproach which was all the more affecting for the restraint and refinement of what had preceded it.

Stephen Bennett's Claggart may not have been quite at this level but the singing was

strong and there was a convincing sense of the kind of masculinity which is naturally attracted to authoritarian forms. The characterisation could have done with a shade more blackness perhaps, but the upright 'normality' of the characterisation, the very Anglo-Saxon starchiness despite the kinks, had considerable power of persuasion.

The title role in the Neil Armfield/Richard Hickox production was taken by the London-based Australian baritone Peter Coleman-Wright and if his acting was fine, his singing was marvellous. I listened to Peter Glossop in Britten's recording of the opera as a preparation for this production and Coleman-Wright really did seem to have the edge, not least in Billy's great act two solo, before his death, 'Look! Through the port comes the moon-shine astray', where the musicality of the singing becomes an extraordinary dramatic thing, poignant and plangent.

Something similar is true of Richard Hickox's conducting. Hickox is a major exponent of Britten's work (some of his interpretations—of the *War Requiem* for example—are even more highly regarded in some quarters than the composer's). What he brings to the score of *Billy Budd* is a meditative intensity and deliberateness, an ability to listen to the connections and attend to the longer paragraphs. He doesn't have Britten's impatience or his extroversion but the upshot—which is extremely powerful and pensive—is to tilt *Billy Budd* all the more strongly in the direction of modern tragedy. Hickox also manages to hear the hush and the yearning behind the stormtoss and the windlash. It is a wonderfully intense and restrained performance.

Billy Budd was one of those all too rare opera productions where it's obvious even to an unbeliever that this form of musical drama can touch on things which are urgent and calamitous and full of electrical intensity. The director and Billy Budd were Australian, the conductor and Captain Vere were British. The production itself was some form of Australian export which was coming back home. It was also a production rated as a world event in *International Opera Collector*.

Il Trovatore

THE REST OF THE Melbourne tour (to the time of going to press) has been a mixed bag, though in no way shameful. If there has been nothing else remotely on par with *Billy Budd*, there has also been nothing to justify calls for the opera to lose its funding.

It is always a difficult thing to defend an art form, more particularly a traditional and establishment one, that requires subsidy for its survival, to critics who have no appreciation of its charms and mighty claims or who require that it be done superbly if it is to be done at all. This is the kind of argument that would only justify bubblegum adventure stories if they were all as good as *Star Wars*. So much for *The Matrix*.

Chesterton was right when he said that if a thing was worth doing it was worth doing badly. Of course it's necessary to qualify immediately and say that the kind of 'badly' which is acceptable from a company like Opera Australia should be compatible with something like the aspiration to be 'world class' (and *pace* Barrie Kosky, that's not a parochial judgment: it's a simple practical comparison that every society in the world makes).

Admittedly the production of *Il Trovatore* that hit Melbourne (in the manner of an ancient, wettish fish) didn't do much for Chestertonian paradox. This was the old Elijah Moshinsky version with the Sidney Nolan sets. It was looking the worse for wear—a pity really because this was a splendid and viable production in its day.

It had been a vehicle and a showcase for Joan Sutherland, a production that showed what opera could do rather than what could be done with opera. Most people who had seen it in one of its earlier incarnations would have had fond memories of things like the nonchalant fencing rehearsal with which the soldier's chorus 'Squilli, echeggi la tromba guerriera' was sung. The night I saw it the ghost had fled and only the corpse was in evidence. Richard Jones had supposedly rehearsed Moshinsky's production but the original director's precision of movement and gesture was nowhere in evidence, and in the absence of any sense of epiphany or action, Nolan's sets looked simply old.

Everything went wrong. Soldiers leapt on to chairs at the wrong moment, gypsies slumped where they should have skipped. And it didn't help that Richard Gill sometimes had the State Orchestra of Victoria playing too loud and in uncertain tempi. Caruso supposedly said that all you needed for *Il Trovatore* was the four best singers in the world. In this production Maria Pollicina produced a certain largesse of sound as Leonora but she was sometimes raw-toned and she couldn't act. There were hideous moments where the singer appeared gleeful at points of dire distress. Antonio Nagore was better, but Richard Jones did not succeed in allowing this large-voiced tenor to give more than a perfunctory performance, full of taste but lacking the redbloodedness and outrage that Verdi requires. Only Elizabeth Campbell as Azucena sang and acted with the passion and style appropriate to the work. Hers was a commendable attempt to come to terms with one of the greatest of Verdi mezzo roles, and the fact that Campbell appeared to be incarnating Azucena in a ghost production peopled by ghosts, made the performance all the more formidable.

PELLEAS ET MELISANDE was in a different category altogether, though it produced polarised reactions from the punters. The decision to stage this early modernist opera, with its post-Wagnerian critique of Wagner and its strange dappled symbolist score, was clearly an attempt to get out of the chocolate box, and present one of the important and difficult modern operas rather than just another bit of Puccini.

The result was a close-run thing. The production, by Patrick Nolan, was neither bad nor wrongheaded but it was without the kind of instant ability to visualise (and indeed conjure) which is all but essential with an opera like this. Nolan's production showed signs of being intelligent and thoughtful without quite working. There were also odd confusions, for example where a forest had to double with a castle and the effect came across as something like an Eltham lounge room circa 1970. Lots of glass.

It's a production burdened by symbolism and literalism in equal measure but with little sense of balance. Symbolic waterholes manage to get real clothes wet. We are neither enchanted nor convinced. And it featured one of the worst distractions ever let loose in an opera production: for every one of the many musical interludes Debussy wrote for *Pelleas*, Nolan had the curtain come sailing across, clangingly and

OUYANG YU

The winter sun

was fast fading beyond
the half-transparent wall
of my garage
Scribbling across the wall face
with something like trees
lying on a lethargic sofa
I was watching it fade
doing nothing to stop it
closing my eyes
for it to fade further
counting the names of people
on the inside of my eye-lids
for possible support
and finding none
each one of them a would-be embarrassment
aware that the world must be fast progressing
around me
advancing where there would be no more need
for books and the likes of me
I wasn't dreaming
for I knew the sun had gone down
leaving the winter behind
on the wall
and a few gilt-edged clouds
drifting
or frozen
I remember the rejection
the disgust with the human world
of competition
and my own thought:

was it because I was old?

treacherously, so that even the most high-minded soul could think of nothing but champagne and toilets.

That said, the State Orchestra of Victoria played very well under John Fiore and the principals were good. Kirsti Harms had presence as Mélisande, Angus Wood sang better than he acted as Pelléas and John Pringle (although too old for the role) gave menace and dramatic savagery to the part of Golaud.

So it was an interesting attempt at a very important opera. But it showed that in a work which can seem to be about the nature of interpretation the director can't go in and expect the story to tell itself.

To some extent he or she can when the work is *Fidelio* and the composer is Beethoven, not so much because the story is a creaky old pile of Romantic fervour as because the music so triumphantly justifies itself at every point that the drama becomes absolutely vivid as its necessary pretext.

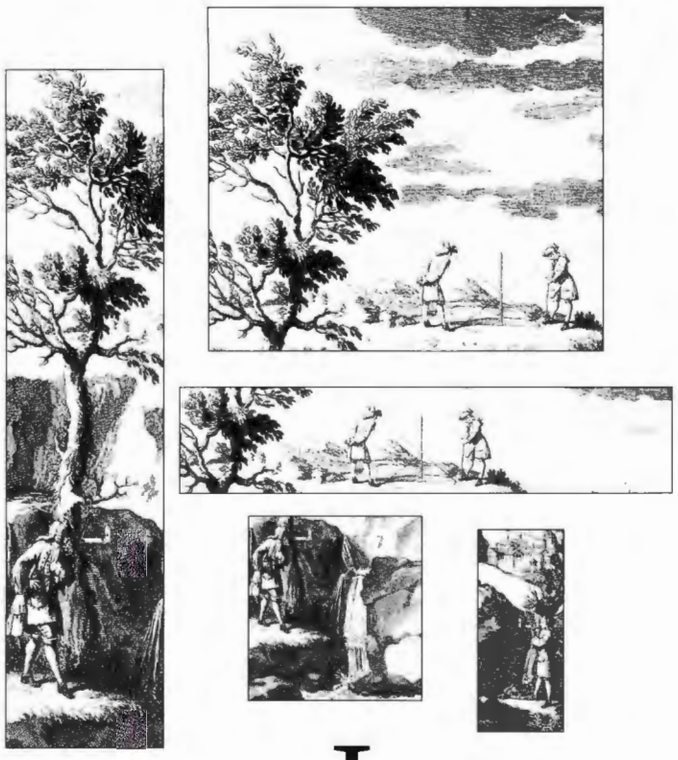
This was Elke Neidhardt's restaging of a Michael Hampe production and it was in high Germanic chocolate box style: easy on the eyes and soothing enough to the mind for the music to be able to do its work. Which it did, imperfectly but triumphantly. Elizabeth Whitehouse as Leonora had an extraordinary sparkle and bite, even if not every note was perfect. It was a terrific singer's performance, soaring and intense, and served to symbolise the way this music creates happiness less like a drug than a religion. Whitehouse is precisely the kind of singer Opera Australia should be hugging to its bosom.

As it should Julian Gavin, a rich tenor with a more powerful voice than we are used to hearing, who essayed Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette*. His is a swoopingly sensuous and graceful voice full of Italianate tone, and if Leanne Keneally's Juliette didn't quite rise to meet him, she nevertheless created some very pretty music with him. Just as important as Gavin here was the conductor Richard Divall (the former Artistic Director of the VSO) who brought a marvellous warmth and brio to this 19th-century score which is always bound to seem like the wedding cake that makes a joke of the lovemaking because it is a less markedly 'musical' thing than the Shakespeare it gallicises and rhapsodises. Nevertheless, this was a handsome production to listen to, and Suzanne Johnston's pants role aria as the page was very stylish. To look at, this production was hardly there at all. Lots of monumental minimalism which meant something to the director Sarah Carradine, but not much to anyone else. Any mice of the State Theatre might just as well have come on stage and assisted the singers and chorus in eating up the scenery.

OPERA IS CERTAINLY an expensive activity. In order to have the remotest chance of performing it half-well you need to invest a great deal of money and even more faith. But if we're to live up to the tradition of a country that produced the Melbas and Sutherlands as well as a great number of distinguished singers and musicians and directors and conductors we have to bear with the opera. It's a form of music that is loved by the very large number of people who'll switch on to it on TV or radio. It's an art form the Communist world maintained with a fierce pride in Russia and Eastern Europe. It's also a form which pulls in more young people who realise the truth of Susan Sontag's saying that opera is the most overwhelmingly emotional of all the arts. Song, spectacle, sex and death: what more could you want?

And, yes, if a thing's worth doing it *is* worth doing badly. In the past few months I've seen a great singer, Bryn Terfel, essay one of the great roles, Falstaff, for the first time, in this country. With *Billy Budd* I saw an ensemble production as dark and subtle as any the world's great opera houses could yield on a good day. Given such riches who cares about the also-ran productions? They are a small price.

Peter Craven is editing *Best Australian Essays 1999*.



Integrity: the long walk

Antony Campbell *continues his series on an unconditionally loving God. This month: unconditional love—a different view: decisions, decisions.*

VI

Your love is better than wine.
(Song of Songs 1:2)

A theology of an unconditionally loving God involves a deep and passionate relationship. The playing field is tilted. Many of us settle for a different view of God and a playing field that is level. This view involves a belief in God as a benevolent being, a decent sort of a God. Certainly not a fanatic sectarian God; but an understanding God, well disposed to us creatures and forgiving of our fragility.

I RESIST THE IDEA THAT FAITH in an unconditionally loving God is the easy option. It isn't. As a matter of fact, being unconditionally loved isn't an easy option either. It sounds good. It is good. It isn't easy. The more I have talked with people about accepting God's unconditional love for us, the more I have come to realise how challenging it is. And the more I've found people agreeing that it certainly is not an easy option.

We need a good look at what may be involved in a widely held approach to Christian faith (the Roman Catholic version, at least) and what sort of differences are associated with the acceptance of God's unconditional love. The 'widely held approach' is what I grew up with; it's fine as long as you don't push it. But it's what I think I'm growing away from. The theology of an unconditionally loving God is what I hope I'm growing towards.

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Playing fields

Probably the most helpful description for this widely held, often traditional, approach to Christian faith is faith that searches on a level playing field for its sense of God. The theology of an unconditionally loving God that I've been advocating is faith that searches for its sense of God on a tilted playing field. By a 'level playing field', I mean that the metaphors for God—judge, lover, patron-cum-benefactor, etc.—are given equal value, pointing towards what can be said of God, subverting each other, constantly reminding us of the limits and inadequacy of each, the tension between them disclosing the mystery. By a 'tilted playing field', I mean that priority has been given to a primary metaphor for God, to which others are subordinated. I've been arguing for priority to be given as the primary metaphor to that of God as one who unconditionally loves.

The level playing field where all metaphors are equal (although at any given time some metaphors may be more equal than others) has the advantage of allowing us to play one off against the rest. There are times when it is advantageous to have God as a benefactor or a judge or a patron as well as a lover. Alongside its passion for truth, theology (outside the sects) has a desire to get as many into heaven as possible. Catholic casuistry has normally favoured the faithful against the law, seldom the law against the faithful. Life before God can be easier with appeal to multiple metaphors. In actual living, the advantages of the level playing field have to be balanced against its human risk—the risk, where the metaphors are contradictory, of numbing, paralysing, even soul-destroying ambivalence.

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Analogies

With a tilted playing field, the analogy in human experience for a theology of an unconditionally loving God may be a deep and passionate relationship. I'm not talking about sexual experience, but something much more; sex is not the only realm of passion. A deep and passionate relationship speaks of total acceptance, of both lover and beloved; it speaks of engagement and utter commitment to the well-being of both; it speaks of a mutual joy of presence and being. It speaks of much more. That's the challenge—and the fear. The tilted playing field puts the love first and foremost.

For the level playing field, a different experience of relationship might be sketched as analogy. It might be, but I am not going to do it. Each of us has to draw the sketch for ourselves. Drawn by others, it somehow won't be right. It is a sketch of life when the spark isn't there. Living goes on satisfactorily enough, but there's no flame to the fire. Things are comfortable; but almost too easy, almost anodyne. Safe and secure, with no place for surprises. Nothing deep and passionate. Nothing nourishing for spirit and life. The painful can be evaded; priorities can be shifted. Level playing fields allow for that.

Of these two analogies, most of us are attracted to the first, the deep and passionate. But tilted playing fields are tricky. Many of us settle for the second, the safe and secure, because that's where we are—and we count ourselves lucky. Level playing fields give players more possibilities; no single aspect or metaphor dominates.

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Implications

Overall, that's about where it may be with God. A theology of an unconditionally loving God involves a deep and passionate relationship. The playing field is tilted. Many of us settle for a different view of God and a playing field that is level. This view involves a belief in God as a benevolent being, a decent sort of a God. Certainly not a fanatic sectarian God; but an understanding God, well disposed to us creatures and forgiving of our fragility. Well disposed and able to be prodded a little by prayer. All prayer has its place. Prayer of praise and thanks, of course; but also intercessory prayer where we are asking for things for ourselves or others. We can ask God for favours and we do; we may not necessarily expect to get what we ask for, but we do assume that appropriate behaviour on our part will be appropriately rewarded by God. There is an aspect, therefore, of the patron or benefactor: we expect God to take care of us and to be favourably disposed toward our interests.

There may be a recognition that the scales of justice don't work out in this life; there is an expectation that they will in the next one. Not too savagely of course. We do expect God to be understanding of foibles and not too strict on minor infractions. Whatever our misgivings, most of us see ourselves on the side of the angels. The comforting aspect is that evildoers will receive their deserts. We may not be very clear about who the real evildoers actually are and we may not be very clear about what happens to them, but there is this feeling that the unfairnesses of life are evened out. There is a rewarding reason for sticking close to the straight and narrow. Divine justice will catch up with those who don't.

With a level playing field view of God, elements of the lover, the judge, and the patron-cum-benefactor etc. may be mixed in. The enormous practical advantage of a traditional view is that we aren't constantly challenged; we just have to be found on the side of the angels at the end of life—keeping the rules basically. We can expect to be helped by God along the way, which is psychologically valuable even if it doesn't always come off. We know that being good is going to bring its reward and, perhaps even more satisfying, those who don't bother about goodness will get their appropriate come-uppance in due course. Or something like that.

A tilted playing field, with priority given to an unconditionally loving God, is not quite so easy. It is not enough to be on the side of the angels at the end. It's a poor relationship if all we can say for it is: we were there at the end. A loving God affirms a relational element in faith, invites a personal involvement. If I accept God's love, I'm accepting a relationship and taking on a lot more than just keeping rules. I won't be able to accept love for very long without returning it. If I return that love, I will be constantly looking to the beloved rather than the rules. What will matter is how much I love, not what the rules allow me.

Theoretically, there can be a maddening sense that others aren't bothering about it and are still being loved. Practically, the basic challenge is not about what others are doing but about us. The challenge is: accepting ourselves to be utterly loved by God, how do we respond? Our achievements are not the key; we're loved for who we are, not what we do. How do we respond when it dawns on us that it is not the things we do that ultimately matter nor the dint we make on the outer world? What matters is the person each one of us is, as well as the persons each one of us affects. Who I am, and who others are because of me, is the ultimate measure of my life. Seen in the light of God's unconditional love for us—for each of us.

Today most people are not hugely bothered about imaging heaven. But we do need to image our relationship with God here and now—and the two are related. The major benefit and, at the same time, the basic flaw of a traditional portrayal is an uncoupling of the quality of life in heaven from the quality of life on earth. There will be degrees of happiness, but we will not be aware of the differences. A one-litre jug and a two-litre jug and a five-litre jug hold different quantities of liquid when they are full; although the quantities are different, each of the jugs is full. Each individual will be perfectly happy. Whatever the exhortation to full human living and whatever the attractions promoted, the basic goal in this view of life is to be in God's good graces at our death. In sporting terms, when the final whistle blows we want to be among the players—not sent off or in the sin-bin.

This approach diminishes the seriousness of our lives. In this approach, what matters is not how fully we live, but that we keep the important rules of the game. In sporting terms still, when that final whistle

Today most people are not hugely bothered about imaging heaven. But we do need to image our relationship with God here and now—and the two are related. The major benefit and, at the same time, the basic flaw of a traditional portrayal is an uncoupling of the quality of life in heaven from the quality of life on earth. There will be degrees of happiness, but we will not be aware of the differences.

Opposite and next page: surveying the metaphysical playing field, graphic after Leone Battista Alberti.

blows, we'll be there on the same field, no matter how well we played. Equally important, all that memory holds for human life and identity will apparently be passed over. The reality of memory demands a place for regret and sorrow as well as delight and joy. To be honest, I don't see how memory can be left out in any scenario.

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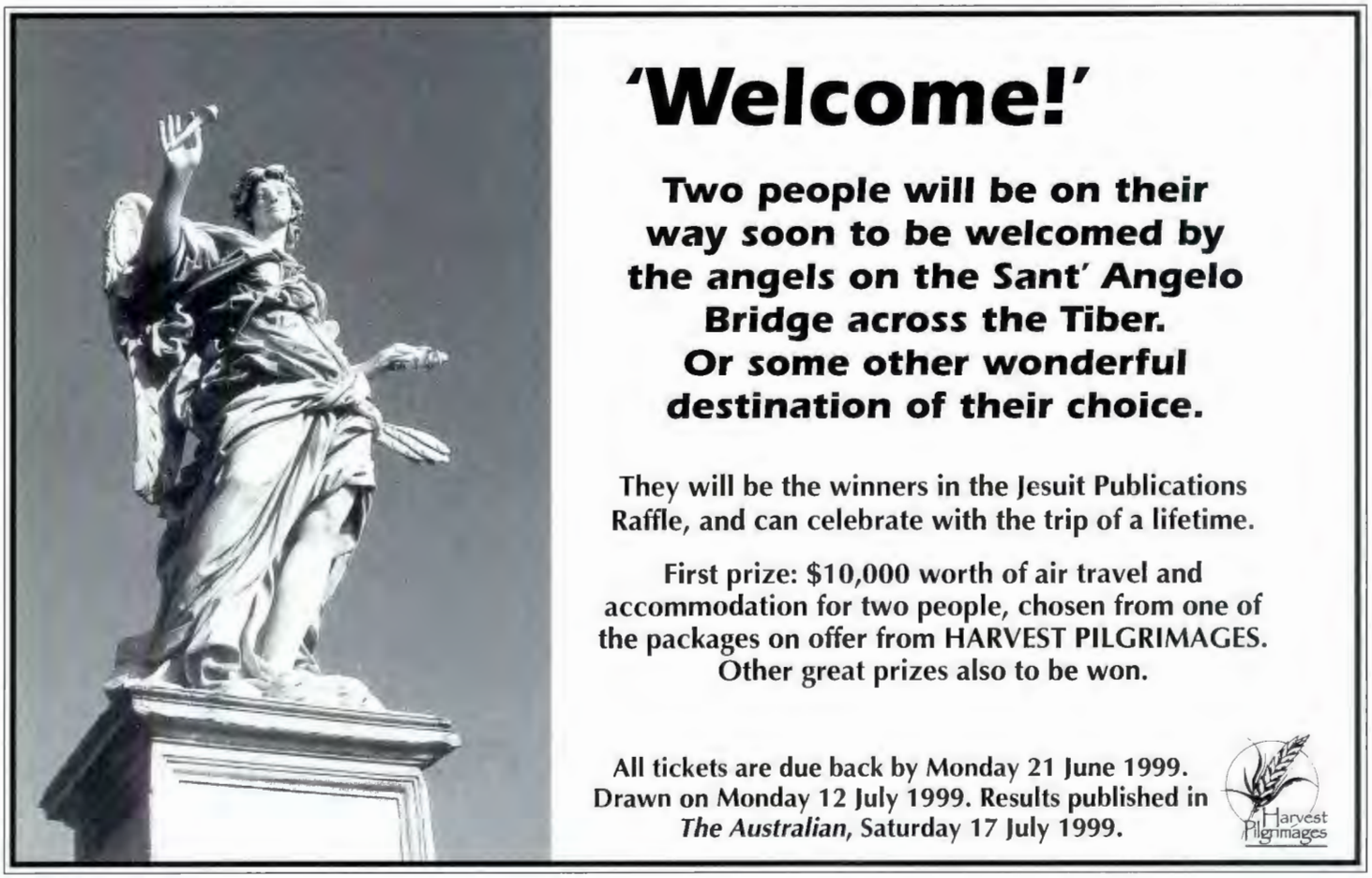
Choices

Which attitude to our relationship with God is going to enrich our lives most? That is the challenge we have to face and the basic choice facing us in life. What has bite for us is the question: what is the fullest way that we can live our lives? If we have tried to achieve that, then at the end we'll have no regrets. Whatever the outcome, I tried. As one wise old leader suggested for his epitaph: He did what he could with what he had.

What can we do to live our lives to the fullest? We may wish we didn't have to ask that question, but we can hardly escape it. Some people do escape it most of their lives, maybe all their lives. Too bad, but the rest of us can't; we'd be living in permanent denial—and that is scarcely enriching. We can't escape the faith questions. I've tried, God knows. I had a ten-year stint as an agnostic, but I finally realised I was playing games. So I have to accept what my answers to those faith questions are. Yes, I do believe in a God. Yes, I do believe I survive my body. Yes, I do believe that God is unconditionally loving.

So where does that leave us? We can alter the last response to replace 'unconditionally loving' with: yes, I do believe that God is benign, kindly, and understanding. Well disposed. All that jazz. But I know that I don't quite believe it as the whole answer. Not deep down somewhere. Reality doesn't make full sense to me if God doesn't love us passionately in the ordinariness of life. Maybe it doesn't make much sense if God does. But for me there is more sense if God loves us deeply and passionately. So, like it or not, that's where I have to be.

Antony Campbell SJ is professor of Old Testament at the Jesuit Theological College within the United Faculty of Theology, Melbourne. *Next month: Unconditional love—mystery: silence and speech.*



DAVID SHANKEY

Soul stealer

HEROIN. I'm not just watching it on the big screen in *Trainspotting*, or reading about whether or not one politician supports a small prescribed drug trial. Heroin has crashed into my life and has been whirling around like an unleashed demon, causing havoc and stealing souls.

At first it was acquaintances dying. People on the fringes of my life, who had succumbed to temptation and then disappeared from the circles I was moving in. They turned up dead from overdoses; eulogies of tragic loss and misdirected youth. This week it was property that disappeared. A flatmate had four weeks' rent stolen from our kitchen table. Prime suspect is the junkie who lived in a vacant lot next door. He was a soft and gentle man, who played with our cat and wrote song lyrics on scraps of paper. He slept alone surrounded only by empty syringe disposal units—his life support, remnants of someone else's hit in a used syringe. A pathetic soul living with both darkness and light within him, but I lost my sympathy for $1500.

Heroin is a devil that is leaving governments paralysed with fear and parents confused and angry. Heroin has become the new sin that dare not speak its name in private schools in Australia. Heroin is transforming the underbelly of our country towns, as they become major transportation centres, out of sight from the city. There is a gulf between our cities and the country—we speak differently, we socialise differently, and we vote differently. But in both the city and the country young people are turning to the most addictive drug of all. Lonely, isolated people sometimes need some solace. And heroin provides solace aplenty.

People use heroin because it makes them feel good, better than they have ever felt before. It provides an instant state of bliss, an immediate connection with yourself, and a feeling of acceptance and understanding of the world around you. What could be more soothing than to feel self-acceptance simply at the insertion of a needle? For the young unemployed and unskilled, heroin can give meaning to lives, something that society has failed to do. It is often likened to a spiritual experience of sorts, one that provides an instant enlightenment and a taste of nirvana. Some say it offers a pleasant conversation with God. Like religious ecstasy without the devotion.

I see heroin as the biggest religious cult of the 1990s. The heroin cult is like the Moonies during the 1970s. Like the Moonies, the principals of this cult have achieved extraordinary wealth. Like the Moonies, they have aggressive recruitment techniques, from giving out cigarettes with spots of heroin in them, to having an army

of virtually unpaid salespeople, who need to sell the product in enough quantity to subsidise their own habits.

The Moonies were everywhere in the 1970s, popping up in suburbs and recruiting through families and friends to unite all religions under one Moon. In the 1990s it is heroin that is everywhere hanging out for converts. For young people there is always a friend of a friend who is a user or an ex-user, who can put you in touch with the right people. And heroin, like the Moonies, is not averse to publicly recruiting. During the 1970s, the Moonies would hang out in non-places, like shopping centres and street corners, looking for lonely people. Now your local street-level dealer is there, ready with a wink. Essentially they approach offering a similar product, a little bit of inner peace.

Like other cults, heroin can socially isolate a devotee. The new user enters a world of seediness and crime, at first just to purchase the product, but often soon to pay for the habit. Sometimes the user will steal and beg from family, inevitably cutting them off after extended periods. Other friends will not understand this new life, so the user stops calling them. Fellow devotees cannot really be trusted as they desperately need that burst of enlightenment, and value that much more than any friendship. Like many cults, as time goes on it becomes more expensive to remain in the heroin cult, as the habit gets larger and more money is needed just to function. And like the most famous cults, it has its mass killings when a pure batch hits the streets.

With its army of users and dealers, extensive supplies and an attractive product, the heroin cult is fully settled in, and while many close their eyes and wish for a bygone era, heroin will not disappear. If society wishes to do something about heroin's incredible recruitment rate, it should treat this how it treats any other cult. Cult followers everywhere seek a meaning to their lives and some love and acceptance. Heroin devotees are no different. When they first tried heroin they were looking for something, something they were not getting from other parts of their lives. They were not prepared for the awesome power of heroin as it inserts itself in the body. Like turning up to a personal growth seminar and being overwhelmed by the dazzling tricks of a guru, heroin offers something simply too good to be true.

Where the Moonies and their cohorts only have psychological power over their members, the heroin cult has the extra hook of physical addiction. After a couple of tastes the body and mind, with growing authority, order further hits. Stealing $1500 from a friendly neighbour seems to be a logical and sensible option. When I see how users are prepared to debase themselves completely, it makes me wonder how many overdoses are a welcome relief from a living hell.

I don't know what can be done to break the cult. I guess that young people who join need an alternative meaning to their lives, need to be part of society, not rejected by it. There is no connection between the rhetoric of the drug debate (zero tolerance, drug war, drug courts) and the reality of users' lives. At the moment they are being preached at in a language they don't understand and don't care about. ■

David Shankey was a participant in ABC TV's *Race Around the World*.

Graphic: Max Ernst, *Murdering Airplane*, 1920. Private collection, USA.

GEOFFREY MILNE

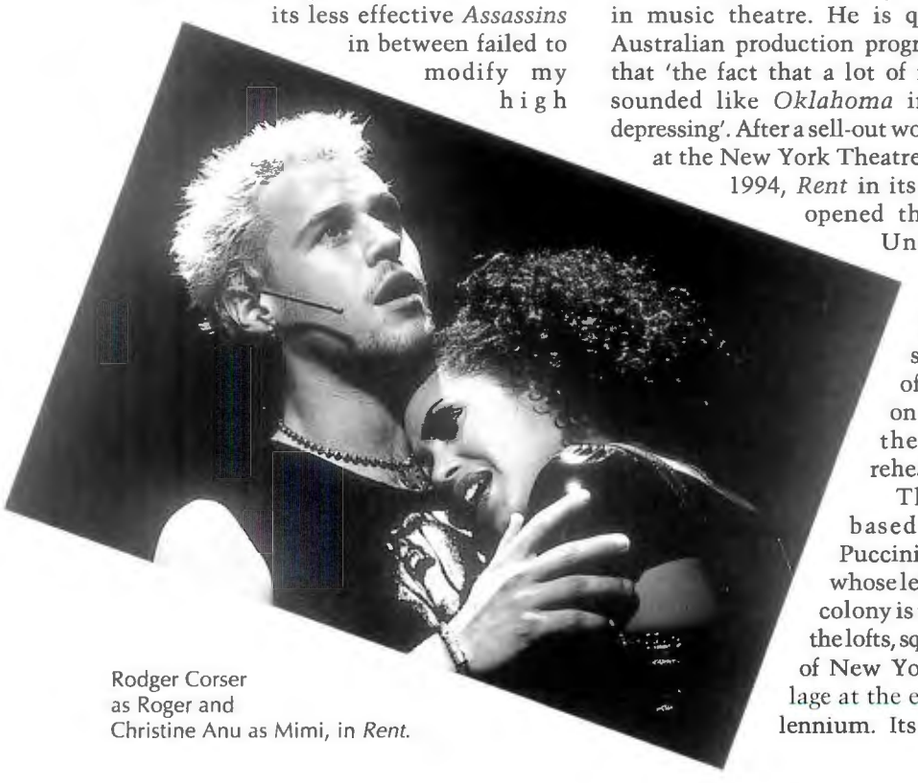
Rent rocks

I HAVE TO CONFESS that I am not, on the whole, a big fan of American musicals. When the daily papers announced a couple of years ago that Australia might 'lose' the latest of that ubiquitous breed (*Ragtime*, I think it was) because of some problem with its Canadian multinational presenter, Livent, I did manage to compose myself. There would be others soon enough. And so there were: vacuous new entertainments like *Crazy for You* and *Sisterella*, along with a pretty competent revival of *Chicago* and a tired old faxed-in version of *Fiddler on the Roof*.

Nothing, surely, could ever come within cooee of the two really great American musicals—*West Side Story* and *Hair*—or even the next best, which are most of Stephen Sondheim's. All power, by the way, to the arms of the state theatres—most notably the Melbourne and Sydney Theatre Companies—who have given us such terrific productions of Sondheim over the past decade. I thought the MTC's *Sweeney Todd* in 1987 was excellent, as was its *A Little Night Music* in 1997; even its less effective *Assassins* in between failed to modify my high opinion of that elegant and intelligent composer's work. Along the way, the STC weighed in with a persuasive *Into the Woods* (in 1993) and *Merrily we Roll Along* in 1996.

Thus, with a mixture of trepidation and anticipation (would this be the next leap forward for the form, as the publicity promised?), I ventured into Melbourne town from my mountain retreat to see the latest new US musical *Rent*. It was worth the trip.

Rent is a punchy little rock musical which runs completely against the grain of the mostly massive, overblown and technology-driven new musicals from England and Europe to which we have been subjected over the past 15 years. It has a cast of just 15, a band of five and a single standing set with a couple of elevated platforms, staircases and walkways, contrived to look as if it is stood up within the bare walls of the theatre. It was written over several years and many drafts in the early 1990s by a young actor/writer named Jonathan Larson, who was evidently a devotee of Sondheim but not of the prevailing trends in music theatre. He is quoted in the Australian production program as saying that 'the fact that a lot of musicals still sounded like *Oklahoma* in 1996 [was] depressing'. After a sell-out workshop season at the New York Theatre Workshop in 1994, *Rent* in its present form opened there in 1996. Unfortunately, Larson never tasted the fruits of his success: he died of an aneurysm on the night of the final dress rehearsal.



Rodger Corser as Roger and Christine Anu as Mimi, in *Rent*.

The show is based loosely on Puccini's *La Bohème*, whose left bank artists' colony is transported to the lofts, squats and alleys of New York's East Village at the end of the millennium. Its complicated plot deals with many shifting relationships but focuses most particularly on three love affairs, two of them tragic. *Rent* begins on Christmas Eve when Mark, who is an experimental filmmaker, and Roger, a rock musician, are presented with an ultimatum by ex-roommate Benny, who has plans to evacuate the area and develop it into a cyber-arts studio. This is not a popular move in the community and performance artist Maureen is planning a prominent protest gig that night. Benny's ultimatum is that Mark and Roger will stop Maureen's protest or pay the rent on their loft for the whole of the year. Being broke starving artists, the rent is not to be found.

But the protest gig goes ahead, with Mark's assistance, and it's a great success. This and its aftermath (including a marvellous party in the Life Café and then a riot) form the social background to the real action. For, meanwhile, another ex-roommate, Collins, is rescued from a mugging by transvestite street artist Angel and they fall in love ... and Roger meets the dancer Mimi (the only character to retain her name from the Puccini original) and they fall in love. The third tempestuous love affair is between Maureen and her manager Joanne. The problem is that Angel has AIDS and both Roger and Mimi are HIV positive; this is 'Living in America/ At the end of the millennium.'

ALL OF THIS IS NARRATED by Mark, who follows and films it lovingly with his faithful hand-held Bolex.

Act 2 begins on New Year's Eve and follows the wider social events and the tragic love-plot developments up until the following Christmas and it would be unsporting to give away too much more of the plot. Suffice to say that some of it follows Puccini but much of it flows from the internal logic of the situations Larson sets up. Puccini's Marcello, by the way, is Larson's Mark; Rudolfo becomes Roger, Benoît is the yuppie Benny and Musetta is Maureen. The tune Roger occasionally picks out on his guitar sounds more than a bit like 'Musetta's Waltz' but the biggest tribute to the original is the

Act 1 finale—'La Vie Bohème'—sung by the whole cast at the celebration after Maureen's show.

There are nearly 30 songs in the show, including reprises and a couple of times when two songs are intricately woven together. They're nearly all terrific; Larson really had something as a song-writer. There are plenty of big love songs, the best of them between Roger and Mimi, like 'Light my Candle' and 'I Should Tell You'. There are big company numbers like the celebratory Act 1 closer and the wistfully beautiful Act 2 opener, 'Seasons of Love' and a slightly sentimental hymn to living in America at the end of the millennium. There are also plot-advancing songs like Collins' 'Santa Fe', which outlines his plans to open a restaurant with Angel, and a very clever narrative gimmick in the form of a series of voice mail messages sung in recitative style.

The show I kept recalling through much of this was, of course, *Hair*, although Larson's bohemians are nothing like as countercultural as that show's motley assortment of characters, and *Rent*'s millennial insistence doesn't quite have the magic or excitement of 'The Dawning of the Age of Aquarius'. But it's easily the best rock musical since that landmark. It's about genuinely contemporary issues and people and it doesn't trivialise them. Nor is it afraid of hard questions.

To try to sum up in a single sentence what a piece as complex as this is about is not all that hard if one remembers one of Bertolt Brecht's little epigrams: 'In the dark times, will there still be singing? Yes, there will be singing. *About* the dark times.' *Rent* is singing about the dark times. And this Australian co-production by Cameron Mackintosh, the Sydney Theatre Company and others does it proud. After a reasonable season in Sydney last year, it has really taken off in its Melbourne season (which began in late March).

The show, directed here by the original New York director Michael Greif, looks deceptively simple with its very fluid staging. Greif uses every square foot of the space and is not afraid to play important moments at the sides, up high, at the back or wherever it suits him; hardly anything happens dead centre in the time-honoured musical tradition. A few versatile trestle tables and a bunch of simple chairs are practically all designer Paul Clay needs, while Angela Wendt's costumes take contemporary dress to an interestingly eccentric and theatrical edge.

But in a show like this, it's the performers who carry the momentum. The cast are mostly excellent as individual performers; as an ensemble, they are outstanding. The wonder of this is that hardly any of them are experienced music theatre actor/singers, coming mostly as they do from backgrounds in rock, pop, commercials, dancing and entertainment.

Rodger Corser (who plays the rock musician Roger) is a pub band singer by trade. He has the voice and brooding presence to suit the role. His roommate Mark is played by Justin Smith—a veteran of Harry M. Miller's revival of *Jesus Christ Superstar* in 1992, aged 17, and some orthodox acting work in Sydney since—with the right degree of filmie nerdiness, replete with glasses and a huge woollen scarf. Mark Richard Ford and Fred Jones (Collins and Benny) are imported for the show and both do the job pretty well.

However, for my money, it's the women characters who stand out. Christine Anu is sensational as Mimi. Her big dance numbers are extraordinary and her dying moments poignant but never cloying. Techno rock and pop singer Michelle Smith is a wonderfully eccentric Maureen, and counterpointed by band singer (and sometime musicals performer) Genevieve Davis as Joanne. But the most extraordinary performance of all comes from a young man called Opell Ross, a model, dancer and cabaret artist whose Angel is stunning.

Such unorthodox casting achieves two ends. It brings people with real 'street cred' to the roles and new blood into the business. I wish no ill fortune on performers like Marina Prior or Rob Guest (who have made their names and fortunes in Cam Mack musicals for a decade or more), but it is good to see fresh faces and bold new talent. *Rent* charts a way forward. And its relative smallness of scale, (size doesn't comprise its artistry) means that it doesn't have to run and tour for years to make it worthwhile for its producers. Nor does it have to have theatres rebuilt for it.

We have seen the last of the big blockbusters—for the time being. Until the inevitable next wave, let's have more of the likes of this. ■

Geoffrey Milne is head of theatre and drama at La Trobe University.

Rent *will run in the Comedy Theatre, Melbourne, at least until July; it may run longer. Who knows, it might even tour further.*

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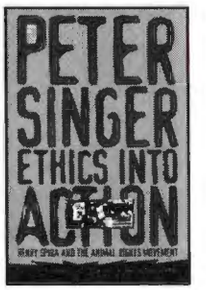

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FLASH IN THE PAN

Going for broke

A Civil Action, dir. Steven Zaillian. During the 115 minutes of *A Civil Action*, there's no nudity, simulated sex, love interest, violence and barely a cuss word. Yet, despite its being so unfashionable, tight direction, excellent acting and a good storyline make it a very watchable movie.

The film is based on actual events. Set in the 1980s, the film chronicles the legal crusade waged by attorney Jan Schlichtmann (John Travolta, above) on behalf of eight families in Woburn, Massachusetts, against two of the nation's largest corporations, W.R. Grace & Co. and Beatrice Foods. The families claim that the companies have contaminated their town's drinking water with dumped toxic chemicals, ultimately leading to the leukaemia deaths of eight children.

Schlichtmann's small Boston firm takes on the action on a contingency basis—no damages, no charge. From the outset it is going to be a difficult and expensive case. First, Schlichtmann has to establish that the toxic waste seeped from where it was originally dumped, through the ground to the town's water supply. Then there's the problem of showing that the waste material contained carcinogens that caused the deaths of the children.

Although *The Verdict*, starring Paul Newman, better exemplifies the problems of the US civil damages system, *A Civil Action* is always interesting, generally believable and at times very moving.

As the slick personal injuries lawyer ('their pain is my pain'), variously branded as a 'bottom feeder' or 'ambulance chaser', Travolta is both likeable and imperfect. He drives a Porsche, makes heaps of money, and is listed among Boston's ten most eligible bachelors.

The action becomes a protracted nightmare for both lawyers and clients. Money is guzzled up by the cost of expert witnesses and soon it becomes a case of success or penury.

The film raises the ongoing question of contingency fees. If there is a real chance of the client getting nothing and the lawyer being unpaid and footing the bill, when is an offer to settle unreasonable? In the event, the message seems to be that justice is subservient to wealth, or as old lawyers say, 'everyone is presumed innocent until proven broke'.

Performances are uniformly good. Travolta achieves an acceptable metamorphosis from cynicism to compassion, and Robert Duvall (nominated for an Academy Award) gives a splendid performance as the elderly folksy lawyer representing the local tannery. Kathleen Quinlan plays the grieving mother of one of the dead children with compelling dignity, while David Thornton provides the most memorable scene when, as a distraught father, he describes the circumstances in which his son died.

The end of the film is untidy, but when a story is linked to reality, the facts cannot always be accommodated neatly in the running time. **—Gordon Lewis**

A nick in time

Plunkett and Macleane, dir. Jake Scott. Robin Hood has always struck me as a crashing bore—goody-two-shoeing all about the place like some over-zealous boy scout. Plunkett and Macleane on the other hand are a couple of top-notch, self-centred crooks who steal from the rich and (as the advertising goes) that's it. Hooray. But more than just actively unpicking Robin Hood's straight laces, *Plunkett and Macleane* is busy changing the very form of the historical adventure flick.

It would be safe to say that directors such as Baz Luhrmann (*Romeo and Juliet*) and Danny Boyle (*Trainspotting*) have informed Jake Scott's very hip style of filmmaking. Employing the language of *Trainspotting* and the camera acrobatics of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Plunkett and Macleane* is a whirlwind of styles and references, all trying to flush out the old and flood you with the new. Big intentions, uneven results.

The film drops us into the stinking muddy hole of 18th-century England. Macleane (Jonny Lee Miller), a ruined dandy, lies drunk in a debtors' jail when Plunkett (Robert Carlyle), a rough petty crim, crashes violently into his life. As the result of a semi-bungled robbery, Macleane finds himself free, and both find themselves in pursuit of the same mammoth ruby. The only problem is that the ruby is buried in the intestines of an interred corpse. During the merriment of body-snatching and disembowelling, our two bloody heroes are rounded up by the authorities, inviting the less refined of the two to cry out

'Sarrenderr is fer wahnkerrs'—thus setting the argot and tone for the rest of the film.

Language is not all that is modernised in this zappy costume adventure. Dance music and souly vocals boom over many of the scenes, and the character- and set-dressing is decidedly at odds with any 1740s I've ever seen. Pierced eyebrows and dance-house flunkies pepper the film with great effect, but the script is a mite empty. Storylines are resolved conventionally and love interests, while feisty, never really capture the imagination.

Performances and the film-makers' foolhardiness are what make this film. It is a joy to watch Michael Gambon pottering about the screen as a corrupt and warty uncle. Robert Carlyle plays a divine runty little villain perfectly and Jonny Lee Miller and Liv Tyler are both appropriately beautiful and edgy. **—Siobhan Jackson**

Bleak nous

The General, dir. John Boorman. This is one of the most violent films I've seen for a long time. Not because it is more graphic than many films. It isn't and, from memory, there is only one murder in the film. But the violence is raw. It hurts to watch it, an experience intensified by the fact that the film is made in black and white. There is no silver lining on the bleak lives it represents.

Martin Cahill (Brendan Gleeson), a leading figure in Dublin's underworld, was killed in 1994. He had become notorious for the audacity of his crimes and the loyalty he demanded from his followers, who called him 'the general'. In one of the most memorable sequences in the film, Cahill orchestrates a heist on Dublin's biggest wholesale jewellers. It's a raid that the IRA had tried and failed to pull off. Cahill suspects that one of his crew has helped himself to some of the gold bullion. So Cahill nails him to a billiard table. Personally. The scene is shot with such precise observation that it is almost impossible to watch. Its aftermath, in which Cahill decides his accomplice is not guilty after all and takes him to hospital, makes a pathetic nonsense of Cahill's methods of justice.

Cahill is portrayed with human qualities but, nonetheless, is difficult to like. He lives with and has children with two sisters, Frances (Maria Doyle Kennedy) and Tina (Angeline Ball). He manages to outmanoeuvre the law, including his rival Inspector Ned Kenny (Jon Voight) in ingenious and sometimes funny ways. It was Cahill, for example, who was responsible for the theft of priceless Dutch masters from Russborough House. The recreation of such crimes maintains the pace of the film. But it is its psychology and the sheer mundanity of the chaos it represents which stick unpleasantly in your imagination. **—Michael McGirr** SJ

Star bores

Celebrity, dir. Woody Allen. The sight of the gods was traditionally supposed to send mortals mad. In the presence of celebrity, Woody Allen's characters don't go mad but they do expose themselves as abject, needy,

and robbed of humanity. Among them is Lee Simon (Kenneth Branagh), a frustrated travel writer who stinks of failure, chases interviews and glossy women while he pitches his obviously lousy screenplay. This Robert Altman-like device brings him into contact with Melanie Griffith, Leonardo Di Caprio, Winona Ryder and other meta-celebrities, who apparently gave their services to this film for a fraction of their usual fee. The credibility of the Woody Allen oeuvre has its own currency—and they are clearly having fun. Di Caprio is the standout as a beautiful brat regnant who gets *everything* he wants, and in whose backwash Simon briefly bobs.

Simon/Branagh and Judy Davis are a nervy New York couple who break up in classic Allen horse-laugh style. She's the hysterical wronged wife and he's the guiltily selfish neurotic we used to barrack for in *Annie Hall* and *Manhattan*. Branagh gives us a scarily accurate Woody impersonation, but is far too personable to disarm us with its underdog pathos. This lays bare the misogyny and coldness which was always behind the Sad Little Man's quest for the goodies, and we don't empathise when he whines. Davis, in desperation meltdown, wins sympathy, success and most of the laughs. In her vulnerability and self-questioning, she offers aspects of Allen's persona which he lacks. And unlike Simon, she is 'lucky', ending up happily remarried and herself a minor TV celebrity. In the final scene (a device reminiscent of *Purple Rose of Cairo*), Simon/Branagh sits in a movie theatre, his face reflecting the Spectacle, condemned to remain in the real world. **—Lucille Hughes**

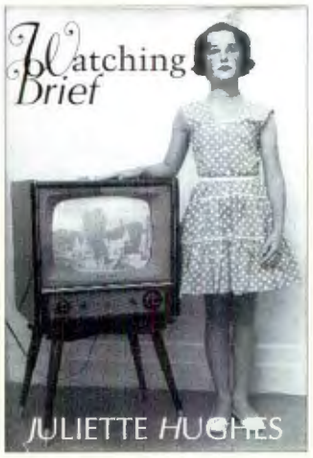
Calling Mork

Encounter in the Third Dimension, dir. Ben Stassen. This latest IMAX production is quite short—less than 40 minutes—but feels a bit like a Luna Park ride while you're there. The problem is that, although the 3D production values are stunning, with plenty of stomach-lurching dives down endless caves and through outer space, and lots of things poking at your face phantasmagorically, the narration fails to grab. The problem is the front-man, Stuart Pankin, who plays a nutty professor type of character without a scintilla of irony. The Muppets are Swiftian by comparison. Someone like Rik Mayall or even Robin Williams would have brought it all to life.

If they'd only splashed out a bit on the actors as well as the production the grown-ups could really enjoy this too. What we're left with is a very American short kids' flick with fantastic special effects. The history of the medium *is* quite interesting, and the snippets of '40s 3D gangster movies are great. The trouble starts when Pankin's Professor talks. The stuff with Elvira, Mistress of the Dark, falls rather flat as well, because she is better seen introducing a horror movie on TV rather than trying to sing a very silly song about being scared.

There are grown-up IMAX movies, ones you really should see, such as *Extreme*, which is very good indeed. This one you can take the eight-to 12-year-olds to see and try to argue them out of Maccas afterwards.

—Juliette Hughes



Don't spoil it with facts

I HAVE SOME clever friends who make a beeline for my stack of lowbrow women's mags when they visit me. Bored with *Vogue* and *Belle* and the *Bulletin* they know that the *TV Weeks*, *New Ideas* and *Woman's Days* they are too embarrassed to buy for themselves without dark glasses and maybe a balaclava are waiting for them, sirenlike, under the flying ducks at Casa Hughes. Conversation can be curious with cuppas balanced beside the reading matter:

***Clever Friend**: I told him well, you'd better look at* Podgeworthy v Griddlebotham *because if you try to run a fief of soccage defence without the Spleen-Farthing precedent you're* dreaming—*My God, Pamela Anderson's done her boobs again!*

***Me**: Yes, and do you know there's a women's spirituality conference coming up in—My God, Cher's got another tattoo!*

***CF**: Quite tasteful, this time.*

***Me**: I quite like that skull-and-butterfly thing myself. But do go on—you were telling me about the Department of Sponge and Pillage ...*

***CF**: Yeah, yeah, well it was really all up to the Registrar—Phwoar, Brad Pitt in Speedos!*

Television is like that: your information comes surrounded by tags and trails of extraneous sensory stuff that can reinforce or subvert the message or can drop unclaimed into the unsounded depths of the mind. This can make for great entertainment but it can be slippery and unreliable when dealing with, say, facts.

The best documentaries keep you guessing, allow the mind space to ask the questions it would be asking if, say, its owner were reading a book instead. The rhetorical tricks that reveal themselves so obligingly in written language hide themselves more efficiently in television. You can make a program with only half a fact: in fact it's much easier to be simple, to leave out things that would spoil the fine flow of a narrative which, if conveyed only as printed word, would be a byword for sloppiness and bias.

The ABC screening in May of the UK Channel Four docudrama *Civil War: England's Fight for Freedom* bore this out. For many people watching this program, it would be the first and last thing they ever heard about Oliver Cromwell, the Stuarts and the state of things in that fascinating time, the mid 17th century. So it was annoying to find that many false impressions had been given. To start with, there was no link with what was going on in the rest of Europe or even in Britain—nothing to tell you it was the time of Mazarin, the Fronde, Dryden, Milton, Descartes, Rembrandt, Molière, the rise of Louis XIV, Hobbes' *Leviathan*. The program made no attempt to put the Puritan phenomenon in context. You'd be left with the impression that the Puritans were just God-fearing freedom fighters against a horrible little despot—certainly nothing subtle or wider-ranging, such as reflection that Charles I was hated possibly more for his tolerance of Catholicism than for his misguided attempts to embed a divine right of kings, a right, if it ever was one, whose time had long gone in that country. The popular hatred of Popery had made the life of recusants difficult since the time of Elizabeth, and the prejudices of the mainly Protestant populace were iron-clad. There was little mention of the widespread vandalism of the medieval churches: the only example given was of some well-meaning Bunyanesque stalwarts getting rid of *new* ornamentations in their village church that had just been put there by a new vicar. A century later the French revolutionaries in their atheism spared more stained glass than the godly hooligans in Britain.

There was a fair bit of whitewashing going on in the program: Cromwell's Irish massacres were barely alluded to; only a reference was given to rising English feeling against the Irish because of ill-founded rumours of Catholic atrocities against Protestant settlers. You could go away with the notion that Ollie was a bit of an operator but not really such an awful chap; certainly not the detached, pitiless slaughterer of Drogheda. There was no mention at all of the Puritans' ludicrous *sharia*-like laws regarding entertainment and dress. (The similarity to Iran under the Ayatollah was striking: the shedding of an autocratic monarch in a rush of religious fervour, only to be followed by repressions as bad as or worse than before.)

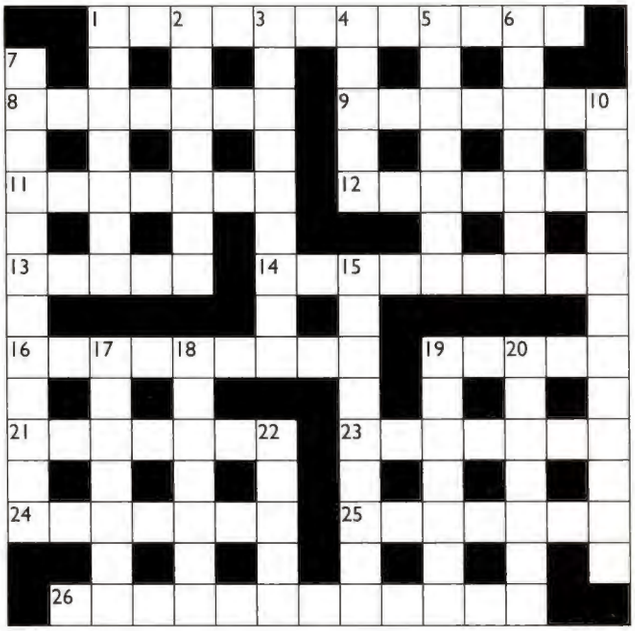
It was good to see John Lilburne and the Levellers getting a mention, but the program's worst sin was to fudge the chronologies at the end, so that you could end up with the impression that the great Freeman John died in jail under Charles II. They mentioned the correct date for his death, but as a last item in a list that had been a chronological one—Cromwell's death, Charles II's accession etc. Lilburne died while on parole from the sentence he had received under Cromwell, and a year *before* Cromwell himself died—as so many tyrants do—in his bed. Anyway, Cromwell wasn't half as interesting as Charles II, who was that rare thing, a humane statesman. He baulked at executing all of the regicides: there were many signatories to his father's death warrant, and he said that he was 'sick of hangings'. He inherited his father's religious tolerance but not his silly obstinacy and detachment from reality. I wait in hope for something about him along the lines of *I, Claudius*—surely the most satisfying historical drama ever, even better than Glenda's *Elizabeth I*. Failing that, gimme *Blackadder* every time.

WHEN IT COMES TO HISTORY, you can make great drama out of sheer fairy floss and the ABC's screening of the most recent British production of *The Scarlet Pimpernel* shaped up very well, with lots of atmospheric candle-lit interiors and lovely French scenery. I was sure that a recent episode must have been shot in Duras, a little town in the Bordeaux region that we stayed near for a few weeks in the '80s. The abandoned *château* had huge crumbling walls and the town square looked very familiar. But France is rich in picturesque little towns with crumbling *châteaux*, and I suppose it could have been shot anywhere from Normandy to Toulouse.

Richard E. Grant was pretty good as Sir Percy Blakeney (better than the last one, Anthony Andrews, who is too Sloaney and not at all 18th-century aristocratic) and the curiously waxen face of Elizabeth McGovern as Marguerite looked terrifically like an engraving I remember seeing of one of the Gunning sisters, the dowerless Irish girls who married dukes. By sheer coincidence, however, that night on Foxtel the *Blackadder* episode was the one ('Nob and Nobility') that dealt with the Pimpernel. No contest.

Juliette Hughes is a freelance reviewer.

Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 74, June 1999



Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM

ACROSS

1. Cricket shot more or less to square leg goes beyond the fence to the aquatic centre! It could be a clear winner. (5,3,4)
8. Move to Rome or I'll find a place that has greater capacity. (7)
9. Give ground and try to come to terms again. (7)
11. Meerschaum used to be of a same variety as the ocean spray. (7)
12. Fellow on outing with girl does so with authority. (7)
13. Auditor observed part of the act. (5)
14. Looking in all directions a chap sets out to sell papers. (9)
16. Bank credit I'm in also, partly because of my fear of con men, for example. (9)
19. Someone initially competent—being black. (5)
21. US lawyer riven with anxiety over alien entering. (7)
23. Incidental benefit from return of bowler's action. (4-3)
24. Showing common sense, hair-cropped Merv inside suddenly becomes jittery. (7)
25. Boy and his dead-ringer take a trip to Lake Lucerne? (7)
26. Right-wing attachment to difficult dogma ruins report, lacking left version as an alternative yardstick. (9,3)

DOWN

1. Add charge for storing to wages. (7)
2. In literary competition the record is lyric poem to take the event! (7)
3. After empty pomposity, country becomes subject to arsonist's obsession. (9)
4. In Bihar, embassy staff are forbidden entry to the eastern enclosure. (5)
5. Being in a huff, international body makes one first-class bloomer. (7)
6. Some thugs shove raw eggs at you to intimidate. (7)
7. Representative sample, given pamphlets, annoyed religious group in accepting nothing. (5-7)
10. Dramatic presentation of the Battle of Waterloo, perhaps? (7,2,3)
15. Being utterly spent, I was worrying about what Portugal might have been had history been different. (4,5)
17. Contrary to expectations the writing had a poetic form. (7)
18. At-home party, or soirée to begin with, cannot be held alfresco. So what is the alternative? (7)
19. Quarrel depicted in the first part of the series produces later attitudes that are somewhat starchy. (7)
20. Brother I guided in cooking course became furious. (7)
22. He gets up to reach the vertical pipe. (5)

Solution to Crossword no. 73, May 1999

T	I	D	I	N	E	S	S	■	B	O	T	H	E	R
A	■	E	■	O	■	P	■	G	■	V	■	O	■	E
I	N	V	E	S	T	I	G	A	T	E	■	I	L	L
W	■	I	■	E	■	E	■	R	■	R	■	P	■	A
A	L	L	E	G	E	D	■	G	A	L	L	O	O	T
N	■	■	■	A	■	■	■	O	■	A	■	L	■	I
■	B	U	S	Y	B	O	D	Y	■	P	Y	L	O	N
C	■	N	■	■	■	B	■	L	■	■	■	O	■	G
L	A	C	E	D	■	S	P	E	C	I	F	I	C	■
I	■	E	■	E	■	T	■	■	■	N	■	■	■	R
M	A	R	I	A	N	A	■	A	D	V	E	R	S	E
A	■	T	■	D	■	C	■	S	■	O	■	O	■	P
T	E	A	■	P	U	L	C	H	R	I	T	U	D	E
I	■	I	■	A	■	E	■	E	■	C	■	S	■	N
C	A	N	I	N	E	■	I	N	H	E	R	E	N	T

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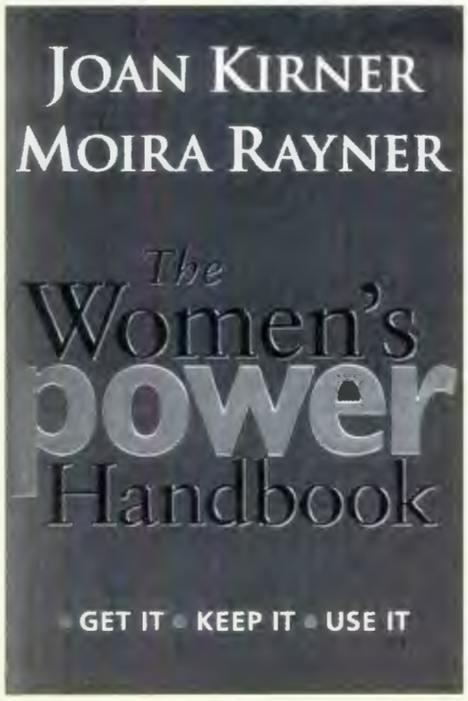

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