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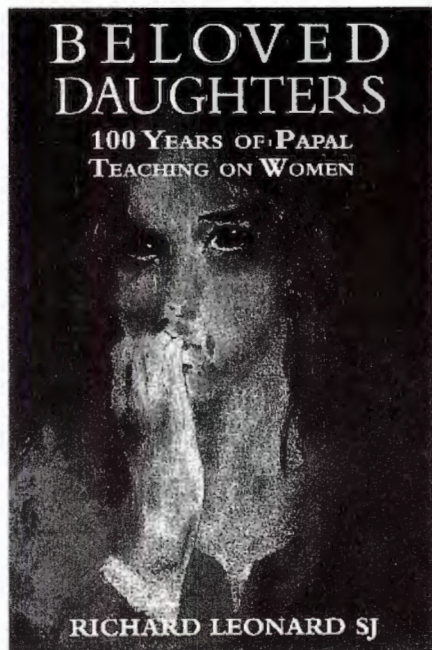
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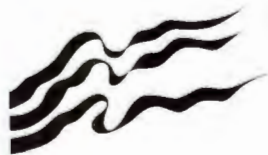
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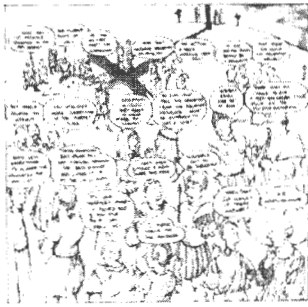
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PO Box 553
Richmond VIC 3121
Tel (03) 427 7311
Fax (03) 428 4450

Publisher
Michael Kelly SJ

Editor
Morag Fraser
Production editor
Ray Cassin

Consulting editor
Michael McGirr SJ

Editorial assistant: Jon Greenaway
Production assistants: J. Ben Boonen CFC,
Paul Fyfe SJ, Juliette Hughes,
Siobhan Jackson, Chris Jenkins SJ, Tim Stoney

Contributing editors
Adelaide: Greg O'Kelly SJ
Brisbane: Ian Howells SJ
Perth: Dean Moore
Sydney: Edmund Campion, Andrew Riemer,
Gerard Windsor.

European correspondent: Damien Simonis
US correspondent: Thomas H. Stahel SJ

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Spirit of place

IN JANUARY I WROTE in *The Sydney Morning Herald* that the Papal Mass at Sydney's Randwick racecourse was the most significant religious event in this country in the past 200 years. It owed this significance, I argued, less to the beatification of Mary MacKillop than to the inclusion of the Aboriginal smoking ceremony in the liturgy. My point was that the Mass had introduced a distinctive Australian spirituality, a spirituality in which reflection on the physical environment could lead Australians to a deeper understanding of who they are and what it means to live a moral life.

The smoking ceremony was not novel simply by virtue of its inclusion in a Catholic liturgy—that has been done before—but because its inclusion in this particular liturgy signified a new order of acceptance and encouragement of this form of religious expression at the highest levels of the church. Brought together here were the barest threads of a spirituality in which the physical environment becomes available to Australians not merely to adorn their religious ceremonies (as it has at times in the past) but to instruct their religious life.

Australians know what it means to struggle with a harsh environment; that knowledge, the Pope suggested in his homily, has much to teach us about the struggle in the 'spiritual wilderness' of our age. We have not made a home, as some would have us believe, in some godforsaken place. Priestly robes and Gothic architectural styles may seem inappropriate to our climate and sense of informality, and the seasons may mock our efforts to observe imported religious rituals like Easter and Christmas. Still, an omnipresent God must be in this country too—indeed, the Pope seemed to be saying, this is a land that resonates with the divine.

The *Herald* article brought a gratifying response from predictable quarters—mild praise from priests and religious who have worked in Aboriginal ministry for many years and whose appreciation of the numinous quality of the Australian landscape is much more finely attuned than my own. From lay Catholics and other interested Christians, there was virtually no reaction at all. This did not surprise me. In the article I had also argued that the true significance of the Randwick Mass would probably not be appreciated by most people for another 20 years.

What I had in mind was that the bare threads of this spirituality needed to be woven together into a well-tailored

garment through further theological reflection. At some point, the process of exploration and articulation has to include a broad range of Australians, especially young Australians. Lastly, a spirituality of the land must be infused with a certain potency if it is to catch on and make a difference in the way people think and live. That means relating it much more clearly and closely to the everyday experience of ordinary Australians.

How might these requirements be met and a spirituality of the land be fully developed?

An obvious starting point for theologians and others who are interested is traditional Aboriginal spirituality. Given the realisation by anthropologists and comparative religionists of the sophistication of Aboriginal religious systems, and the antiquity of the Aboriginal experience of and attachment to this land, it would be unusual if traditional Aboriginal spirituality did not have something to offer the rest of us.

In fact, as an excellent forthcoming book by Eugene Stockton, the *Aboriginal Gift: Spirituality for a Nation* (Millenium books) demonstrates, it has a good deal to offer. And given the Second Vatican Council's acknowledgement that the Catholic Church (indeed, Christianity generally) doesn't have all the answers, there is no reason to balk at examining what's on offer. Stockton, an archaeologist and Catholic priest, has a timely caution, however, for the over-eager: 'Aboriginal influence on Australian spirituality (is) a challenge to look again, and more deeply, at our traditions, to re-emphasise elements in that tradition that are in tune with our time and place'. The last thing non-Aborigines should entertain is the delusion that Aboriginal spirituality can mean the same thing to all people; the last thing that Aborigines need is another appropriation by members of the dominant culture of what is distinctively theirs.

FOR THE REST OF US, the non-theologians and the great un-churched, ecological imperatives are likely to be just as important as any new interest in Aboriginal culture in inducing a sense of wonder at our surroundings. That presents both opportunities and problems. A prerequisite for the exploitation of the natural environment by Western societies has been its 'disenchantment', in the name of rationality and the cause of production. The new interest in conservation and sustainable development, especially among the young, should make people receptive to a spirituality of the land, especially one that takes their immediate concerns seriously but also develops them into a more

comprehensive and ultimately satisfying transcendent self-knowledge.

On the other hand, however, the mainstream churches have been slow to respond to a growing environmental movement and many people (again, especially young people) have adopted 'green' political activism as a pseudo-religion. Winning them back, if that be the exercise, will take imagination and courage. Simply issuing statements, as the Australian bishops are fond of doing, is no substitute for taking the church and its resources into the places where the environmental debate is being waged, thus making both an environmental ethic and a spirituality of the land acutely present in the lives of ordinary people.

That's one ingredient of the potency referred to above. The other is relevance.

Non-Aborigines came very slowly to an appreciation of the beauty of this land, and slower and more hesitantly still to a feeling of belonging to it. Romanticised images of Australia, however, won't hold them to it in any meaningful way. The 'bush' and 'the outback' have only limited meaning to most Australians today, who are coastal dwellers and cosmopolitans. And talk of the 'Red Centre' as some sort of silent, knowing presence at the heart of our consciousness is nothing more than 'white fella's dreaming'. Just look at the way

most non-Aboriginal Australians relate, for instance, to Uluru; they climb to the top to assert their dominance over nature. So much for a change of attitude expressed in a change of name. Moreover, they do this on what are, essentially, exotic holidays from 'home'. They are visitors to the centre, not people journeying to the core, the mother-lode of their psyches.

Most of us, in our less sentimental moments, see ourselves more as a sunburnt people than as people of a sunburnt country. A spirituality of the land must be a spirituality of the entire physical environment as people experience it and confront its challenges. That may be less idyllic but it will also be more real and hence more powerful. Soil and smoke and references to Isaiah are the beginnings of a profound rethink of who we are and what we are called to be. But this spirituality won't be complete, and won't be something most of us can relate to, until we can see something of God not just in the wilderness but in the breakers off Bondi, bushfires in the Dandenongs, and, yes, a sweltering suburban summer's day. ■

Chris McGillion is the opinion page editor for the Sydney Morning Herald and a regular contributor to *Eureka Street*.



Prized above all others

THE TEMPLETON PRIZE for Progress in Religion is worth winning. It is more valuable than the Nobel Prize, but given its stated purpose, the two most recent winners are, to say the least, surprising recipients. Michael Novak won in 1994 and Paul Davies this year.

The prize was established in 1972 by the wealthy businessman, John M. Templeton, and is now administered by the Templeton Foundation Inc, which is based in the Bahamas. The award, worth \$A1.4 million, is given to persons who have found new ways to increase our love, or who have enhanced our understanding, of God. The qualities sought in recipients are freshness, creativity, innovation and effectiveness. There are nine judges representing the major faiths of the world.

The first winner in 1973 was, predictably, Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Other recipients have been Brother Roger of Taizé (1974), Chiara Lubich, the founder of Focolare (1977), the Protestant theologian Thomas Torrance (1978), Cecily Saunders, of British Hospice (1981), Michael Bourdeaux, of Keston College (1984), the Benedictine scientist-priest, Stanley Jaki (1987), and the Australian ecologist, Charles Birch, in 1989.

For me, both Novak and Davies were surprise winners. Let us take Michael Novak first: born of Slovak extraction in 1933 in Pennsylvania, he trained as a seminarian with the Holy Cross Order, but he left before ordination. He started off as a critic of US capitalism and the WASP society that spawned it. He wrote speeches for the Democrats Edmund Muskie, Sargent Shriver and George McGovern. His best known early book, *A Theology for Radical Politics* (1969) gave expression to his political radicalism, but from the mid-70s he became the Catholic defender of American capitalism,

attempting to anchor his critique in the philosophy of Jacques Maritain who, in the face of continental fascism, had advocated religious and political pluralism.

In *Toward a Theology of the Corporation* (1981), *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (1982) and, most recently, *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Novak has argued that the capitalist system and the entrepreneur are the main benefactors of the poor and the jobless. Latin America, in contrast to North America, is poor because of its 'moral-cultural system'; in other words because Latin Americans lack the work-ethic. He likens the business corporation to the church and even applies to it the image of Isaiah's 'Suffering Servant'! Novak also claims to find much of his own thinking in the 1991 encyclical *Centesimus Annus*. Given John Paul II's ideological self-sufficiency and known opposition to western capitalism, this is highly unlikely.

It is difficult to see what is original in Novak's thought, which is the usual mediocre stuff of neo-classical economics. Novak claims to examine the liberal tradition of Adam Smith and J.S. Mill 'with the eyes of a Catholic' and, no doubt, this romanticising of capitalism comforts the Catholic business élite; but it lacks the articulated theological analysis of contemporary society offered by religious thinkers such as the ethicist David Hollenbach, the theologian Johann Baptist Metz, the historian Martin Marty, or even Andrew Greeley.

MY PUZZLEMENT ABOUT the Templeton was deepened this year when Paul Davies was awarded the prize. Certainly, it is important that religion and science should talk, and Davies has bravely attempted to do this. But the difficulty is that Davies understands only the scientific

portion of the dialogue. His writing reveals an extraordinary ignorance of theology and a simplistic epistemology.

He attempts to take up where Stephen Hawking, in *A Brief History of Time*, leaves off. Davies accepts that, given the laws of physics, the universe can create itself. But he pushes the question of creation beyond the unbounded cosmos to the physical principles that underpin reality and according to which the universe acts. Davies asks: is God to be somehow identified with these laws or normative forms? With a neat epistemological side-step, he assigns what in the past would have been called the divine attributes to the laws of nature: they are universal, absolute, eternal, all-powerful and 'in a loose sense, omniscient'! He says quite clearly that 'the laws (of physics) ... have been invested with many of the qualities that were formerly attributed to God from which they were once supposed to have come' (*The Mind of God*, p82).

Davies goes on to identify these laws with Plato's 'perfect forms that acted as blueprints for the construction of the fleeting-shadow world of our perceptions' (*The Mind of God*, p92). These laws, or forms, exist in the mind of a mathematical God who—or should I say 'which'?—is absent from the world and is strikingly like Plato's Demiurge.

Davies is honest enough to admit that these notions leave us feeling uneasy. The reason for this is clear to the philosopher, if not to the physicist. For lurking within this discussion of God and the beginning of the cosmos is an epistemological problem of considerable magnitude. Davies moves back and forth between scientific knowledge (which even today prides itself on some form of empirical verification) and theological concepts (which are essentially analogical) as though the

two were perfectly compatible and that there was no real difficulty in simply juxtaposing them.

Certainly, much scientific discourse these days approaches the analogical. But this does not mean that scientific and theological discourse can be glibly equated as Davies tends to do. The issue of the dialogue between religion and science is both more complex and

more philosophically challenging than *The Mind of God* and Davies' other writings suggest. The discussion needs more than a glib re-statement of Platonism; and, perhaps at the same time, the Templeton Foundation Inc. of Nassau in the Bahamas needs nine new judges. ■

Paul Collins MSC is a writer and broadcaster.

COMMENT: 4

CHRIS MCGILLION

Speedy Zedillo

'While Chiapas, in our opinion does not pose a fundamental threat to Mexican political stability, it is perceived to be so by many in the investment community. The government will need to eliminate the Zapatistas to demonstrate their effective control of the national territory and of security policy.'

THAT STATEMENT APPEARED in a 'political update' by Chase Bank, one of the biggest institutional investors in Mexico, on 13 January. Within a month, Mexico's President Ernesto Zedillo had ordered his army generals to put an end to the year-old indigenous uprising in Chiapas; two weeks later, he was offering to open peace talks again with Zapatista leaders. Some commentators have viewed this zig-zagging as a bold attempt by Zedillo, who has no deep roots in the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), to forge some middle ground support. In fact, it reflects the contradictory pressures he is under.

Since the collapse of the peso in December, foreign creditors and investors, along with the Clinton administration, have been demanding that Zedillo restore stability. But the tougher he gets, the more Zedillo undermines his own democratic credentials, weakens Mexico's claim to be a modern, First World state, and risks increasing sympathy for the Zapatistas throughout the rest of the country. Hence the policy dilemma. Hence Zedillo's oscillation.

The fact that the banks should have chosen Chiapas as the litmus test of Zedillo's effectiveness is not

all that surprising. True, the Zapatistas have won no significant allies beyond their own state. Their grievances, like their demands, are essentially local. And they pose no significant military threat: theirs is more an armed protest than an armed insurgency. The reason the Mexican army finds it so difficult to crush them is that, fundamentally, they emerge from the human, not the physical, landscape of Chiapas.

The Zapatistas, however, do represent something of a moral conscience for the rest of Mexico. Their gallant, almost suicidal, resistance raises serious questions about whether the ideals of the 1910-17 revolution—justice, egalitarianism, inclusion—have been betrayed. The uprising also testifies to the fact that, instead of lifting the living standards of all Mexicans, the free-market economic reforms of recent years have left many of them worse off.

The Zapatistas, then, are a national embarrassment if not a national threat. But they are not just that. They are a test of the unity of purpose and political skills of the Zedillo administration. If the man with the technocrat's training and a democratic mandate cannot control a rag-tag rebellion by disgruntled

peasants, how will he ever be able to handle a broader popular challenge to his government?

And as far as the banks are concerned, such a challenge is an occupational hazard for the Mexican president. Chase's 13 January 'update', for instance, also offered the gratuitous advice that Mexico's 'monetary crisis limits the resources available to the government for social and economic reforms'. Why? Because in Washington and Wall Street profit remittances and loan repayments take priority over anti-poverty programs and land reform in Chiapas. Mexico's creditors are to get all that's due to them in the years ahead in the name of economic responsibility; Mexicans generally will get rising inflation, more unemployment, and the indignity of less and less decision-making power over their own affairs, all in the name of—well, the good of the nation is the stock excuse.

Eventually Zedillo will have to stop trying to please everyone and take a cold, hard look at his options. He can play the nationalist card and tell the Yankees to go to hell. Were he to do that, it is conceivable that both PRI traditionalists (who were never happy with the way Zedillo's predecessor, Carlos Salinas, began dismantling the corporate state on which their perks and privileges are built) and popular groups outside the PRI's control (who are suspicious of free trade with the US and critical of neoliberal reforms generally) would support him. But Zedillo's political instincts, like the institutional interests he was appointed to serve, are unlikely to allow that.

Zedillo's only other option is to do the bidding of his foreign constituents—Washington, the banks and the foreign investors—and try to ride out the storm of opposition as best he can. That will almost certainly mean a repressive turn in Mexican politics. For the bankers, this is preferable to default. For Washington, it is more tolerable than a Mexico spinning out of control. For ordinary Mexicans, it is the price they will be asked to pay for the privilege of being yesterday's 'boom' Latin American economy. ■

Chris McGillion has recently returned from Mexico.

Let there be logic

From David Griffiths

I enjoyed Paul Tankard's review of *Telling Lies for God* (January-February 1995) but there was one contextual fact omitted: Professor Plimer is a committee member of the Victorian Skeptics.

I should declare that previously I worked in public affairs for the Church of Scientology. In fact I find much to agree with the skeptics, I like science and logic.

It seems the skeptics are engaged in a battle with 'unreason and anti-science'. The risk is that they become too dogmatic about science.

While we don't want illogic taught in the classroom, we also don't need a 'faith of science' dogma where in reality uncertainty exists.

To this extent I wish the skeptics would spend more time examining science and its activities, advocating something truer to its nature. If 'astrology' is a sad state of believing one's destiny is already determined, science must be on the side of free will, not substitute an alternative deterministic system.

The problem of antiscience may not be solved by 'doing battle with the heathens', as by reforming science itself.

David R. Griffiths
North Fitzroy, VIC

Professor Plimer is not a committee member of the Victorian Skeptics, and so far as he is aware there is no organisation of that name. He does subscribe to The Australian Skeptic, a national journal published in Sydney—ed.

Play the game

From James Rodgers, 1st XI coach, St Ignatius College, Riverview.

At a time when allegations of bribery among public figures is common, suspected and sometimes even proved, why are we surprised that reports of such conduct have now surfaced in a game such as cricket?

Perhaps it is, as Peter Roebuck wrote so passionately recently in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, that 'Cricket has been the noblest of games ... it remains magnificent,

Eureka Street welcomes letters from its readers. Short letters are more likely to be published, and all letters may be edited. Letters must be signed, and should include a contact phone number and the writer's name and address.



cherished and overwhelmingly honest. Like all games, though, it is played by mere humanity in whose ear temptation whispers, as it has done since Eden. Cricket has been remarkably free of disgrace, yet it is too much to expect that it would be entirely an oasis of innocence in a corrupt world ...'

Those in positions of public trust will never be immune from temptation. There will always be those who seek to gain from the results of others' endeavour or lack of it. There will always be a temptation to 'fix' the result of enterprises far more significant than games of cricket.

In this year alone, we have seen a Buddhist monk in Burma offered \$10,000, meals and trips by that country's generals. The monk was, in return, to convince Burma's 1991 Nobel Peace Prize winner and currently 'detained' pro-democracy leader, Aung Sa Suu Kyi, to give up her fight.

In NSW, the Independent Commission Against Corruption works overtime. The commission has recommended in February that bribery charges be considered against an RTA officer who allegedly received payments from real estate agents.

This recalls Japan in the 1980s, where the ruling LDP made 'favours for cash' politics an art form, handing out public contracts and business licences for political favours.

Even Christ was tempted in the desert by inducement of power and wealth. One could even draw an analogy with cricket and religion. Those of us in the know realise that the relationship is close. As a cricketing

priest and colleague of mine was fond of claiming, cricket and God both have no beginning and no end!

Now, why is it that Shane Warne, Tim May, Allan Border, Mark Waugh and Dean Jones have all, apparently, rejected such financially attractive offers?

Is there a virtue among cricketers that enables them to see through these temptations and reject anything that would sully the reputation of the game? Is there something in cricket, despite its pandering to commercial and materialistic values since the 'Packer Revolution', which brings out the finest in its players?

Those of us who coach, play or watch the game would hope so. The game's demands promote patience, humility and opportunities for reflection. Our faith in those who uphold the playing traditions of the game at the highest levels is still strong. Cricket, in Roebuck's word, still deserves to be 'cherished'.

It is surely still not too idealistic to state that acceptance of temptation offered by a bribe is a hurt to the game as well as to the individual. The game and all other aspects of public life still have values.

James Rodgers
Lane Cove, NSW

Words R Us

From Fr Christopher Dowd OP

Pamela Foulkes' assertion that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's ban on the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible denies Catholic women the right to hear the Word of God in their own language is plainly ridiculous.

The point of the Pentecost account is that the diverse ethnic groups were all able to pray and prophesy in their own national languages. To read some kind of point about gender into this account is an exercise in 'proof-texting' at its worst. It certainly provides no mandate for bowdlerising the Bible to satisfy disgruntled minorities.

The great achievement of modern critical biblical scholarship over the past couple of centuries has been to go a long way to establishing the original Hebrew and Greek texts. Is this all to be thrown away in the

name of social engineering? Scrupulous fidelity to what is actually in the text must be the first principle of translation. If a Pauline letter, to use Ms Foulkes' example, has 'brothers' only, it is not a more accurate translation to substitute 'brothers and sisters'. That the Sacred Scriptures were composed in a patriarchal culture is an historical fact which, like all historical facts, cannot be changed but only accepted. Where, in the context, a masculine-specific word clearly has an inclusive reference, it is the task of preaching and catechesis to bring this out. Fiddling with the objective text is not the way forward.

For this reason, the CDF is to be congratulated for its rejection of the NRSV. The Congregation for Divine Worship ought never to have approved this version in the first place, although that it did so will come as no surprise to anybody familiar with that organisation's record in the history of the liturgy over the last 30 years. In rejecting the NRSV, the CDF is not only defending the integrity of the Scriptures but is also putting in place a bulwark against further 'slippery-slope' decline. Anybody with any doubts on this latter score should refer to the reportage of the tomfoolery contained in the Oxford University Press's new inclusive-language Bible, prepared mainly with the American market in view.

While on this point, some of us are becoming weary of the linguistic and cultural enthrallment, so zealously promoted by feminists, of the English-speaking churches, including the Australian, to American Catholicism. The NRSV, sponsored by the US Episcopal Conference, is but the latest manifestation of this state of affairs. For a quarter of a century now we have had to endure the hatchet job of a translation which the Washington-based International Committee on English in the Liturgy performed on the Latin text of the 1969 Roman Missal. If we must be in thrall to anybody in the matter of English usage, let it be the English themselves whose language it is and who generally know how to use it.

The solution to Ms Foulkes' problem is an acceptance of two things:

firstly, the inescapable historical conditioning of the biblical writings, about which absolutely nothing can be done, and, secondly, the nature, structures and operations of English for, as the headline above her article states, it is not just her language but 'our' language, too.

Christopher Dowd

Clayton, VIC

Pamela Foulkes replies:

Christopher Dowd's letter reminds me of one that appeared in *The Times* after the Church of England's publication of a new English translation of the Lord's Prayer. In it, a retired colonel from Surrey complained that if the English of the King James Bible was good enough for Jesus, it was good enough for him!

I should point out, first of all, that I am well aware that the passage from Acts which I quoted referred



originally to the many ethnic groups who heard the Pentecost preaching. I was unashamedly applying a metaphorical interpretation to the passage, in a homiletic tradition which dates back to Origen and beyond. It is one of the tasks of the exegete to draw from the biblical text a message that speaks to the audience of the day. That, after all, is why the Gospels were written.

Father Dowd, in his concern for literalism, appears not to have noticed that the NRSV does present the most accurate translation of the original Hebrew and Greek texts now available. Its use of inclusive language in other areas, in response to the linguistic sexism of the past has, I know, not found favour in more conservative quarters. However, it is used only in those instances

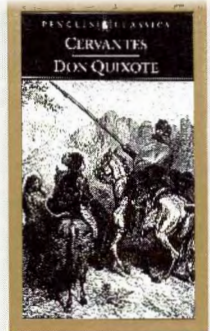
in which it is appropriate, not to modern feminists, but to the original audience of the text, and even then with caution. The committee of translators, in their preface, stated that their mandate was to 'eliminate masculine-oriented language' only in so far 'as this can be done without altering passages that reflect the historical situation of ancient patriarchal culture'. The patriarchal bias of the God language of the Bible has been retained precisely because of its historicity, and the committee further declared that: 'We have resisted the temptation to introduce terms and phrases that merely reflect current moods'. Hardly a statement of the free-for-all bowdlerising of which Father Dowd accuses them.

Father Dowd seems to have misunderstood a basic truth about the use of Scripture within the Christian community. I agree with his contention that these texts were composed within a patriarchal world, and that to treat them as totally ahistorical is to falsify them. But to set the Word of God in linguistic concrete is to curtail its continued meaning and power in our changing world. The biblical documents struggle to express, in finite human language, experiences of the transcendent that ultimately cannot be confined by that language. Every translation is an interpretation, and the best translations attempt to bring the Word of God to new life for the audience of their own time.

The NRSV translators have struggled, within the limits of the historical patriarchy of the texts' original authors, to make them speak anew to Christian women, as well as men, throughout the English-speaking world. Christopher Dowd is right when he says that it is not just my language, but 'our' language. I belong, however, not to a 'disgruntled minority' but to the group that constitutes more than half of the present church membership.

And I know from experience to whom the word 'men' refers when it is used in the liturgical assembly, and it isn't me!

Pamela A. Foulkes
Parkville, VIC



This month, thanks to Penguin Books, the writer of every letter published in *Eureka Street* will receive a copy of **Cervantes' Don Quixote**. Penguin Classics, RRP \$14.95.

Let them eat sprouts

CONSIDER THE ALFALFA SEED. In city sandwich bars and the kitchens of the health conscious, it swells, germinates and is consumed within days. But the grown-up version of the alfalfa sprout is not food for yuppies. It is the lucerne plant: difficult to grow, but a lifesaver once it is established. Lucerne is stock fodder, and it improves pasture by fixing nitrogen in the soil; its tap roots extend deeper than can easily be imagined, even deeper than the deepest tree roots. At Twilight, the farm in central western New South Wales that *Eureka Street* visited last year to report on the drought, lucerne has made all the difference.

The farmer at Twilight established dry-land lucerne some time ago, in a wet year. Many of his neighbours had given up trying to do the same thing. Getting lucerne to grow successfully—especially without irrigation—is more difficult than growing lettuce or carrot. But once you've got it, it keeps on going for about five years.

Through the summer, while the wheat and canola crops wilted, the topsoil blew away and the scrappy roadside feed disappeared into the stomachs of hungry sheep, the lucerne hung on. That meant the farmer was able to keep his stock. When the rains came in January, the lucerne put on a spurt and, to his amazement, the farmer found himself at the sales trying to buy stock when everyone else was selling. He has been heard to say: 'We haven't really had a drought. We've just had a long dry period.' It is the sort of

remark that might make him unpopular with his neighbours.

The Twilight farmer has never eaten an alfalfa sprout in his life. He would probably laugh or snort if you told him they sell for a dollar a punnet in city groceries. He eats canned vegetables. He knows little about the ways of city yuppies, and cares even less about them than they care about him.

In Australia, more than in most nations, city and country are foreign to each other. Last year, however, the romance and sadness of the drought meant that the attention of the cities flickered briefly in the direction of the inland and the Prime Minister, Paul Keating, toured the areas worst hit by the drought. He announced new social-security measures for farmers, and new eligibility criteria for the Rural Assistance Scheme (RAS), under which drought and other relief is granted to farmers.

The year came to a close, and January brought soaking rains to most of drought-affected New South Wales and some of Queensland. To the city imagination, rain means an end of drought. We have all been fed the Dad-and-Dave images of families dancing in the rain and an instant end to problems. We are not ready to hear about the complexities of seasons, regions and crops. The media spotlight moved on, and drought ceased to be a story.

The January rains were welcome of course, but summer rains mean very little for crops. Farmers sow in autumn, typically around Anzac



Day. There must be enough moisture in the soil at that time to germinate seed, then more rain over winter to keep it growing. So the next few weeks will be crucial to the coming year in agriculture, but now nobody is listening.

Meanwhile, central and southern Queensland have still not had rain, and the wet season is drawing to a close. They can expect their fifth year of drought.

Drought has now been accepted as a normal part of farming in Australia, by agricultural scientists and government policy makers, and farmers have to plan for it. But what made this drought so exceptional was that the El Nino effect—the see-saw meteorological phenomenon that truly makes Australia a land of droughts and flooding rains—failed to go away.

Normally, El Nino causes a drought year about twice a decade, then subsides. Since the beginning of the '90s, however, El Nino has subsided only to reassert itself later in the season.

A SENIOR METEOROLOGIST with the Bureau of Meteorology, Grant Beard, says it is still too soon to tell whether the El Nino effect has truly disappeared, or whether it might reassert itself in time to dash farmers' hopes of a good harvest. The



crucial indicator meteorologists refer to when trying to predict El Nino is the Southern Oscillation Index, a measure of sea and air temperatures in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. In an El Nino year, the index goes into negative values, and at the height of the drought it was down to about minus 15. In a good year, the index should be about +10 in April-May, when farmers are sowing their crops. At the time of writing in early March, the SOI stands at about minus 1, having risen slowly during January and February. If the rise continues, the drought will be over, but if it fails to go into positive figures, the widespread January rains will be next-to-useless, and El Nino will still be waiting in the wings.

The policy director for the National Farmers Federation, Gary Goucher, is generally positive about the Federal Government's approach to the drought, but nevertheless has stories to tell about what happened once Paul Keating had finished his tour, and the city's temporary flicker of interest in the inland had died.

The new guidelines for access to RAS were welcome. Previously, in order to be declared a drought affected area, farmers had to have been in drought for 24 months out of the previous 36. But this was a dubious criterion. Goucher says: 'You can't just do it by how much rain falls,'

says Goucher. 'There are too many variables. Is it hot or cold? Is it windy? Did it fall in a big lump, or lots of little bits? Cynical observers suggest that the definition of a drought is when backbenchers start telling the government there is a drought. It is a political-angst definition rather than an agricultural one.'

The new criteria that followed Keating's tour incorporated six new and more sophisticated factors to be taken into account when decisions are made about whether government assistance should be given. Rainfall was only one of them. Others included crop and pasture conditions, average stocking rates, water availability from dams and farm-income levels.

All very well, but Goucher says that almost immediately there was a breakdown between the Canberra and the states on the fine detail of how the guidelines should be applied. The Federal Government had apparently intended that the various ally.

SOME STATE GOVERNMENTS seemed to think that rainfall was still the crucial criterion, and that it had to be satisfied before the others could even be considered. Did the media report this communications breakdown? 'No,' says Goucher. 'By then nobody seemed interested.'

The Twilight farmer has never eaten an alfalfa sprout in his life. He would probably laugh or snort if you told him they sell for a dollar a punnet in city groceries. He eats canned vegetables. He knows little about the ways of city yuppies, and cares even less about them than they care about him. In Australia, more than in most nations, city and country are foreign to each other.

In New South Wales in particular, he says, the new criteria were applied in what seemed to farmers to be an arbitrary fashion. 'Some areas were drought-declared and others weren't when it wasn't clear why, and no clear explanation was given.' Goucher blames politics, and the fact that New South Wales had an imminent state election. In Queensland, which has a Labor state government, the new RAS guidelines worked well.

But the problem of when farmers should reasonably expect government help in times of drought goes much deeper than political expediency. It goes to the heart of our methods of agriculture and our understanding of this land. Since the then Minister for Agriculture, John Kerin, instituted a review of drought policy in the mid-1980s, it has been accepted that drought is not a national calamity, but a normal part of farming in Australia, and that good farmers should plan for it. It is now accepted that the aim of government policy should be to encourage good farmers, not to prop up bad ones with drought assistance every time conditions are less than ideal. This approach is broadly accepted by farmers. However, it is also agreed that there are some exceptional circumstances—such as the extended El Nino effect of the first half of this decade—when no amount of planning is going to help. In such circumstances, government aid is still needed.

The problem is in defining what is normal and abnormal in the

*Photograph above:
Bill Thomas*

Australian context. Rainfall criteria are comparatively easy to establish, since there are records going back more than a century. But when it comes to other, more sensitive criteria, everyone is shooting in the dark.

A reliable measure of drought might be rates of plant growth over a season—so many kilograms per hectare of growth, or else the area is declared drought-affected. Having imported a European system of agriculture to a profoundly non-European country, however, we are totally ignorant about what is 'normal'. Establishing a data base for use in measuring the severity of drought would entail long-term and complex monitoring, yet such benchmarks are essential if farmers are to be able to plan and know at what point they can expect the government to intervene.

IN THE PACKAGE OF DROUGHT measures Paul Keating announced last year, \$5 million was made available for drought research. Of that, about half is meant to go towards the necessary type of monitoring. But, many months later, Murray Lembit of the NSW Department of Primary Industry's drought task force admits that planning on how to spend the money is still in its early stages. The Bureau of Meteorology will get some, and so will the states, but nobody knows precisely what will be done with it. According to Lembit, the money is barely enough: 'Ten million? More? Who knows how much it might cost to get really serious about it? This is something people have been trying to grapple with for years—how to define a drought.'

Speaking to those involved in the area, it is clear that although a limited amount of money is there, nobody has got a clear idea of how to go about the exercise. An atmosphere of scepticism pervades. Goucher, whom one might expect to push the project, says that the National Farmers Federation is not lobbying on the issue. He asks how much the government can reasonably be expected to spend on benchmarks for measuring exceptional drought, when the condition might only occur once every quarter of a century. But isn't it a crucial measure for planning in a major export industry? 'Yes, but

we've been trying for long enough to know that it's just about impossible to do.'

Whether or not the National Farmers' Federation can get motivated on the issue, one is forced to wonder whether such a measly amount of research money would be acceptable in the face of a major, four-times-a-century threat to planning in any other major export industry. One can imagine the indignation in the steel or coal or wood-chipping industries if they were given the same treatment.

The long-term effects of the drought on the structure of Australian agriculture will not be seen for a couple of years. Farmers do not, generally speaking, walk off the land during a drought, because their properties won't sell. For the same reason, banks tend to wait for a good season before they foreclose on debt.

At the height of the drought, Malcolm Fraser predicted that the weather plus lack of government assistance would see a decline in the number of family farms and a rise in the number of multi-national corporations in agriculture. He even implied that there was a Labor conspiracy to wipe out this group of independent-minded conservative voters.

Certainly, farmers who got into heavy debt this year will be leaving the land during the next two to five years, but Goucher believes it is an overreaction to predict the end of the family farm. The political will to help Australian agriculture prepare for drought exists, he says, but nobody really knows how to go about it.

MEANWHILE, THE LUCERNE ON Twilight grows well on the summer rains, though in spite of this farmer's skill, his income hasn't risen in more than a decade. In good years, wheat and wool prices have been low. When prices have been high, he has had to struggle with drought. Equipment is wearing out and money is short when it comes to replacement. He has planned well. But sometimes, dealing with governments, success feels a lot more like luck. ■

Margaret Simons is a freelance journalist and regular contributor to *Eureka Street*.



AUSTRALIA'S biggest economic problem is Government's chronic propensity to spend more than it can afford. Private savings have remained relatively constant over the past 30 years, but declining Government savings mean that our total savings rate has dropped from 25 per cent to 16 per cent of GDP.

Our exploding foreign debt—now over \$10,000 for every Australian man, woman and child—is at least partly the result of this scarcity of domestic savings, and the cancer of joblessness is mostly the result of the high interest rates needed to stem the current account blow-out.

Inspired leaks suggest that a compulsory 3 per cent superannuation contribution is the key to the Government's Budget strategy. Taking money out of consumers' pockets is supposed to dampen domestic demand and restrain our 'over-heated' economy. And putting money into the hands of the insurance companies is supposed to increase the pool of domestic savings.

In fact, the Government's haste to address short-term demand problems is likely to make long-term structural problems worse. Forcing people to save without changing the conditions under which their savings grow could result in substitution of one form of savings for another and not any growth in their total.

Moreover, with unemployment still hovering around 9 per cent, housing interest rates up three times in six months, and prosperity more evident in the pages of the *Financial Review* than in people's wallets, any new slug threatens the economic recovery.

Unlike the existing superannuation levy—which is paid by employers out of foregone wage rises—this increase in the levy will come straight from the pockets of taxpayers. Compulsory superannuation is possibly the greatest confidence trick of the last decade.

If the Government is serious about boosting saving, it will spend less itself and use carrots rather than sticks to boost private savings.

After the 1988 Federal Budget, then Finance Minister Peter Walsh claimed

Budget bets

The Prime Minister, Treasurer and their advisers have their say in May. But what do the rest of us believe is important? Eureka Street asked Liberal Tony Abbott, Democrat Cheryl Kernot, and Labor's John Langmore for their Budget priorities.

that a Government which took its duty to the taxpayers seriously could shave a further \$4 billion from its own spending. Now, the former Labor Government Minister says that at least \$3 billion in recent spending commitments are 'discretionary, poorly targeted, and devoid of social or economic merit'.

The *Fightback!* package contained a Tax Free Savings Scheme which exempted the interest on new savings from tax. If the interest income of a average taxpayer went from \$1000 to \$2000 in a year, new savings income of \$1000 would be tax free. Even at the cost of \$500 million a year (which could easily be matched by spending cuts), this is one piece of John Hewson's policy that the Government really could steal.

The annual Budget is the Government's ritual opportunity to shape the economy (and mould society) for the years ahead. Here are two ideas for any Government interested in nation-building.

First, move to a tax system based less on taxpayers' income and more on taxpayers' responsibilities. Under our existing system a single taxpayer on \$30,000 a year has \$445 a week after tax. A taxpayer on the same \$30,000 a year but with a dependent spouse and two dependent children has just \$495 a week after tax, family allowance and home child care allowance. Three extra people to feed, clothe, house and educate on \$50 extra a week —no wonder families with children are Australia's new poor.

SECOND, ESTABLISH A GREEN Corps, or environmental army, to fix our polluted waterways, degraded bush and eroded farmland. Existing landcare schemes could be integrated with existing job training programs to ensure that every able-bodied young person without a job or ongoing education had a place in the Green Corps. Waiving three years' fees for university entrants willing to spend a year in the Green Corps would ensure that a good mix of Australians began their adult life working for their country as well as for themselves. ■

Tony Abbott is the Liberal MHR for Warringah.



THE 1995 Budget will have to be a

'tough' one. Tough, because economic reality means we as a nation have to start paying our way. That is, paying for the government services we want, need and increasingly demand.

We just don't pay our way at the moment. Unless we want to burden our grandchildren with a mountainous debt, or have the next recession go much deeper than it need go, we have to redress that situation. It's as simple as that.

That economic reality means the Budget must also be 'tough' politically. Because paying our way means expenditure cuts and/or taxation increases. The toughness required has been made necessary by Paul Keating's past economic irresponsibility.

A large part of the deficit problem comes from the first stage of Paul Keating's *One Nation* income tax cuts, announced as part of his strategy to counter *Fightback!* in 1992. Those cuts, which started in 1993, were badly targeted, badly timed and unfunded.

So what amount of Budget action should be taken? Certainly not the whole amount of this year's deficit (some \$10-11 billion), as some seem to be suggesting. That deficit figure is already projected to fall considerably, through the 'growth dividend' (more jobs meaning extra income tax 'in', and fewer unemployment benefits 'out') and higher sales and petrol taxes, due to begin in July.

A more realistic figure could be about \$3 billion of extra expenditure cuts or revenue gains. This would about halve next year's deficit. Suggestions that go beyond this mark are over-reactions.

There are, no doubt, efficiencies and

continued p14,

MOST IMPORTANT in determining the shape of this year's Budget must be Australia's still very high level of unemployment.

Unemployment creates the greatest waste, inefficiency and human destruction in Australia. There are other important issues, but unemployment is paramount, and the budget's first aim should be to stimulate job growth.

Tied into that, the Budget should aim to reduce growing inequality, at the same time as minimising Government debt. (Remember that we have relatively low debt by international standards.) We also need to address what I think is a serious current account problem.

What we need is not a soft or tough budget, but a responsible one. If we are going to stimulate employment we will have to increase revenue collection, and, as well, ensure that the economy doesn't grow so fast that it triggers inflation. And we certainly don't want further increases in interest rates.

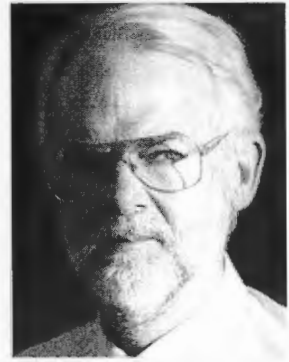
Reducing the size of the deficit should not be our key aim, but it is important, both in objective terms, and as a way of reassuring the financial and stock markets that the government is acting responsibly.

I think it is *not* responsible to set a target amount by which deficit will be reduced. The deficit is a proxy for the extent to which budgetary policy stimulates or contracts economic activity.

In strictly economic terms the deficit is of only minimal significance. Its importance comes from that fact that it is believed to be important. The deficit should never be a goal in itself; it is a means to an end. It is far more important to discuss spending and revenue, and then come to a deficit.

The principal way of reducing the deficit this year should not be through expenditure cuts, but by increasing revenue. Revenue has been severely eroded over the last fifteen years, and now is the time for an equitable increase.

There are a number of ways of doing this. *continued p14, overleaf*



We could halve dividend imputation, modify negative gearing, reduce tax concessions for superannuation, or raise the tax rate for higher income earners.

Only two or three of many possible revenue raising options would be needed to bring the deficit down this year.

All increases in spending should have the maximum possible impact on employment. This can be done through building up the areas of human services that are the most job-intensive.

In all these areas—health, education, the arts, aged and child care—there are desperate needs. Last year 140,000 Australians who applied to go to TAFEs were denied entry because there weren't enough places for them.

Everyone knows that hospitals are strapped for cash, and although increased funding for health services is not the only answer, it is certainly a high priority. Waiting lists for nursing homes and child care places need to be reduced. We could increase funding to the ABC.

These are just some areas in which better funding would help to make our society more decent and civilised, and have, at the same time, a direct effect on employment.

WHAT WE NEED ARE PERMANENT jobs, where there will be permanent benefit not only to the people who are employed, but to the whole of society. Can you imagine anything better for building up our international competitiveness than improving the skills of the workforce through technical education?

The only area where major cuts can responsibly be made is in Defence. Defence hasn't been subject to the same rigorous assessment that the rest of the public sector has undergone. Officers in the navy, for example, still have stewards to bring them cups of tea in the morning!

Experts estimate that, over a period of time, approximately 2 billion dollars could be cut from the Defence budget. We certainly shouldn't be ordering a seventh or an eighth submarine.

These measures wouldn't have much impact on this year's budget, but would provide substantial saving the future.

It is also crucial that Government keep a close eye on its own programs, through constant review and minimisation. In any large organisation waste occurs; it is a condition of good government that we are constantly

checking that we are spending in the most efficient way possible. ■

John Langmore is the Labor Member for Fraser, Chair of the Caucus Social Justice Committee, and co-author, in 1994, of *Work For All*.

The above is the edited transcript of an interview with **Catriona Jackson**.

Cheryl Kernot cont. from p13. savings which can be made on the expenditure side of the Budget. No-one will claim otherwise. This is especially so in the area of service duplication between the various levels of government. A rationalisation in this area is desperately required, but with the absence of reasoned debate and the nature of federal-state relations, action in this area is unfortunately a long-term prospect.

Given this, and with the smallest Government sector in the western world, we are at the stage where severe cuts will most likely directly affect the delivery of social and community services. The Government, in pursuing efficiency gains, must protect and preserve Australia's social safety net. This is the fragile structure holding an unequal society together. Remove it and you damage the entire social web.

The other side of the Budget is revenue, which, of course, involves taxes.

There are taxes, and there are taxes. And there are tax concessions. It is concessions that must be the first target in the current tax debate. We must ask if some of these are a luxury the country cannot afford at the moment.

Modifying some of our more generous tax concessions—especially those which overwhelmingly benefit higher income earners—presents a range of demand-reducing revenue options to consider. (The figures below are 'best estimates'.)

1. **Modifying superannuation concessions.**

Superannuation tax concessions total some \$6 billion. Modifying the system to make it less-biased towards the well-off could save \$500 million.

2. **Individuals who incorporate.**

Given the gap between the top level of income tax (47 cents in the dollar) and the company tax rate (33 cents), there is an incentive for professionals to use corporate structures to lower their tax.

Cracking down on this through tax avoidance measures could also result in revenue gains.

3. Quarantining interest deductions. Interest payments on new loans would be deductible only against income from actual investment, thereby modifying the negative gearing process (as in the US). This could raise some \$250 million in its first year, doubling in the second.

4. Modifying dividend imputation. The role of full dividend imputation in reducing the taxes payable by high income earners (who receive about 70% of all franked dividends) has been important. Reducing the credit by half—which is in line with international practice—could raise \$800 million, rising by another \$600 million if the measure were extended to non-resident shareholders. Provision would have to be made for the impact on lower income earners, including independent retirees.

5. **Interest withholding tax.**

If the two-thirds of interest income paid to households, but *not* at present declared to the tax office, were taxed, some \$3 billion could be added to the revenue. Taking a conservative approach, and introducing such a tax in conjunction with other savings incentives directed at encouraging savings by ordinary Australians, the net revenue gain could still be close to \$1 billion.

6. **A minimum company tax.**

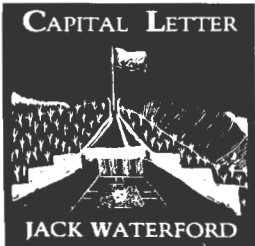
Requiring companies to pay a minimum rate of company tax irrespective of tax planning devices could gain—depending on what level it was set and what thresholds applied—hundreds of millions of dollars.

7. **Modifying the tariff reduction timetable.**

If we want to get serious about reducing the current account, a two-year extension of our tariff reduction timetable—already years ahead of GATT targets—would result in a revenue boost of \$500 million in the first year, doubling in the second.

All these options should be examined before we think about income tax rates. But let's not forget: a single extra rate of 51 cents in the dollar—four cents higher than the top rate now—for those on more than \$70,000 per annum, could raise \$800-\$900 million, and reduce the demand for imported consumer goods. ■

Cheryl Kernot is a Senator and leader of the Australian Democrats.



Cashing out the good intentions

PAUL KEATING IS MAKING progress in Aboriginal affairs a centrepiece of his plans for the year 2000. He plainly means it, but is it likely to happen? Bob Tickner has brought to Cabinet a \$3.2 billion plan to 'step over the shambles of uncoordinated and trivial programs' and bring Aboriginal housing, water and sanitation up to ordinary Australian standards by 2001. This would involve extra funding of about \$1.6 billion, together with a repackaging of existing money going into Aboriginal housing and infrastructure programs.

Strictly, one might expect that the chances of such a submission getting up in the context of a need for broad spending cuts in government would be slim. But the proposal in fact asks for only \$40 million—2.5 per cent of the additional money—in the next financial year. And some of the extra money involved would be obtained by taking away from the states up to \$100 million a year of the money given to them for Aboriginal housing and infrastructure—money that the Commonwealth says, rightly, is not being spent as it ought.

On top of this money is the \$1 billion land fund, earmarked as a part of the Mabo compensation program, though again, as with the infrastructure package, the annual sums promised by the Commonwealth are low.

Carmen Lawrence went into the Budget Cabinet with a proposal that saw net savings of about \$200 million from her Human Services and Health Department's \$18 billion programs. She wants to spend about \$100 million more a year on Aboriginal health, and her cause, naturally enough, has received a boost from Paul Keating's statement in Copenhagen.

Also in the pipeline is a promised statement on Aboriginal social justice issues. And Aboriginal education and Aboriginal employment and training programs continue to get fresh funding. And it seems clear that there is no climate for cutting any of the funding being received by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission.

It seems like a time of renewed hope and renewed government commitment in Aboriginal affairs. So why should one be sceptical? Because, although everyone agrees 'something should be done', the extra funds are being committed without much of an idea of what exactly that something should be and how it should be achieved.

The Government's own reports, for example, show that the National Aboriginal Health strategy failed because it was not really tried, and especially because the states did not meet their promises. But talk about taking on the states for their failure to deliver ordinary services to Aboriginal communities is little more than hot air, and often dangerous hot air. The Commonwealth has little capacity to organise substitute services, as it has threatened to do, and it would be disastrous if the states were to be allowed to walk away from their responsibilities.

Both Aboriginal community-controlled medical services and the Health Department have been lobbying for ages to take over control of Aboriginal medical services from ATSIC. It would be a good idea, because ATSIC is doing such a bad job, but in fact the department has no strategy beyond more of the same. And although the Aboriginal medical services are certainly a key to health care, they are often resistant to external scrutiny.

QUESTIONS OF THE DISTRIBUTION of funds and resources are still far from settled. There is a strong political tendency for per capita distribution, even though levels of disadvantage differ markedly from area to area. The dispositions of funds in communities owes more to history than to actual needs, and it is often impossible in practice to take money away, or to reallocate what already exists, even when there is broad agreement that this should happen.

Even the rhetoric being drafted to push what Tickner wants to call the Centenary of Federation Aboriginal Health Infrastructure Initiative is

focused on an older understanding of health problems. Twenty years ago, the visible side of ill health was infectious disease: ear, eye and skin disease, respiratory, gastrointestinal and sexually transmitted disease in particular. Most of these scourges were rooted in poor living conditions. They had been problems in non-Aboriginal Australia too, a century ago, and had been resolved not so much by doctors as by engineers. Fred Hollows used to say that most infectious disease in Aboriginal communities would be wiped out when there was hot water in every house.

But urgent as the job of building up and repairing the infrastructure is, by itself it will have little effect on the problem areas of Aboriginal ill-health: diabetes, hypertension and other diseases of lifestyle, and secondary problems of alienation such as alcohol and drug abuse, and trauma.

Perhaps it could, if as much money was spent on education, training, jobs, and the building up of social capital as on the development of physical infrastructure itself. That social capital may well involve the removal of a host of obstacles to long-term growth and development, including pushing petty capitalism as an alternative to the cooperatives, and looking at land tenure, particularly the private ownership of homes.

These are all difficult issues, particularly for ATSIC. It has a top-down decision-making system that is only just beginning to develop flexibility, even at a regional level.

This is still the main game in Aboriginal affairs, and the silly and shabby point-scoring by both sides on the Hindmarsh Bridge affair is almost entirely a distraction, far too ambiguous in its facts to allow the making of judgments about respect for the beliefs of others or the integrity of the mail, let alone about ways in which ministers should make decisions. ■

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

ALAN NICHOLS

Divided they fall

MANERPLAW, THE TOWN ON the Burma-Thailand border which for 30 years symbolised Karen resistance to rule from Rangoon, has fallen. The town, on a bend in the Moei River, had a population of only 5000 but served as both capital and military headquarters for Burma's seven million Karens, a people who have never had control of their land but are determined to preserve their language and culture.

Successive governments in Rangoon, military and civilian, have tried to contain the Karen, who have used their international connections with Christians in the West to maintain their resistance. The Karen were famous as guerrillas on the side of the Allies during the Japanese occupation of Burma from 1941 to 1945. Some of them died, along with Australians and Thais, during the building of the Burma Railway over the mountains from Kanchanaburi into Burma.

The fall of Manerplaw in the last week of January was sudden and unexpected. It was triggered when Karens associated with a small Buddhist sect led the troops of the central government, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), across the Salween River and over mountains into the Karen headquarters. This betrayal produced the first Buddhist-Christian divisions during the long war between the Karen and Rangoon.

There are now bitter recriminations between the Karen leadership, which is mainly Christian, and some of the Buddhist groups

who together constitute a majority of the Karen people. Three weeks after the fall of Manerplaw, the Karen President, Bo Mya, who had fled the town with his government, claimed that the betrayal was another successful example of the 'divide and rule' tactics that SLORC has used to gain cease-fires with the Kachin and Wa ethnic armies along other sections of the border.

A Bangkok observer wrote: 'The bitter feud between Christian and Buddhist troops led to clashes between the factions and eventually to defections of 400 soldiers from the Buddhist faction to SLORC. This faction led the assault on Manerplaw. Later however SLORC claimed it had merely provided logistical support for an attack by the "Democratic Karen Buddhist Organisation". Their statement said: "It is obvious that only those within that defence perimeter would be able to launch such a rapid and successful attack. No government troops were involved."'

The religious dimensions are interesting. Because of intense work among the Karen by Catholic, Anglican and Baptist missionaries late last century, the educated leaders of the Karen are mostly Christian. In recent decades the Seventh Day Adventist Church has also been active, and President Bo Mya is one of their converts.

Five years ago, Buddhists in Burma became concerned at the success of the Christian groups among the refugees in Thailand, and sent a group of 50 monks to Sho Klo camp to counteract their influence. But this had never developed into any kind of public conflict until the



emergence of U Thuzana, a monk belonging to a vegetarian sect, who established himself in a white pagoda on the junction of the Moei and Salween Rivers a few months ago. U Thuzana and his followers led the SLORC troops into Manerplaw.

For the previous three years, the SLORC's troops had been stymied at Sleeping Dog Hill, 10 kilometres over mountains from Manerplaw. Several times Karen units cut their supply lines, forcing them to withdraw, and the SLORC troops left their guns behind them.

They had made a determined effort in January-February 1992, with constant daily shelling by rockets and mortars, and sometimes strafing by jet fighters. At that time the Karen Prime Minister, Saw Ba Thin, had invited me to visit him at Manerplaw to discuss the serious plight of 50,000 Karen people displaced within Burma by the fighting at the time. Thousands of refugees were fleeing for their lives over the border into Thailand, as they are again this month after the fall of Manerplaw.

My role was that of a refugee worker with the Jesuit Refugee Service, responsible with others for food and health care for 50,000 refugees in camps in Thailand. We were concerned that more might cross the border, and we were worried about their health. The mountains they were crossing were inhospitable;

Buddhists in Burma became concerned at the success of the Christian groups among the refugees in Thailand but this never developed into any kind of public conflict until the emergence of U Thuzana, a monk belonging to a vegetarian sect. U Thuzana and his followers led the SLORC troops into Manerplaw.



there was little food; and malaria was common.

Knowing there had been shelling in the area, I enquired of my Karen guides in Mae Sot, the border town, whether it was safe to proceed. I was assured it was. After a two-hour journey in a four-wheel drive, we arrived at a primitive jetty on the Moei River, where I picked up a stranded ABC TV crew, who had got that far but could not arrange transport any further. Media were gathering in Manerplaw in anticipation of its fall.

WHEN WE ARRIVED THERE by longboat an hour later, the town of Manerplaw was deserted, the schools closed, only a token defence force remaining. Saw Ba Thin and the other Karen leaders were not there; they had fled into Thailand and were now directing the war by radio telephone.

Casually the guards pointed out the bunkers on the river bank 'in case there is shelling, but it's stopped now. No need to worry. Anyway, you have 10 seconds between the firing and the landing.' At the end of a long hot day I was about to step into a shower when I heard the first mortar shell whine through the air above me, and then heard it land in the river.

I ran through the guest house to find everyone else had left for the bunker, then by habit I paused at the

door to put on my shoes and lace them up. The second shell landed then, closer. Aloud I said to myself, 'I don't have to tie up my shoelaces on this occasion.' The next hour was spent crouched over in a dripping clay bunker with two very nervous and unhappy young Karen soldiers. It was a foolish moment in a very dramatic time for the Karen.

I was, fortunately, rescued from that situation two hours later and taken onto Thai territory to meet Prime Minister Ba Thin, who outlined clearly the situation of displaced people and requested help of the refugee agencies and the international Christian community. The night boat ride through rapids with fires on both sides of the river lit by rockets and mortars was only interesting in retrospect. At the time, I kept saying to myself, 'What am I doing here? I only came to help the refugees.'

Looking back, one of the most prophetic things Saw Ba Thin said to me in the three days I stayed at his temporary home was: 'You need to understand, Alan, that Manerplaw is not just a headquarters; it's an idea. It represents the Karen people.' I asked, 'But what happens if it falls?' He replied: 'It cannot fall. Manerplaw is an idea; it will move where the Karen people move, and it will live on.'

This is now happening. On see-

ing the inevitability of defeat late in January, the Karen army set fire to the village and camp of Manerplaw to prevent strategic areas and equipment falling into the hands of SLORC troops. The Karen then moved south, out of reach of SLORC troops, and established a new base. But they are also capable of splitting into guerrilla units. They know these hills, and are fighting with great motivation.

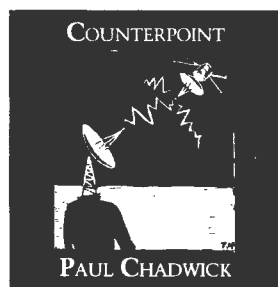
SLORC troops, on the other hand, are young conscripts and lack motivation. Hundreds die on every assault. It is said they are fed drugs to lower their resistance to being 'cannon fodder'.

I visited Manerplaw several times after the shelling of February 1992. In January 1993 I was present for a much happier and more peaceful occasion—4000 Karen celebrating the 66th birthday of their president, General Bo Mya. There were open-air concerts, national dancing, soccer games and the kick-boxing final for the year.

On many visits to the Karen, especially in refugee camps in Thailand, I have found them optimistic, nationalist and determined to have a

'Manerplaw is not just a headquarters; it's an idea. It represents the Karen people. It cannot fall. It will move where the Karen people move, and it will live on.'

—SAW BA THIN,
KAREN PRIME MINISTER



nation-state for themselves in some kind of Federal Union of Burma. They do not want political independence—but they do want recognition. It is very hard for Australians not to sympathise with this natural longing.

The consequences of the present crisis on the border for the Karen people are very serious. Already the Democratic Alliance of Burma—a consortium of the ethnic peoples—has been weakened by the cease-fires of SLORC with the Kachin and Wa people. Ten thousand new refugees have fled into the camps in Thailand in the past three weeks. At first the Thai Government said they would be pushed back. But this week they have agreed they can stay.

What is at stake, from the viewpoint of the Karen leadership, is the very existence of their people. They fear genocide.

Dissident political groups, including students who led a democratic protest in 1988, met at a secret location in February and issued this statement: 'We acknowledge and honour the efforts of the Karen National Union and the Karen National Liberation Army to defend Manerplaw against the SLORC, and we stand united with the Karen to resist and overcome the offensives. The capture of Manerplaw should not be regarded as a final victory for SLORC, but rather a temporary triumph for the Burmese military.' They condemned SLORC for renegeing on its promise to negotiate with all ethnic groups and to engage in national reconstruction.

THE STRONGEST international response was from the United States government, which said: 'The US government calls on the government of Burma to act in accordance with its own oft-stated intent to resolve its difficulties with Burma's ethnic minorities peacefully. We call on the Burmese government to respect the human rights of all its citizens. Any improvement in our relations depends upon progress in Burma.' ■

Alan Nichols worked with the Jesuit Refugee Service in Asia from 1991 to 1993. He now works with the Christian Resource Unit of World Vision Australia.

Choose your partners

LUXURIATE IN THIS: Keating and Packer have fallen silent; the clack has been hushed; their dogs have come to heel. Consider what the recent cacophony has explained about the big issues facing Australians who, we are repeatedly told, must adapt to information technologies that, like the weather, are coming upon us but are beyond our control.

The cross-media rules, ostensibly at the centre of the Keating-Packer rumble, are having minimal effect on the realignment of forces in the converging media environment. They were shaped for the 'old media', like newspapers, but as a tool to 'guarantee plurality in the media', as the Prime Minister pleads, they are almost irrelevant in their present form.

The cross-media limits are a Keating policy from way back. In 1970, as a backbencher, he urged the Gorton government to adopt this US regulatory tool. In 1976, as a frontbencher, his private member's bill to dilute cross-media holdings was defeated by the Fraser government. Then as Treasurer, in 1986, Keating used cross-media rules to prise apart Cabinet colleagues who had wrestled to a standstill over broadcasting law reform. Keating's plan was elegant and deadly: a combination of greater tolerance for concentration within a medium, and limits on holdings across media, had the result of harming Labor's perceived enemies and aiding its then mates.

An upheaval in media ownership immediately followed. Concentration of ownership in the press, already high by international standards, grew much worse as Rupert

Murdoch took the Herald and Weekly Times; the three main commercial TV networks quickly moved out of Sydney and Melbourne to dominate the smaller capitals and regionals; and after a period of relative diversity, commercial radio is becoming increasingly concentrated.

The promised trade-off of strict separation among the different media—'queen of the screen or prince of print'—was never quite delivered. Magazines, in which Nine Network owner Kerry Packer predominates, were not caught by the cross-media rules. The largest owner of regional newspapers, Tony O'Reilly's Australian Provincial Newspapers, has acquired the biggest commercial radio network.

The cross-media rules also generously tolerate owners in one medium taking stakes in another. The Broadcasting Services Act, which Keating's government passed in 1992, allows an owner of, say, a television station to have up to 15 per cent in a newspaper serving the same market. Above 15 per cent and you are deemed to be in control of the newspaper. If, however, the TV owner acquires more than 15 per cent and prove that this does not constitute control of the paper, the increased holding is within the law.

THIS IS AN INVITATION to take strategic positions and test the limits, awaiting a change of government policy, or of government. So Murdoch is at 14.9 per cent of the Seven Network, with an expressed wish to go further. Packer's recent purchase of more than 15 per cent of Fairfax has the Australian Broadcast-

ing Authority inquiring into whether Packer is in a position to exercise control. How this can be monitored on a continuing basis, and in private, has never been explained.

The dynamic—familiar for decades in media-political relations—has media owners applying public and private pressure for adjustments to the law while politicians of all complexions duck and weave and eventually play one owner off against others.

Far from breaking with the historical pattern, Keating appears to fit comfortably within it. He has chosen Murdoch over Packer, and the heightened sense that Packer versus Keating is mortal combat stems partly from the absence of other players, such is the extent of concentration now.

Menzies had more options than Keating now holds when, in the 1960s' scramble for TV licences, he played off the young Rupert Murdoch against the Herald and Weekly Times. Sir Warwick Fairfax had far less firepower when he temporarily reversed policy and turned the Fairfax papers against Menzies in the 1961 election. Murdoch's campaigns for Whitlam in 1972, and against him in 1974-75, were undertaken with only three metropolitan daily papers among 18: puny compared to

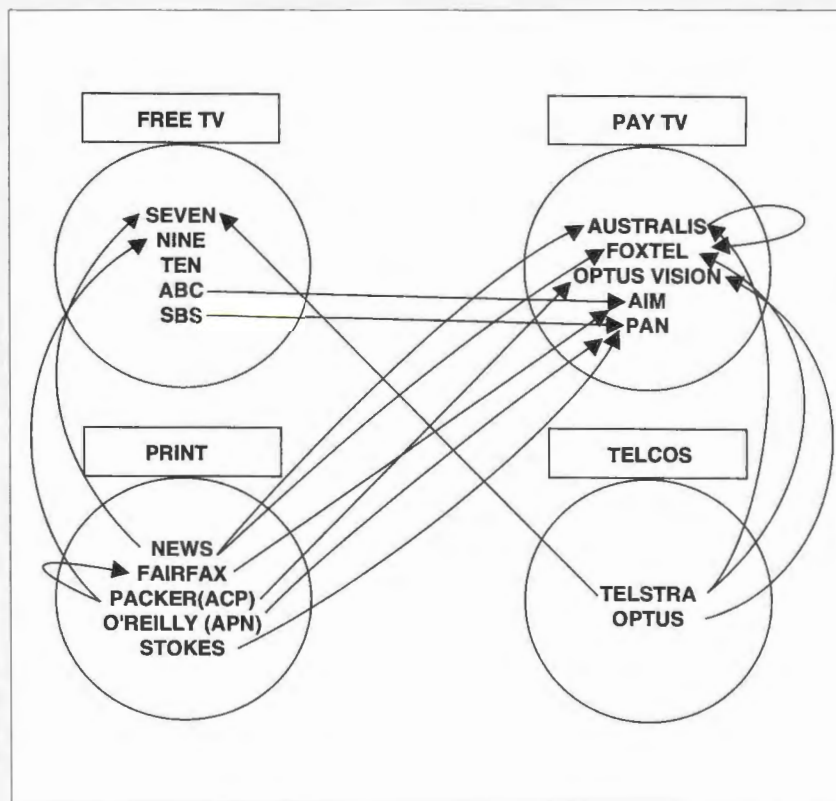
the media power he now wields.

Perhaps Keating calculated that he had no choice. Or perhaps we should remember that the most significant part of the information infrastructure, on which so much now depends, is Telstra, better known as Telecom, which remains for the moment in public ownership. When Keating called on Murdoch in Canberra last year, just before the release of the *Creative Nation* statement, they discussed the changing media landscape. Did Keating regard himself as 'proprietor of Telstra' in his dealings with that other renowned media proprietor?

Murdoch's News Corporation and Telstra have made an agreement that appears to commit Telstra to a \$4 billion upgrade of Australia's telecommunications infrastructure to permit the delivery via fibre optic cable of the broadband information and entertainment services that the technologies offer. Telstra must build the pipe through which the digitised content will converge and be delivered to our homes, offices and schools. Details of the News-Telstra deal are disgracefully

scanty, but it seems that Murdoch's contribution involves provision of content for their new pay-TV service, Foxtel, and probably the development (and control?) of the subscriber-management system.

The arrangement appears to give Murdoch pride of place in exploiting the major infrastructure of the future. Perhaps News has negotiated power to influence which competing services will also be permitted to use



Extent of cross media links in converging media environment

Print	Free TV	Pay TV	Telcos
News (Murdoch)	Seven (Murdoch 14.9%, Telstra 10%)	Australia (Murdoch 8.3%, Telstra 8.3%, TCI (US) 30%, Cosser 10%)	Telstra (public ownership)
Fairfax (Black 25%, Packer 17.5% as at 10 March 1995, Murdoch 5%)	Nine (Packer)	Foxtel (Murdoch 40%, Telstra 40%, Australis 20%, Seven Network expected to join)	Optus (51% local, 40% US and UK interests)
ACP (Packer)	Ten (CanWest, assorted locals)	Optus Vision (Optus, Packer)	
APN (O'Reilly)	ABC (Public ownership)	Australian Information Media (ABC 51%, Fairfax 24.5%, Cox Communications (US) 24.5%)	
Canberra Times (Kerry Stokes)	SBS (public ownership)	PAN TV (SBS, Stokes, O'Reilly)	

All these links are *within* current law restricting cross-media holdings, with the possible exception of Packer's holding in Fairfax, about which the Australian Broadcasting Authority has yet to rule. Australis, trading as Galaxy TV, currently offers a domestic Pay TV service delivered by satellite technology. Foxtel will carry the Australis programming via fibre optic cable, which Telstra, better known as Telecom, is laying around Australia at present. Over time, the cable will replace the existing copper-wire cabling used for existing telephone services. The cost of re-cabling the nation is estimated at \$4 billion.

—Foxtel data based on media reports of the announcement.



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Telstra's cabling, and on what terms. Even more money flows from local phone calls than from Fairfax classified advertising. It leaves Murdoch perfectly placed to acquire slabs of Telstra should the push to sell it develop again.

Packer, who has teamed with Telstra's competitor Optus, was so irked by the News-Telstra deal that he bitterly referred to it in the celebrated television interview in which he declared his wish to control Fairfax and, to Keating's chagrin, praised John Howard's prime-ministerial credentials.

As I have suggested in earlier columns, enormous public-policy issues arise because of the shift to an information society—equity, privacy, copyright—and the Federal Government has a duty to resolve them in the public interest. (The media have a duty to debate them fairly, but we must return to that conflict of interest another day.)

It is possible to read recent events not as Keating, PM, defender of the public interest in diversity, facing down Packer the media mogul who wants to grow, but rather as Keating, Telstra proprietor, striking a deal with Murdoch the media mogul who, Keating calculates, has grown quicker and more cleverly than Packer.

There may be a public-interest case for aligning the public's Telstra with the Murdoch family's News Corporation. Does Keating think that Australia's future in the information economy of the region, or the globe, requires such an alliance? Will Murdoch accept that this privileged position justifies enforceable community service obligations?

The public-interest arguments against such an alliance demand debate, especially when the privatisation of Telstra—still coalition policy, apparently—would sever the thread of accountability that government stewardship implies. (It would make Jeff Kennett's sale of Victoria's electricity industry seem trivial by comparison.) The prospect gives the traditional arguments against concentration of the 'old media', such as newspapers, a powerful fresh application: diversity is so vital to democracy that no-one,

not even Mary MacKillop in a business suit, should be trusted with so much power over either information structures or content in the digital age.

The alliances now being formed (see table) to exploit the possibilities of technological convergence do not appear to be leading to the dilution of power long promised by those who have urged us to stop worrying about concentration of media ownership and control. Michael Lee, now Communications Minister, finished his 1992 parliamentary inquiry into print media (he was then a backbencher) with the reassurance that, although concentration was serious and endemic, technology would save us with a greater diversity of services, stronger competition and smaller markets that 'could mean that the power of major media groups to influence public opinion may be diminished'. But, as with the advent of the wireless, and later free-to-air TV, the existing major players are moving first and best to dominate the new media.

To those who urge us to put our trust in competition policy and other regulatory tools to ameliorate the disadvantages of bigness, I cite the sorry history of such reliance, the current porous cross-media rules, and the fact that one major player has coupled commercially with those who hold in trust the public's telecommunications infrastructure and who make the laws.

Why won't the warning bells sound? ■

Paul Chadwick is Victorian co-ordinator of the Communications Law Centre.

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If you, or someone you know, could benefit from confidential, professional counselling, please phone Martin Prescott, BSW, MSW, MAASW, clinical member of the Association of Catholic Psychotherapists. Individuals, couples and families catered for.
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MARK DEASEY

Time out of mind

MOST NEW YEAR celebrations seem to fall at ambiguous times, with the seasons providing no obvious clues as to why we should think of one episode as ending and another as beginning.

In Australia, New Year comes at



midsummer, with the climax of Christmas already over and nothing obviously new emerging from the heat and dust. Khmer New Year can seem just as oddly placed—it is in mid-April, as Cambodia swelters towards the end of its hot season. Temperatures have risen by imperceptible stages into the 40s, the Mekong and the Sap are near their lowest point, and the air is soupy with dust and 95 per cent humidity. The sun blazes starkly in a sky where clouds are hard to imagine.

Theoretically, the rains start now, settling the dust, softening the ground for the plough and the next crop. Sometimes they arrive, sometimes not, and until the end of May there might be only tantalising splatters. It was at Khmer New Year, on 17 April 1975, that Phnom Penh fell to the Khmer Rouge, and at that harshest time of year the city's swollen population was forced out on its shuffling march into the parched and devastated country.

Last year, 2538 years after the birth of the Buddha, the rains came early. But it didn't look too auspicious. Cambodia was nearing the first anniversary of its UN-supervised elections with the new coal-

ition government already unsteady on its feet. Corruption persists, at the top levels especially, and the Khmer Rouge is clearly determined not to dwindle into irrelevance. It is not too hard to become cynical in Phnom Penh, if that's what you want to be.

I wasn't there for the build-up. Up in the mountains of Nghe An, in north-central Vietnam, we heard snatches on the BBC about kidnapped aid workers, Khmer Rouge demands and Sihanouk's standard posturing. In Vung Tau in the south, the oil boom town seemed too preoccupied with its own prospects for prosperity to be aware of anything else. With a few days of the old year left to run, I arrived unannounced at Pochentong early on Sunday afternoon, went by taxi through the half-asleep streets around the Olympic market, and let myself into V's place with the key that always hangs from my belt.

Only Aunt Phaly is there. The rest of the family are in Siem Reap, and not expected back until Tuesday. As I dump bags and shed clothes in the close heat of the main room, she glides in with the usual offering of chilled coconut juice.

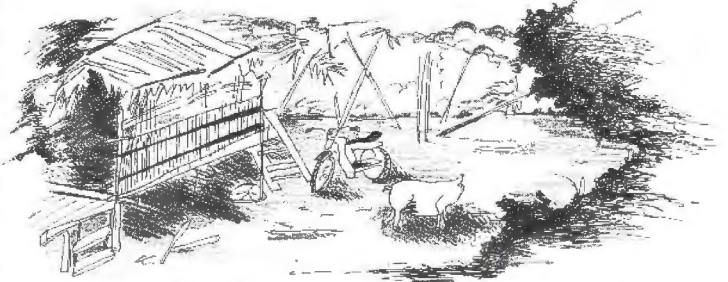
The heat diminishes marginally. The Cambodian currency I had left from the last trip gets me by taximotorbike out to K's place. In the wet, the house sits on a virtual island; K's mother once spent a good 10 minutes scrubbing my sandals clean at the well when I arrived after an ill-routed bike trip. Now the house is high and dry inside its bamboo

fence and fringe of trees, and K's mother and sister, recognising me in the distance, have hailed K.

'Soft' is not a derogatory term to apply to Cambodian men, but even by these standards I know few people as gentle as K. I didn't really register his existence very clearly until the time my father had his stroke. In chance conversation at the mid-morning break, it turned out that K's father, too, was seriously ill, and K was absent for several fraught days getting him down to a specialist hospital in Saigon, while I was planning a lightning trip to Dad's bedside in Melbourne. Now he comes running from the house, wraps me in an embrace, and leads me inside by the hand.

ALL K'S FAMILY have the same radiant smile, noticeable even in Cambodia where people usually smile. The story they have to tell is hard to reconcile with their demeanour: in 1975 they and 150 other families were driven out to the empty flood plains and scrub of Prey Kbass, to herd cattle and plant such rice as would grow.

Three years later, only four fam-



ilies had any members surviving. K's family came out intact.

At dusk, we head out to see the sights. K's motorbike is red, newish and gleaming. It is a tempting target, but he doesn't seem concerned at being out on it after dark. A lot of the robber-gang leaders were put behind

For the third time, Maha Ghosananda will be leading hundreds of nuns, monks and lay people on foot through contested territory, this time to Pailin, to show the potential for reconciliation and rebuilding at the grassroots. Having witnessed the first walk, I'm no longer inclined to consider it as a quixotic gesture.

bars early in the year, and there's life on the main streets, at least until 9pm.

We head up what used to be Achar Mean Boulevard. The name of the monk who founded the People's Revolutionary Party has been removed, and it is now called after some member of the royal family. Not that it makes much difference: everyone Khmer still calls it 'the big street'. The UNTAC boom has collapsed ingloriously, hotels have closed their doors and once-flash restaurants are decidedly grubby. But there are cascades of light everywhere, enough electricity to light most provincial towns in fact, though the floors above the Singapore goods shops and the high-tech pinball parlours are often lit with candles and their inhabitants swelter in the airless dark.

The Chray Chung Var bridge marks the northern limit of the city proper. When I first came here, in 1988, this was one of the few destinations for a Sunday evening outing. You could walk or cycle to the abrupt drop at the end of the second span, then eat boiled duck-embryo eggs and drink sugar-cane juice as the sun set—about as sophisticated as entertainment got for most. There was vague talk then about the Japanese eventually repairing the bridge, which they'd built a few years before the day in 1973 when the Khmer Rouge blew it up; but the 'Broken Bridge' seemed fixed as an institution.

So it seems a bit unreal as we mount the incline into the dark, and where the yawning hole should be, continue in a smooth arc over to the far side. This bridge has only been opened a few weeks, and enough people are still enthralled by the novelty to make a steady two-wheeled stream to the other end. There the sealed road peters out rapidly into the frog-croaking dark, and there's not much else to do but turn around and come back. Even back safe on the noisy side, a disconcerting feeling of unreality persists.

Along whatever they're calling Achar Heamchay Street these days,

the cheap food stalls and drink shops crowd the broken pavement. We are only 150 metres from the main thoroughfares, where the backpackers, UN staff and the like move. My white face earns us stares and giggles when we sit down to eat. There's the



usual trickle of beggars but an odd absence of hostility in this rather hard-bitten part of a city that is fast losing the illusions that got it through the years of war and austerity. *Nom pan sach*, clichéd street food, but for once it seems to have been prepared with finesse.

THERE ARE MERCIFULLY FEW work commitments on this trip, though we've had a pressing request for help from the organisers of the Dhammayietra Peace Walk. For the third time, Maha Ghosananda will be leading hundreds of nuns, monks and lay people on foot through contested territory, this time to Pailin, to show the potential for reconciliation and rebuilding at the grassroots. Having witnessed the first walk, I'm no longer inclined to consider it a quixotic gesture. The support from villagers along the way, normally silent and wary of everything that comes from outside the village confines, shows that something is happening in the countryside, something that no one in the corridors of power in Phnom Penh seems to have understood.

The coalition's headquarters, in a barely furnished and dusty building in one of the less fashionable pagodas of the city, is quite a contrast to the NGO offices with which I am familiar. As with much Khmer organisation, apparent chaos reigns, leading to clear and timely results. Upstairs,

Maha Ghosananda receives all comers. He's been dubbed the 'Gandhi of the Battlefields', a cliché that could be off-putting before you've actually experienced his presence

and seen him at work. We sit before him. Stating your business, arguing a point, or seeking a direct opinion all seem a bit irrelevant, though this man is astute and can be incisive. The reality of peace radiates from him, a certainty seen and known. For a few brief moments it is shared with us, though now I can't remember what we actually talked about.

By New Year's Eve, even V has managed to wind up his obligations and close his UN office door behind him. Sovanny's home village on the river island is only 15km away, but to get our party of five adults and two children across a bridge by motorbike is a logistical problem reminiscent of the 2nd form maths questions we used to get. While we're negotiating fares with a taxi-motorbike at the street door, K pulls up and is immediately shanghaied into the expedition. The taxi driver is sent on his way, I swing onto K's pillion seat again, children, parents, aunts, bags, and baskets are arranged on the other two, and we set off into the early morning glare. Our convoy dissolves and reforms in the swirl of holiday traffic several times before we cross the bridge to the peninsula and head across the lotus marshes to Prek Leap.

I manage to get onto the first boat, with the kids, and at the other side, two of Sovanny's sturdy male cousins are waiting with smiles, and shepherd me off to sit in the shade while we wait for the rest of the party. A woman is peeling and slicing mangoes from a large basket, and passes me slice after slice on the point of a knife, asking the usual questions about where I come from, how long I've been here, where I'm going. Koh Dach is a place with a strong sense of its own identity. Most of those jammed on the ferry are returning to home villages and family for the holiday, and the proportion of those we greet by name rises as we approach the village.

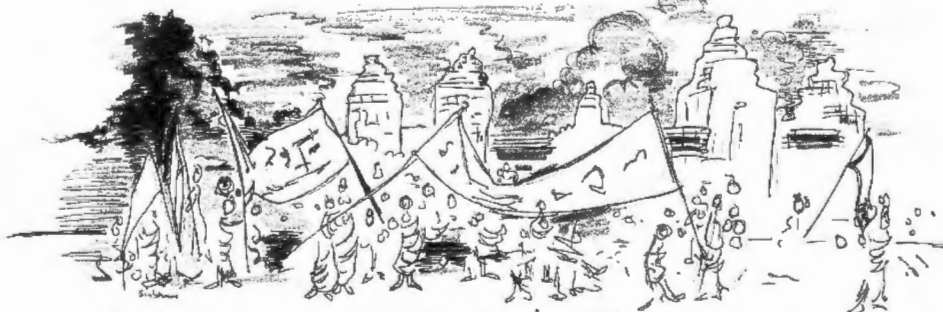
The party reassembled, we head off along a shaded track on the last leg home. This is rich country by Cambodian standards, with fruit trees, cows and pigs wandering about, and some houses built of planking with tiles, rather than bamboo and thatch. The silk looms that make Koh Dach's fame are on the far side of the

At intervals along the road are groups of half-wild soldiers, in motley bits of uniform, guns toted any which way. We litter the road with 2 and 500 Riel notes whenever we see a group ahead. When the afternoon wears on and pot shots from the Khmer Rouge become more likely, they can be obstreperous and nasty, drunk and demanding payment

island, flashes of jewel-coloured fabric amidst the dusty grey and brown of the work areas between the house stilts. Most are idle today, though, even the women take some free time at New Year.

LOCAL MYTH HAS IT that the women of Koh Dach are all beautiful, with soft and fair skin. Some of the firm Khmer social strictures on contact between the sexes are relaxed at New Year, with traditional games and play rituals to allow for courtship. But the boys need all the bravado of a group to approach girls otherwise off-limits, and we first encounter the New Year sport when a pair of girls jump from behind the trees to hit us with coconut stems as we pass. Further on, more young women douse us with water from the roadside; K says they want to get close enough to touch me.

Through the afternoon, as we watch from the house porch, it gets rowdy. Mobs of the pampered sons of Phnom Penh's newly affluent come roaring up the dirt road on their shining 100cc bikes, gaudy straw hats on their heads and switches in the hands of the pillion riders. The girls reply, dousing them from larger and larger vessels of water and the occasional dish pan of suds. The boys retaliate with water-



filled balloons, until a full-scale rowdy water fight is on in the village street.

We slip down a narrow way to the entrance of Sovanny's aunt's house. It was built about a hundred years ago, with massive upright boles supporting the terracotta tile roof, the springy split bamboo floor worn to a dark polish from years of bare-foot tread. There's not much to do but sprawl and talk, and in the classic way of Khmer families, be absorbed effortlessly into the flow of things.

After a leisurely lunch and a long

nap, it is time to swim. The current cuts close in here, and within living memory has brought the edge of the island 50 metres closer to the house door. In batches of four or five, Sros and Hong row us out to the mid-stream sand bank that has been growing at the island's expense.

Not many Cambodians know how to swim, but it doesn't matter here, and soon all 15 of us are lolling in the turbid water. The bottom, for a fair way out, is covered with a mat of pale green weed with the texture of horsehair. Dragging handfuls to the surface, we find it riddled with small shellfish. The Pol Pot years surface with this harvest. Sros laughs and tells of how they used to eat the shellfish and the weed when out, supposedly on other duties. In those days, he said, they could and did eat anything that came to hand without problems; now even a fraction of the variety would make them sick.

Evening is whiled away in more slow conversation on Hong's porch, drinking beer in quantities that would hardly start an Australian party. As I stagger up the stairs to bed, women and children are already sound asleep under mosquito nets down one side of the room; I slip in beside V in the master bed, he barely stirs, and sleep flows in.

There's one awakening in the

small hours as a scattered salvo of gunfire welcomes in the New Year, but it is short-lived and the dark and silence close in again. At dawn V crawls in with his wife and child, and while the light is still uncertain, I become aware of K at the foot of my bed, calling me to get up. He left town at 5am: the plans for Kg Saom have changed, and we are to leave today. There is more traffic on the road, giving some guarantee of safety.

The river at dawn is quite lovely. Only half awake, I teeter down the bank to wash, one cousin pointing

out the footholds, another passing me his sandals lest I muddy my feet, a third handing me a *kroma* and a fourth a bar of soap. It's all done without fuss or effort; here, looking after people is a reflex rather than a deliberate action.

One hour, a ferry crossing and a change of motorbikes later, we're at K's place, and with noisy but precise haste, a dozen people and a great array of picnic gear are loaded into two cars, and we're off. S is tall and lanky for a Cambodian, with a thin and brooding face. He moves with an shambling, loose-jointed walk, apparently quite heedless of what the world may be thinking of him. I've been out on the town with him and K many a time, but this is the first time I've met his wife and three small sons who fill the back seat as he drives, holding forth loudly on corruption and nepotism in the high places where he works.

He's just as loud and careless about whosoever may be listening, his disdainful unconcern so unexpected that it seems to afford him protection. By no picture-book standards is he good looking, but any number of people have told me how powerfully attractive they find him. His wife is softer, rounder, and after introduction gives me no more than shy smiles, leaving the men to talk politics while she occupies herself with her children.

JUST BEYOND KOMPONG SPEU, you cross a border. The hills become steeper, the trees larger and the band of asphalt in front of us in places feels like a tightrope across Khmer Rouge territory.

No one talks about the Khmer Rouge or the kidnappings, or of Bun Roeun's brother-in-law who was killed near here by bandits. The conversation just dries up.

At intervals along the road are groups of half-wild soldiers, in motley bits of uniform, guns toted any which way, hair unwashed and unkempt, apparently forgotten by their commanders. We litter the road with 2 and 500 Riel notes whenever we see a group ahead and get the occasional wave in return—they're usually good humoured enough at this time of day. When the afternoon wears on and pot shots from the

Khmer Rouge become more likely, they can be obstreperous and nasty, drunk and demanding payment before they'll let you travel on to your comfortable destination.

Civilisation returns at Prey Nup as the tidal river valley opens, with the pretty Cham villages spreading along the foot of the slopes. A tree-shaded fork in the road, which looks a lot like a place near Goulburn, shows the coast road to Kampot: venture along it who dare. Talk starts again as the first rubber plantations appear, and, before long we're over the last bald, grassy hills and coming down the slope to the panorama of sea, port and islands before us.

We go straight to the beach. Holidays are few and far between, and K's sisters have all trooped down in high heels and elaborate dresses in which they now sit delicately on the sand.

What else can you say about an afternoon on the beach? We lolled in the surf, played with the kids, climbed the boulders and talked to passing friends. Half K and S's circle of acquaintance seemed to be there for the day or week or the whole New Year. It conjured a strange image, this transplanted camp of the Phnom Penh middle class, its society reconstituted on a narrow strip at the far edge of the country, linked to the city only by a thin ribbon of asphalt through the badlands.

No one told me that a week ago the Khmer Rouge had kidnapped three Westerners on the road we had used that morning. Or perhaps I just didn't want to listen. But at this most crowded time of the year, what had been UNTAC's chosen weekend playground, seemed to have been handed back to the Khmers. At the end of our afternoon drive to the end of the port installations, we came to the beach at Koh Pos (Snake Island), a secluded, tree-shaded cove connected by a path to a gracious colonial bungalow hotel. Here lay a scattered handful of foreigners, in wrap-around sunglasses and the slenderest of nylon bathing suits, striving hard to look cool, while whole clans of Cambodians, the women in elegant lacy concoctions and high heels, the men in dark trousers and white shirts, cheerfully posed for group photos under the trees or on the rocks at

sunset.

Soon after breakfast next morning, we turned around to go back: prudence dictated an early start for security on the road. As we left town, S asked his wife to hand him the *ploeng*—an ambiguous term that can mean fire, electricity, a cigarette lighter or, in this case, a pistol, which he stashed under the driver's seat without taking his eyes off the road.

A FEW DAYS LATER I left for Laos. K and S both appeared to see me off at Pochentong, S proudly brandishing the letter from America received the afternoon before, offering him the place in the Master's course he had sought for so long. Sometimes the opportunities go to those who deserve them

From the name on my neighbour's boarding pass, I could see he belonged to the cadet branch of the Khmer royal family. Business class must have been booked out—I can't imagine a UNESCO official traveling in economy otherwise. He addressed me in French; it turned out he had lived Paris for more than 30 years, married a French woman, and now shuttled back and forth from Bangkok. Only this year had he been back to Cambodia, about which he spoke with perplexity and wonderment. It was no longer his element. From him I heard that Pailin had fallen to the Khmer Rouge again and, in a desultory manner, we discussed what this might mean for security for the rest of the country. Before long though, he reverted to talking of temples in the north of Thailand, as the grey-brown mass of Bangkok hove in sight across the ruthless green rectangles of the Chaopraya delta paddy fields.

The Peace Walk did get through, though turned aside from its planned route, with three deaths and several people held captive for a day by the Khmer Rouge. Not even they dared to stop it outright; determination for peace comes at a price higher than most of us may feel ready to pay, but there is no denying its power. ■

Mark Deasey is Community Aid Abroad's program coordinator for Indo-China and China, and a regular visitor to Cambodia.

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Nature needs nurture

ON 12 MARCH, the Forests and Forest Industry Council of Tasmania took out a full-page advertisement in Melbourne's *Sunday Herald Sun*. It is interesting to speculate why that body felt the need to come to the mainland and set up information booths in suburban shopping centres, defending their use of Tasmania's forests.

The statistics supplied were also interesting: 34 per cent of Tasmania's rainforest is protected. A further 15 per cent is in areas 'recommended for protection'. A good thing, you might say. What you might want to add is the question: why is 51 per cent of Tasmania's rainforest unprotected? And why, after numerous commissions and inquiries, is there still a bitter conflict raging over the uses of all Australia's forests?

It is easy to blame the whole thing on the forest industries. But there is another factor in the equation—the state forest agencies that manage the entire public forest estate of Australia.

The highest-volume consumers of Australian timber are the woodchipping companies, who claim that in the main, they 'only use the residue'. But while high-volume clearfelling is promoted by some state forest agencies as the practice of choice, there will always be 'residue' far in excess of sawlogging needs. Jill Redwood, spokesperson for Concerned Residents Of East Gippsland (CROEG) argues that 'Clearfelling has been and still is being challenged by many scientists and environmentalists as ecologically unsustainable.'

The push for high-quality logs is 'the nosecone' that allows the timber companies access to the highly

profitable woodchips, argues Philip Toyne, former director of the Australian Conservation Foundation and now chief adviser to federal Environment Minister John Faulkner.

The proportion of pulp logs to sawlogs in the old growth forests of East Gippsland is, according to Victoria's Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) *East Gippsland Forest Management Strategy*, four and a half pulp logs to one sawlog. And although value-added products such as kiln-dried joinery-grade timber command far higher prices, they demand much more investment in personnel and resources. Woodchipping, the logging industry's most profitable arm, provides fewer than 600 jobs Australia-wide. The big companies are not in the native forests in order to maximise their wages bill.

The old-growth areas under dispute are reducing all the time, and ironically, also at a time when Australia's plantation industries are expanding at an unprecedented rate, despite taxation obstacles. Obliteration of an old-growth area is, after all, the most effective way of ending debate about its worth. John Faulkner found this out when some of his recommendations on the protection of high conservation value areas were rejected as faulty: the coupes in question had been rapidly logged between the gathering of the information and the giving of the advice.

That kind of occurrence is part of a well-entrenched practice known in the trade as 'strategic harvesting': an area of high conservation value is logged in order to weaken the arguments for its protection. It is common to find that areas of recognised 'High Conservation Value' are the first to go when questions are raised. In 1988 a letter sent from J.F. Yarwood, secretary of the NSW Forestry Commission, to the director of National Parks & Wildlife, contained the following:

'The policy of the NSW government is that the state forests includ-

ed in the wilderness proposals will continue to be managed under the provisions of the Eden Management Plan. This management involves the harvesting of sawlogs and pulpwood, with adequate safeguards for the protection of general and specific environmental values. *Although the Forestry Commission contends that wilderness identification is not justifi-*



fied in their present state, the roading and harvesting intended will put the issue beyond doubt.' (my emphasis)

Attitudes have not really changed in state forestry departments. Witness the publication, by *Wild* magazine, of an internal memo from Ross Runnalls, senior forester in East Gippsland for Victoria's Department of Conservation and Natural Resources in East Gippsland:

'At 3.00pm today the Orbost Chamber of Commerce will conduct a public meeting in Nicholson Street, outside Westpac Bank, to gain support for the closure of all business in Orbost tomorrow, Thursday 2 February, and for as many people as possible to travel to Canberra to join the protest against the Federal Government's decision on woodchip export licences.

'I have been invited to speak to the gathering and give background on the decision regarding the 94

Woodchipping, the logging industry's most profitable arm, provides fewer than 600 jobs Australia-wide. The big companies are not in the native forests in order to maximise their wages bill.

specified coupes in East Gippsland.

'DCNR offices will remain open on Thursday for normal business. Individual staff members will not be prevented from taking the day off if they wish.'

In the confusion following the Beddall decision, attacks were made on the scientific value of the advice given to the Resources Minister by John Faulkner. The Prime Minister allowed these attacks to go largely unchallenged, and retreated into damage-control mode.

In seven coupes in East Gippsland's Hensleigh Creek, released for 'employment reasons' by the Beddall decision, against Faulkner's advice, there has not been a full study of the area. What is known about the area is that it is pristine old-growth forest. Barry Traill, a biologist with Environment Victoria, argues that it is an important habitat for threatened species, is the heart of a water catchment, and contains tall trees that were tall when Captain Cook sailed into Botany Bay.

These will be felled, and about a fifth of them may become beams, veneers or coffee tables. The rest will be classified as sawmill waste or residual wood and will be woodchipped. If they are hollow or knotty (and thus a favoured habitat for many animals, many of them endangered), they also will be felled. Some will not even be woodchipped. Fenella Barry, Victorian campaign coordinator for the Wilderness Society says that 'the woodchippers are getting fussier. They don't really want the really hard, dark woods of the old growth any more. They want small light-coloured logs of uniform width that don't require so much processing.' Those logs will be burnt.

THE PUSH INTO previously unlogged areas suggests agendas that go beyond the harvesting of timber stands in these areas. Many people ask why the forest industries don't use plantations more: they can be sited near town and processing areas, or on degraded farm land, and pose no environmental or economic risk when they are harvested.

The answer is simple: while state-government agencies continue to fund native forest logging through

subsidies that have been conservatively estimated at \$2.25 for every dollar paid by the forest industries, then the forest industries will want to continue logging there. In addition, the forest management practices of state forest agencies throughout Australia dictate the transformation of previously unlogged areas into de facto plantations. The issue then becomes one of land clearance and *de facto* privatisation of Australia's native forests.

These areas are called 'regrowth forest' but bear no resemblance to the complex natural systems they have displaced. They are often planted with a single commercial species and intensively managed, thinned, fertilised and treated with pesticides. However, because they are officially 'regrowth' they qualify as native forest. And the forest industry can take the logs out under the same generous subsidies, with all the commercial advantages of plantation-quality logs, while the government agency does the work of establishment and investment.

The plantation industry, despite this disadvantage, manages to expand. Its economic attractions go beyond the actual cost of the wood. Current figures from the Australian Bureau of Agricultural Resources and Economics show that in 1993 there were more than a million hectares of softwood plantations. The office of the Federal Resources Minister said that these are expanding at the rate of over 30,000 hectares per year. Consulting resource economist Judy Clark says that a more than twofold increase in softwood plantations is expected over the rest of the 1990s. By 2005, hardwood plantations will provide six times the amount now processed by Australia's forest industry.

The restructure of the forest industry is an urgent priority if the inevitable transition to a plantation base is not to cause considerable hardship to timber workers. Clive Hamilton, former head of research at the Resource Assessment Commission and now director of the Australia Institute, says:

'Logging in old-growth forest is doomed. The question is this: are we going to sacrifice the best remaining forests in Australia to a five-year

logging frenzy for an industry that's going to wither anyway, or are we going to facilitate the transition to a sustainable plantation-based industry? Only the conservation movement can give *undisputed* resource security.' (My emphasis)

Australia is at crisis point in its forest management. According to Professor David Bellamy, we are 'the only First World country that is still megabiodiverse'. Internationally, we are beginning to look careless of our treasures. Quite independently of timber needs, last year Australia cleared and burned 6000 square kilometres of scrub for agricultural purposes—an area more than twice the size of Luxembourg. Native forest logging, as far as can be conservatively surmised from available figures, amounted to over 1000km². Seventy five per cent of rainforest that was here in 1788 is gone. And the current codes of forest practice fail to protect our biodiversity, *even when they are adhered to*.

The challenge facing the Federal Government and state forestry agencies is to cooperate in order to provide a smooth transition to a forest industry in which the vast majority of the Australian community can have confidence. ■

Juliette Hughes is a Eureka Street staff writer.



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Easter triduum

AT EASTER 1924 I WAS A CHOIRBOY in a fashionable London parish. My mother had been dead for some months, and a week or so after Easter my father was to go with his regiment to India. I was feeling a certain emptiness. Among relatives and family friends who showed some concern was the choirmaster who was also a well-known organist, and a semi-retired soprano who gave master classes at leading musical institutions. It was these two who set out to open my mind to what the organist called the language that alone can express the inexpressible.

For the Easter High Mass the music would be the great *Messe Solennelle* written by Gounod in honour of the patron saint of musicians, St Cecilia, and in the course of it I was to sing my first solo, the beautiful and most delicate *Benedictus*. That was seventy years ago, yet I believe that I can remember everything, from the moment when the choir passed through the chancel, turned and divided at the altar steps and filed into the high-backed stalls. The church was full, not only because it was Easter, but because for everyone present the day had the nature of an occasion: a personal yet collective farewell to the much-loved parish priest who was lying in his frugal room in the tower at the north end of the church hoping to stay alive long enough to hear this music that moved him to his roots, because he was both a good and simple man who liked Gounod's tunes even if the bishop and some stiff-necked critics didn't.

I have lived with the memory of this event so long that the teen-aged choirboy has ceased to be me and has gradually been changed into an imaginary character in some sort of romantic fairy tale about a boy I sometimes talk to when no-one is listening.

In the weeks before Easter the soprano Madam Isobella and the organist had both tutored him so that he could, and sometimes did, sing the *Benedictus* in his sleep. Their teaching was of the quality that gave their students an extra dimension so that he felt at home with the notes and however high they climbed he went with them; and there were times when the music took hold so completely that it seemed he was being taken over by something that was beyond comprehension.

Privately the choirmaster had said to Madam Isobella, 'His virtue as a singer is his capacity to lose himself absolutely in the music. To go with it and let it lift him into a world that knows only the emotions. That's why I've given him the *Benedictus*. It is almost child-like in its innocent simplicity and will suit him.'

Watching from the organ loft, he played quietly as latecomers slid into their pews, his fingers moving smoothly. He opened the vox humana as the choir filed in, and pulled out a trombone stop when the clergy and the acolytes began their procession down the centre with a cloud of incense floating over them (breath of the Holy Spirit). The boy thought it all wonderful even though he was already thinking about his solo.

Speaking of the occasion many years later Madam Isobella, by then a frail but still gracious lady, told him something he hadn't known

before. 'You remember how the *Kyrie* opens—(she hummed the first few bars) a muted and tentative entry—and then the trebles and tenors plunge in with a high-sounding phrase that clangs like an iron gate being thrown open.' She chuckled. 'I had made your father come, and when he realised that he could hear your voice rising above the others he stiffened as if someone had stuck a pin in him. From



then on he listened, waiting for your solo, becoming more fidgety every minute. Every now and then he could pick you out of the crowd and I could see him wondering when you were going to sing alone, and not being by nature a church-going person, became impatient.

'Then the *Sanctus* came in with trumpet stops and bombardon, so theatrically brash and spectacular that he almost came to attention.' She became reflective. 'I knew how you were feeling because I had once been young like you were then, not knowing where I was going, but beginning to weave a ladder of dreams that would take me higher and higher into some magical kind of inner freedom.'

She had been quiet then for a while, going back over her own remembrances until suddenly she said, 'You know, Gounod had his moments of dramatic sensibility, and that simple bridge between the *Sanctus* and the *Benedictus* was one of them. The clamour of the *Sanctus* then a hush and out of it, like a still small voice emerging from a dying storm, come the gamba and violino with a muted tremolo and your small voice floating over it, a little nervously at first but beautifully in pitch.' Quietly she sang the beginning of it: *Benedictus qui venit ... Blessed is he who comes.* 'I was proud of you not only for the singing but because I was looking at your father who was close to crying because he could feel you slipping away from him and the dream he had for you as a son who would follow in his footsteps and become, one day, a fine upstanding military man. As for me, I knew that you were never going to be a singer but that sooner or later you would find your own road.'

In these days I mostly go to church by courtesy of the television set—a poor substitute for the real thing, but age brings limitations. At Easter, come what may, I play my favourite recording of the great St Cecilia mass and once again think of the boy who sang the solo, and although the story is now as smooth as a water-worn pebble, sometimes I remember extra bits that I put in. But the important things remain the same, especially the feeling I had as I walked out from the church porch into the spring morning that there was no need for me to feel empty because my mother was dead and my father off to India. I had, for a few moments, been in touch with something both wonderful and comforting and would never again be totally alone, and that sooner or later would gradually create my own world that would year after year take its own shape.

Bougainville, 1956

THE SUB-DISTRICT OF WAKUNAI is a scattering of thatched hamlets at the foot of Bougainville in the Solomon Islands. Somerset Maugham country. Coconut palms and banana plants, blue skies and the continuous mumbling of the sea tumbling over coral reefs. I had come to visit Bill Race, a nuggetty little man from Durham where the menfolk of his family have worked in coal mines for generations. He shakes his head remembering.

'Good men they are, but slaves.' He speaks with a broad Yorkshire accent from which he will never escape. At home his family lives in a stone cottage in a narrow cobbled street. 'There were ten of us' he says, 'including Grandma. Never had room to swing a cat. After two years down the pit I decided I didn't like it so joined the bluddy navy.' (Those stretched-out vowels).

On the strength of St John's Ambulance certificates he became a sick-bay attendant, had a sailing ship tattooed on his arm and took up embroidery as a hobby. Having been shipwrecked twice during the war he gave the navy away and emigrated to Australia, joined the New Guinea Administration medical service, and has finished up here in charge of hospital that he and villagers built out of lathes and planks cut from wild sugar cane and sago palms. The only other medical facility in the district is provided by the Marist mission a little further on down the coast.

It is a Holy Week so I take Bill's canoe and outboard motor and go, and on the way catch a big kingfish that I will present to the Mission as an Easter gift. It may compensate in a small way for my lack of tact in arriving without notice on Holy Saturday when the only priest has the new Vatican 2 liturgy to wrestle with. An imposition, seeing that it is the night of the Holy Fire and the lighting of the Paschal candle.

The priest is a gentleman, an American. He has every right to be irritated, but when I explain that I want nothing but a bed and tomorrow will be gone, natural Christian charity prevails. I doss down on a stretcher in his guest room and the house-boy brings a sandwich of tinned beef with some bananas and a jug of muli juice made from wild limes. Then I sleep.

The ceremonies begin an hour before midnight and I wake to the clanging of an iron triangle. The native people of this island are so black that during the night only their teeth and the whites of their eyes can be seen, but walking to the church I can hear the susurrations of hundreds of feet moving through the thick grass like a continuing whisper. Dark clouds move across the moon. Surf beats on the reef. Coconut palms stand like cardboard cut-outs with the upper sides of their fronds glistening as if dipped in silver whenever the moon comes out from behind a cloud. The wings of invisible flying foxes

creak and flap over our heads as we converge on the church, where a fire of bush sticks and drift wood has been lit.

The church has a dirt floor. Roof and walls are lashed, plaited and thatched native fashion. Only the sanctuary has floor boards. It will hold about a thousand people and for the lighting of the candle it is packed. I share a bench at the back with the missionary sisters, each of whom carries a torch and an unlit candle. There are six of them. The superior is English, getting on for 60 and habituated to a certain conventual reserve. The others are American, one of them a physician and surgeon who did her early work in one of the poorest slums in New York. Two are nurses and two are teachers. They bubble with good humour and invite me to visit them in the morning for an Easter breakfast. All round me the atmosphere is filled with a mysterious sense of eagerness as the priest comes down from the altar followed by a native deacon carrying the big candle with an escort of small boys wearing clean laplaps embossed with a cross.

As the little procession passes along the aisle towards the door everyone turns to watch until it reaches the door where the fire throws a flickering light into the porch and the priest now stands to bless the fire. He raises his hands:

... Father we share in the light of your glory.

(This sounds magnificent in Pidgin)

Through your son, the light of the world,

Make this fire holy and inflame us with new hope.

He makes the sign of the cross over the fire and immediately an ear-splitting crack of thunder shakes the mountains all around. The heavens open and a deluge of rain comes pouring out of black clouds and within seconds puts the fire out. The startled whiteness of a thousand eyes flickers like fire-flies (it is all in the notebooks that I have there on my desk, written more than forty years ago when in the grip of the romantic poets).

Runnels of water are already beginning to spread over the dirt floor as one of the small altar boys darts past the priest and snatches a glowing ember from the sodden mess, and juggling it from hand to hand runs back into the church and finds a dry spot where he drops it, and kneeling, blows and blows. One of the sisters takes her shoes off and comes hurrying with a cigarette lighter, and between them they coax a flame from which the Paschal candle is lit.

Other candles are lit from it, passed from hand to hand until this elemental edifice built with primitive materials seems to have acquired a cathedral-like nobility, giving me, a visitor, the feeling that on this storm-tossed night it has become the centre of a unity not only of the people, but of all that makes up their environment; the tropical forests, the coconut plantations, the mountainous black clouds and the moon riding this wild night sky; a unity into which I, a stranger, have for a little while been admitted and made to feel at home.

The Philippines, 1970

MARINDUQUE, A SMALL ISLAND IN THE PHILIPPINES. It is 10:30 on Holy Thursday morning and I sit in a quiet plaza sipping *tuba* with the priest who wears a red singlet, black cotton slacks and sandals and has not yet shaved today. In a few moments we shall be joined by my Easter host, Gustav Sto Domingo, who owns the auto spare parts store and the local picture show.

It is a busy week for the priest. Today confessions begin after siesta, then there are preparations for the evening ceremony of The Washing of the Feet in which Gus plays a prominent part, this being a traditional family privilege. In his youth Gus was noted for his resemblance to Rudolph Valentino but unhappily is now running to fat.

In the evening, when the rising moon is just above the horizon, I walk with the Domingo family through the town and uphill to the church with its square white tower. In earlier years it was also used as a fortress from which the local people defended themselves from attempts at invasions by warlike Muslims from the south. Their defence was based mainly on faith in Our Lady of Perpetual Succour who, on one desperate occasion, called down a violent storm that sank the Muslim ships, at the same time appearing as an apparition on the topmost point of the church with her hands outstretched protectively over her own flock.

The church is packed with a mass of humanity crammed into the side aisles and crowded about doors. Hundreds of fluttering fans winnow the coagulated smell of stale incense, candle fat, people and cosmetics. I am bundled up to the front and given a rickety prie-dieu to kneel on in a small space by the altar rail from where I catch a glimpse of Gus at the back of the sanctuary. His matronly wife, in the front row of pews, is fanning herself vigorously, eager for the ceremonies to begin so that family status may be underlined when Gustav makes his appearance at the right hand of Christ. She wears a mauve

gown and her hair (in curlers this morning) is neat and gleaming, piled high in a Filipino dome decorated with ornamental combs. Twelve elderly men sit waiting for the priest to wash and kiss their feet and when he removes his chasuble and comes down from the altar, Gus is number one in his retinue carrying a large enamel jug vividly decorated with marigolds. A smaller man carries a matching basin, another a towel, and around them crowd acolytes, one waving a fan to keep the priest cool.

He does his job humbly while Gus hovers with the jug, rinsing before each kiss. His wife watches keenly torn between pride and distaste. This morning she suggested to me in confidence that some of the elderly twelve don't wash their feet between Easters and when the ceremony ends the water is not fit for even a carabao to wallow in.

The evening of Good Friday and we stand in a crowd outside the church, everyone dressed in their best, holding candles while we wait to view the procession in which Our Lady of Perpetual Succour is carried all round the town. I stand with Mrs Domingo and a dignified elderly lady whose family has long been responsible for keeping the statue appropriately clothed and decorated in return for special blessings.

She has recounted with dramatic intensity how on a previous Easter the valuable ivory face and hands of the statue were stolen at the beginning of Holy Week and how the lady's husband had arranged for a watch to be kept on the premises of every antique dealer in Manila. So the thief was caught, and the ivory face and hands restored.

The procession was splendid, led by six men carrying tall black candlesticks with a crucifix in their midst. Then the priest and his attendants followed by the town band playing an infinitely lugubrious tune, each player seeming to be contending dolefully with his colleagues in matters of tempo or the choice of notes.

Long files of children follow, each with slender yellow candle; then the statue on a carriage with flowers heaped about its feet, pulled by ten men and brightly illuminated by clusters of lights powered by a generator being towed along behind. It seems to stretch on for ever, two flickering lines of candle light broken by globes of white enclosing other statues— Jesus with a palm branch, Peter with his keys, John whom he loved above the others, Martha, patron of the hearth, Mary of Magdala, and Veronica with the Face of Jesus imprinted on a napkin.

'A rosary of people' said Mrs Domingo making ready to get into the procession. 'I must take the place of this lady who is not now young enough to walk all around the town.' I follow her onto the road, candle in hand.

Before dawn on Easter morning I go down into the town, quiet in colourless silence, with others who are seeking the risen Christ. Like shadows we begin to merge into groups, some carrying effigies of the original seekers. In the middle of the biggest group six girls in mourning robes carry a picture of Our Lady of Sorrows draped in a black mantilla.

At an intersection not far from Domingo's spare parts store sits an effigy of the risen Jesus displaying his wounds, and here the six girls bring the mother to confront the son. Three men begin to play a strange slow tune on wind instruments and from one of the groups a young girl emerges in a pink dress and a hat with long ribbons. Then a lad in a light blue suit comes from another group and together they dance a miming dance, questioning and seeking just as the day begins to lighten.

In the centre of the intersection a basket hangs from a scaffolding and as men with ropes begin to lower it a small boy dressed as an angel pops up and sings 'Alleluia, alleluia, Christ is risen'. The six girls bring the picture of the sorrowing mother to the angel, who leans out of the basket and replaces the black mantilla with another made of fine white lace. Bells ring out across the town. Windows open and people exchange Easter greetings across the streets.

I don't belong to these people. I am a blow-in, an intruder into their community but I am able to keep believing, here as elsewhere, that we are linked by a shared instinct and need to believe.

Happy Easter. ■

Maslyn Williams' writing has taken into its scope Indonesia, China, Cambodia, the Philippines, Korea, Japan and the Pacific Islands. After a career spent covering wars and revolutions he set himself the task of making people understand one another, and has since published many acclaimed books on the region.



The glorious angels of mourning here and on p28 are Giotto's, from The Crucifixion, Scrovegni chapel, Padua.



In my end is my beginning

ABREEZE WAFTS GENTLY ACROSS the beach and, before dying, deposits a decorous wavelet on the shoreline. The half-dozen hopeful bodysurfers, whose heads break the surface of the sea, let this ripple wash over them and resume their wait for a Real Wave. Or at least five of them do. The other has broken ranks—or flotillas or convoys or whatever people surf in—and is following the wavelet into shore. Evidently number six has decided that the Real Wave will never come, and that you can fight neither city hall nor surfing destiny. Her former companions, oblivious to this defection, continue to stare fixedly at the horizon. I briefly engage in a theological appraisal, there being little else to do when the only other person on the beach is the sleeping two-month-old child tucked under one's arm.

Surfers, as I dimly recall from my youth at a surf-obsessed boys school, are voluntarist mystics. They assume that, if you wait long enough and wish hard enough, not only a Real Wave but the Perfect Wave will come along. During my time at the surf-obsessed boys' school, it had always puzzled me that even the most hardened sceptics would entertain this belief when in surfing mode. If I objected that human desires explained neither the physics nor the metaphysics of wave motion, they would just smile benignly to indicate that I could not possibly understand. No doubt they were right. I have never had much of tendency to mysticism, only to the occasional lurid hallucination. Besides, I was a lousy surfer.

But if voluntarism is a core tenet of surfer mysticism, how to explain this renegade about to rise from the frothing shallows? This aquatic oxymoron, an adherent of an orthodox, common-sense metaphysic of cause and effect who by that very fact is heterodox among her fellows? There is rancour in the ranks, faction in the flotilla, a crisis in the convoy, and I can feel a lurid hallucination coming on. The sleeping child can feel it, too, and strains against my grasp, her face raised expectantly in the direction of the frothing shallows. What strange beast is this, its time come round at last, which is slouching towards Cottesloe Beach, Western Australia, to be born?

The creature now floats gracefully above the foam, perched on a half-scallop shell. Or perhaps it is a deformed clam shell. Anyway, it owes more to Botticelli than to nature, and is borne by nereids wearing orthodox green-and-gold Australian swimming costumes emblazoned with the logo of the Republican Movement.

A couple of funky, paunchy tritons honking away on conch shells complete the goddess's entourage; they wear orthodox wrap-around sun glasses

emblazoned with the logo of the Ray Ban movement.

How do sea goddesses get such big clam shells, I wonder, forgetting for the moment about Botticelli and deciding that this lurid hallucination may be every bit as perplexing as the Zen of surfing. But there is also something familiar about this Venus de Cottesloe, and it is not her similarity to anything hanging in the Uffizi. This familiarity turns to recognition as I realise that the long Botticelli-type hair draped round the goddess' face is actually a strand of sea weed. As she removes this all is revealed: tritons, nereids and half-shell fade into nothingness, and the Reverend Celia comes down to earth.

Whether our daughter has witnessed the vision of her Mother Transfigured in the same way as I have, I do not know. But she certainly shares the recognition of her Mother Unveiled, and promptly demands what only her mother can give. Celia cradles the child to feed her, and I wait to see whether the vision of the Cottesloe Venus will be succeeded by a Cottesloe Madonna. But art-and-sun induced reverie is over for the day, and we remain just a happy family on the beach.

'You've been seeing things again, I can tell,' says Celia. 'I wish you would hurry up and finish that article or essay or whatever it is about neo-paganism. Then you might stop seeing things that aren't there.'

When I make no reply she softens: 'Look, I like you just the way you are, of course. But you might be embarrassed if you start telling other people about the things you see. Although I probably shouldn't say that either. It'll just encourage you to go and put it in that column you write.'

I grin affirmatively, and Celia groans. 'Quixote is supposed to see things differently from other people,' I say. 'To remind them that the world is still a surprising place. Or, more arrogantly, to remind them of what they're missing.'

'That is arrogant,' she agrees. 'Are you going to keep it up?'

'What? Arrogance?'

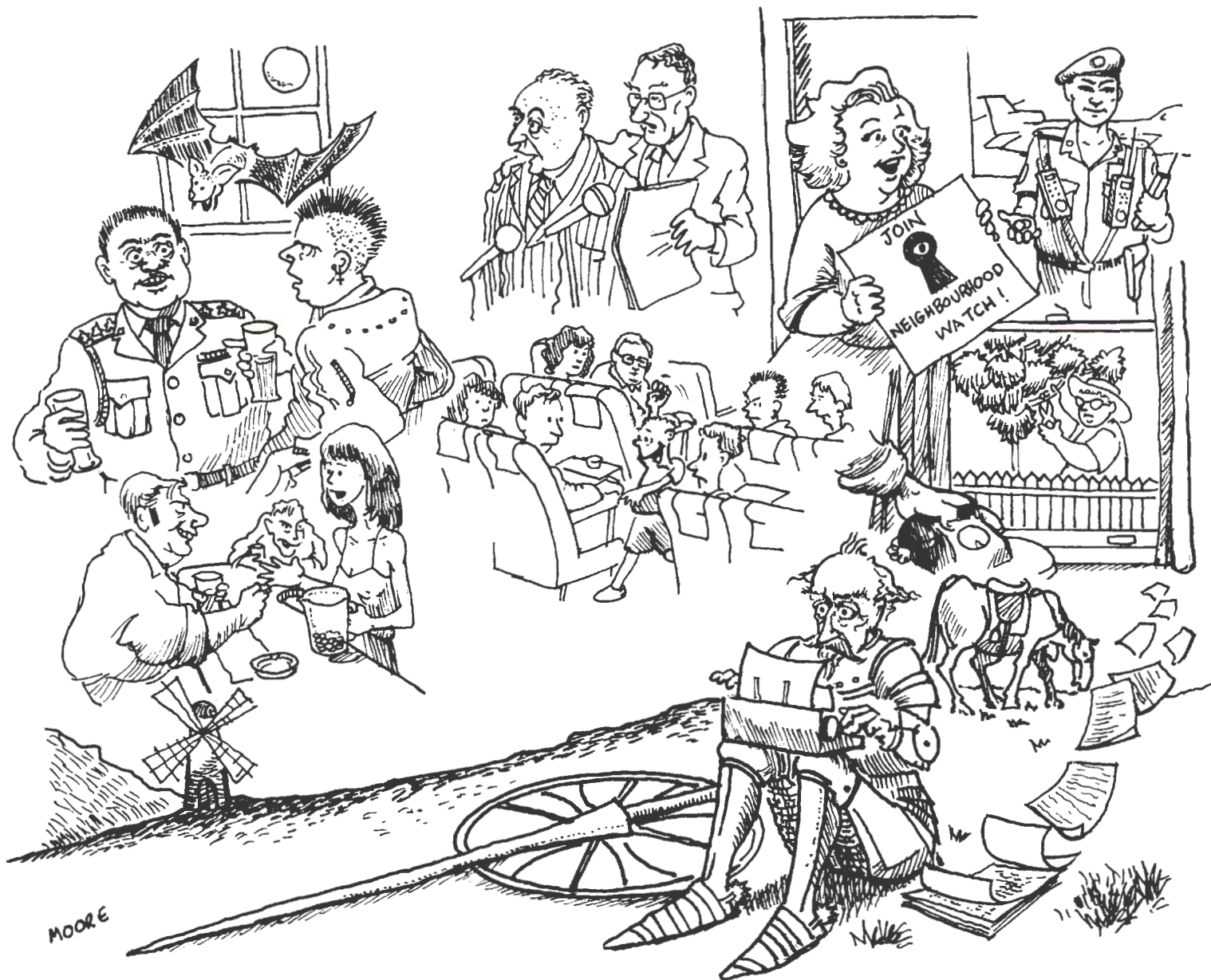
'No, I don't think you'll ever be weaned of that. I meant the column.'

'I'm not sure. I think there will always be a need for Quixotry. But whether I'm still the Quixote that I used to be is another question.'

'Quixote the family man can't write about jug girls and killing bats and terrorising the local Neighbourhood Watch, ch?'

'That's one way of putting it.'

The child, sated with milk, has fallen asleep again and Celia reclines beside her on the towel. 'Well, you might be able to work it out here.'



'On the beach?'

'In Perth. I think Sancho's wrong about this town, you know.'

'Yes, it is more than just a great place for a barbecue. Or rather, the fact that it's a great place for a barbecue says all sorts of other good things about it.'

'Mmm ...' Fearing that another Quixote statement may be in the offing, Celia has joined Dominica in slumber.

I DECIDE TO TAKE A WALK and head down to the water. On the horizon, a faint grey smudge is the first hint that the surfers are more likely to end their day in a thunderstorm rather than on a surfable wave, perfect or otherwise. I watch the cloud grow larger and closer, and as it does so the faint tingle that heralds an hallucination again nags at my consciousness.

As I stare at the cloud it dissolves into the images that Celia has just mentioned: striptease bars, bats buried in gardens and the Demons of Neighbourhood Watch. And an obnoxious child running amok in the passenger cabin of an aeroplane. I think for a moment of Dominica asleep by her mother, to reassure myself that she doesn't fit the picture. Which, as Celia has predicted, gives me the answer I have been looking for. *Pictures*. I wanna be in pictures, sort of.

The family are already stirring when I return to tell them the news, and Celia raises a quizzical eyebrow. 'Have you buried Quixote yet?'

'Not exactly, but I've got an idea about visions. Television, to be precise.'

'Come again?'

'Do you remember the story your cousin tells about when she was a little girl and they got television for the first time?'

'You mean the one about her father deciding they didn't need a Christmas tree, so they decorated this wonderful new box instead and put presents round it?'

'Yes, well I'm going to celebrate television and visions, too. Can we go now?'

'Where?'

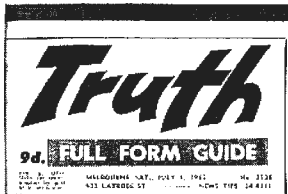
'Melbourne, eventually. I'm going to persuade the editor of *Eureka Street* that she should pay me to watch television, so I can write about it.'

Celia raises Dominica to eye level for a consultation. 'Whaddya reckon? Is your dad as silly as he sounds?'

The child gurgled an answer, with her smile only slightly obscured by the trail of milk dribbling from her mouth.

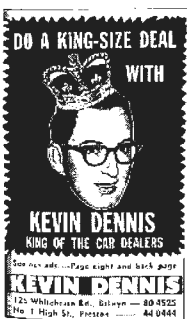
Ray Cassin is the production editor of *Eureka Street*.

THRING'S FLING



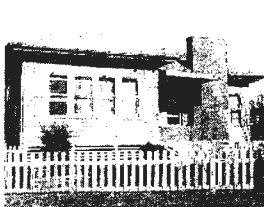
and does
he have
fun!
SEE PAGE 21

HOUSE OF CRUELTY



Truth takes a look inside

From behind the respectable facade of this ordinary-looking house this week emerged a story of shocking cruelty—See Page 3.



The memory lingers on: always larger than life, the late Frank Thring as he appeared on Truth's cover, July 7, 1962.

PICTURE A COURTROOM in Victoria during the early eighties. The prosecution is moving that the jury be dismissed because of a report of proceedings that had appeared in *Truth*. After detailing the disgraceful manner in which the article allegedly held the court in contempt, the prosecution counsel defers to the bench. 'Of course, your honour wouldn't read the yellow press,' he concludes ingratiatingly.

'On the contrary', the judge says, 'I read it all the time, it's got the best form guide in the country'.

Leon Gettler tells this story with obvious pleasure as we sit in a fashionable restaurant that serves dishes concocted from sculpted bits of meat and sauces with unpronounceable names. It doesn't seem the right setting for our discussion of the most infamous newspaper in Australia's history. Nor does Gettler look as one might expect a *Truth* reporter to look. He is a slightly built, affable man dressed in a neatly tailored light beige suit. Moreover, he now covers urban affairs for *The Age*, was state political reporter for the old *Sun* and is author of the book, *An Unpromised Land*.

Given the paper's reputation I

THE MEDIA

JON GREENAWAY

Lies and times

An Australian journalistic institution, the *Truth* newspaper, ceased publication at the close of 1994. It was always titillating and often offensive, but for most of its history *Truth* was rarely as far from the facts as its critics liked to believe.

had imagined myself talking to a Les Patterson—a lush who, with a gut restrained by a coffee-stained shirt, would punctuate his ribald commentary with beer belches and scratching of the nether regions.

But then again, the reaction to the news that the financially troubled *Truth* Newspapers group was to be bought out, and that the soft porn successor of the old *Truth*, *The World*, would cease circulation, was confusing to say the least. Surely the final chapter in the demise of this temple of high sleaze would have been met with gestures of good riddance or indifferent silence? But instead articles began appearing in the more respectable broadsheet press, mourning the final passing of the *Truth*. Much too much respect for the paper that carried headlines such as 'Dingo Death Mum Slams Rock Murder Rumours', 'Hooker Nun Slur' and the unforgettable 'Snedden Dies On The Job'.

Perhaps these laments were not for the content of its pages but for its longevity. For 104 years *Truth* published scandal in all its varieties. Like your great-uncle with the bung eye, racking cough and smutty jokes, you hated *Truth* when it was there and miss it now it's gone.

The magazine was started in 1890 by John Norton, and it was not long before it had attracted its share of controversy. Norton was accused of blackmailing companies into advertising in *Truth* by threatening to print articles defaming their products or services. He established the paper on the premise that it had no respect for reputations or privacy—an ethos which stayed with *Truth* until its end.

During the World War One conscription debate, *Truth* mocked Billy Hughes with cartoons and articles depicting him as a deathmonger. It detailed the violent life and death of legendary Melbourne crime figure 'Squizz' Taylor. In the thirties *Truth* tackled both fascism and communism in its inimitable style, exposing a secret organisation called the 'Silent Knights', and the 'Red Threat' to Archbishop Mannix. In the Second World War it kept up with the fighting and printed its first photo of a topless model.

After the war *Truth* began to go into the private lives of celebrities in greater detail, it extended the coverage of sport, and showed a lot more skin. During the time that *Truth* journalist Evan Whitton won two Walkley Awards for his coverage of the Victorian abortion enquiry and the hanging of Ronald Ryan.

Truth also played a part in denting the convent schoolgirl innocence of the present editor of *Eureka Street*. In 1965, while editor of the Melbourne University paper, *Farrago*, she left her address book on the composers' bench at Southdown Press, the *Truth* printworks. It was returned with the addition of a few ink-smudged names and offers to dance the horizontal rumba, 'any time when mum is out'.

Gettler believes there was a grudging respect for what the paper could get away with. And he claims that many of the people who were loudest in their condemnations were closet readers.

'I'd be at a dinner party and people would say "What do you do Leon?" and I'd reply "I'm a journalist" "Oh, who for?" "The *Truth*"



and there'd be a deathly silence. But eventually everyone would want to talk to you about it, and usually they'd ask who wrote the sex advice column *Heart Balm*.'

The truth about *Truth* is that the end had been in sight since Mark Day and Owen Thompson bought it from Rupert Murdoch in 1980. The paper that had screamed at Australia from the newsstands for 104 years was undermined by the proliferation of other competitors for a reading market titillated by rumour and gossip.

'They had other alternatives', Gettler points out. 'They had TV—it's easier because it's all there—and they had the women's magazines. In a sense what happened to *Truth* is happening to all the newspapers: there's increased competition and circulation is heading south. In *Truth* it was exacerbated because it had a particular market and it became irrelevant.'

Adrian Tame, another polite, intelligent, engaging man, worked on *Truth* from 1973 to 1986. He believes the paper was out of date even when he joined.

'It never kept up. We were being shocked about people living together out of marriage and having love children. It was an antiquated morality and for my money the *Truth* never made it into the 60s or 70s, let alone the 80s or 90s.'

But circulation in the paper's last years was perhaps maintained by the form guide and the brothel ads. Tame and Gettler relay Owen Thompson's description of the typical *Truth* reader: 'The kind of bastard who makes his money in the middle of the paper and spends it in the back'. Indeed *Truth Sport*—launched with the *World* last February as a last-ditch effort to arrest the slide in circulation—still provides the most thorough form guide in the country. In a recent issue (which included 11 pages of massage parlour ads) it made pains to point out that the racing pages would continue under new owner Theo Skalkos. The scandal and innuendo, however, would go.

During his time with *Truth*, Tame had two stints as news editor, a job which at *Truth* is a bit different from its equivalent on regular dailies.

(continued p36)

T Minding the flood gates

THE SPIRIT OF KING CANUTE is alive and well and trying to cope with modern times. Canute (Knut), a powerful ruler in the 11th century, fashioned an empire from England, Denmark and most of Norway. But he is largely remembered for commanding the tide to stop rising—and ending up with wet feet.

His modern day counterparts are engaged in a futile mismatching of human control with the natural and technological world: they are trying to stop the spread of X-rated videos, regulate daylight saving and prevent the flow of information on the Internet.

Archimedes first became aware of these modern Canutes in the mid-70s, when he read a report of a legislature, in one of the southern states of the US, which passed a law forbidding African 'killer' bees entering its jurisdiction. While cartoonists had a field day depicting bees reading signs at the state border telling them they were unwelcome, the law itself was more an expression of the frustrations of impotence—how do you keep exotic pests contained in a world where widespread movement of people and goods has become commonplace?

Perhaps the clearest recent example of Canutism concerns the judge presiding over the committal hearing for Rosemary West, the woman charged with the 'House of Horrors' murders in the UK. While details of the hearing could not be published in the British Press, the whole gory proceedings were available to users of the Internet—that worldwide surf of information available via computers.

The judge had no choice but to try to stem the tide by pronouncing that details of proceedings that took place in his court were not to be carried on the Internet. But he had about as much success as Canute, and he ended up with as bad a press. (Canute's reason for trying to turn back the tide is rarely acknowledged. He wanted to demonstrate the limits of his power to his courtiers.) The judge did what he was legally obliged to do, but he had little chance of being able to enforce his pronouncement.

But the judge's failure is not only due to a mismatch between the law and technology. The anarchy of the Internet is a deliberate design feature. The network started life as a project of the US military to guard against America's being paralysed by an attack on any one centre of information. It has now grown into a many-headed hydra that is the *bête noir* of those who want to control the flow of information—as the Church of Scientology has recently found out.

The science news weekly, *New Scientist*, recently reported that the church, which prides itself on its 'scientific' base, set up a bulletin board on the Internet to discuss issues relating to Scientology. But some of the contributions contained inside information which was not to the church's taste, and it responded by asking network administrators to shut the bulletin board down. When most administrators refused, a couple of the more savvy scientologists posted software to prevent anti-Scientology messages from appearing. Other Internet users were so incensed they wrote a program which automatically restored anything removed from the bulletin board. A many-headed hydra indeed—chop off one head and another springs up to bite you.

If anybody can tame the hydra, it will not be a politician or a lawyer, but a technologist. And the person most likely at the moment is Bill Gates, head of the world's largest software company, Microsoft. Gates is about to release software that will make it easy for everyone to use the Internet. He is trying to entice governments and large corporations to join with him in making his gateway to the Internet as ubiquitous as his Windows software for IBM-style computers. But he is keeping the inner workings or source code for the program locked up tight at Microsoft.

Gates' proposal is attractive—so attractive that it is possible his software for Internet access could become standard. But some commentators are rightly concerned at the potential power of a company which controls the secret opening and closing of the standard gateway to the Internet. Perhaps Gates will become the world's first successful Canute, if that is not a contradiction in terms. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.

'It was fairly degrading because basically, you're looking for filth, sex, decadence, depravity, corruption; you're looking for all the negatives. What used to get to me more than anything was reading the weekly batch of the *London Sun* I used to get sent. Reading six copies of the *London Sun* one after the other was a very, very depressing exercise'.

But despite the diet of decadence Tame regards his time on the *Truth* as the happiest of his professional life. He and his colleagues thrived on a camaraderie engendered by the loathing of the 'respectable' press.

'The rest of the media regarded us as beyond the pale, without any talent or ability, which I really found very annoying', he says. 'The hardest papers to work for are papers like *Truth* because if you can score an interview after you've said I'm Joe Blow from the *Truth* you can sure as hell score an interview after you've said I'm Joe Blow from the *Age*'.

Tame illustrates this with a story about how he managed to discover Australia's most notorious defector, Vladimir Petrov, in the Mont Park hospital. Tame first stumbled across him registered under the assumed name of Sven Allison, but the story was pulled for reasons of national security. Six years later, when the statute of limitations expired on the Petrov papers, Mark Day decided to run the story. Adrian Tame strolled into the nursing home with a photographer in tow, took a roll of shots and barged out with half the hospital in pursuit.

'The photograph was re-run on the front page of almost every newspaper in Australia and *Truth* got paid \$500 a pop; we sold the story for a song'.

GETTLETTLER ADDS THAT *The Age* wanted to buy the photograph but balked at the price.

'Instead they ran an article condemning the *Truth* for invading people's privacy'.

Leon Gettler also believes there is a tendency amongst broadsheet journalists to cut corners, something he could never get away with at the *Truth*. Covering the courts for the paper taught him to write in plain English. 'You have to work harder.

Writing something complex in the easiest possible language is not simple. I remember when I first got there, I'd write something like "élite police squad" and they'd say "what do you mean 'élite'? Write 'top'. This is no French paper''.

Adrian Tame remembers when Leon Gettler came to the paper after Day and Thompson bought out his previous employer, *The Richmond Clarion*. He saw that Gettler was having the same crisis of conscience about interviewing rape victims and grieving relatives as he had had and decided to suggest that perhaps the *Truth* wasn't for him.

'I went up and said to him "Leon, we need to talk because you don't seem to be fitting in". To cut a long story short Leon finished up by picking up a chair and belting me over the head with it. It was at that stage that I knew he would make a very good *Truth* reporter'.

When Gettler and Tame talk about their time at the *Truth* it sounds like the journalistic equivalent of a tour of duty at the frontline of a war. Tame refers to a 'siege mentality'. A lot of pride was invested in their work. 'After a good story', Tame says, 'whoever got it would be clapped back into the office'.

This atmosphere was encouraged during Murdoch's time at the helm. Tame recalls him coming into the office once and asking whether they were doing their job properly because there hadn't been an action taken against the paper in nearly 12 months.

It was in these years that, Tame claims, the paper reached its zenith. The staff at *The Sun* (not owned then by Murdoch's News Limited group) went on strike in August of 1975 and in a matter of hours Murdoch turned the *Truth* from a bi-weekly into a daily.

'He flew in circulation people, he flew in Rigby the cartoonist, he flew in subs. He booked a whole bloody floor of the Old Melbourne Hotel. The strike only lasted three days and we put out a daily for each one. It was absolute mayhem but it was the most glorious three days.

'At the end of it Murdoch stood up in the newsroom with tears in his eyes and said "I will never forget what you people have done for me".

'About three months later seven of those people he said he would never forget were made redundant'.

Leon Gettler too has his Murdoch story.

'Owen, another editorial executive from *The Australian*, and Murdoch were in a taxi in Sydney and they'd had a night on the tiles. The cab is hurtling through the Rocks and Owen vomits all over Rupert Murdoch who has passed out next to him.

THE NEXT DAY OWEN comes into work and his secretary says "Mr Murdoch is on the phone". Owen thought at the time that he'd have to cash his chips. He answers the phone and Murdoch says to him, "That was quite a night we had last night. Do you know I was so sick I threw up all over myself".'

When Day and Thompson took over in 1980 the paper went through a number of changes. The budget was tighter without the backing of Murdoch and, as a result, the *Truth* resorted more to profiling personalities than having reporters camp on doorsteps and follow the tips of contacts. For Tame this had both good and bad effects. The paper no longer destroyed reputations but it also meant it no longer helped the battler who had been done over.

'We used to look out for the disenfranchised, the bloke who got burnt on a car deal, the bloke who got kicked out of his flat because the landlord had found a richer tenant. We did go into bat for these people and we often fought very hard for them.'

Perhaps it was that *Truth* could no longer survive in what had become a crowded market: it's appropriate that it met its end in the year when Pay TV was introduced to Australia. With *Truth*'s demise, a particular style of journalism has passed as well. The predominance of syndicated news services and the advance of communications technology have given us a more uniform and anodyne press. That old great-uncle might have been a disgusting old bastard but at least he was *our* disgusting old bastard. ■

Jon Greenaway is a *Eureka Street* staff writer.

AN INDEPENDENT MONTHLY MAGAZINE CONTAINING NEWS AND COMMENT . . . OWNED AND OPERATED BY CATHOLIC LAYMEN

Catholic Worker

No. 293 Registered at the G.P.O. Melbourne for transmission by post as a newspaper. JULY, 1960

Darkening the church door

APRIL 1995 MARKS THE 40th anniversary of the banning of the *Catholic Worker* from St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, a stricture which the Cathedral correctly assumed would be replicated in the overwhelming majority of parishes in Victoria, and even in some dioceses interstate.

The *CW*'s fault was to declare, in the wake of the Labor Party split and the disbandment of the anti-communist Industrial Groups, that a Catholic could in conscience vote, in the imminent Victorian elections, for any party except the Communist Party.

This advice was not offered gratuitously but in response to an attack made during the official *Catholic Hour* (10/3/1955) by Denys Jackson, on Catholics who did not unreservedly accept political advice from their bishops (meaning those bishops who supported the 'Movement' inaugurated in 1941-2 by B.A. Santamaria).

A photograph on the front page showed the future Democratic Labor Party leader, Frank McManus, and colleagues, standing outside the hall in Hobart where the recent ALP Federal Conference had decided the fate of the 'Groupers'. The former Victorian representatives had been shut out. The caption read: 'Some Catholics were inside; other Catholics were just knocking on the door'. (It should be said that Denys Jackson was appalled by the ban and offered to appeal against it. It may be pertinent that he was English and from a more liberal subculture.)

The official Melbourne Catholic attitude to those 'Catholics inside' was vehemently summed up by Major Bill Jordan, a close associate of B.A. Santamaria, at a Communion Breakfast at Fern Tree Gully. It was quoted for edification in the *diocesan Tribune* (31/3/1955):



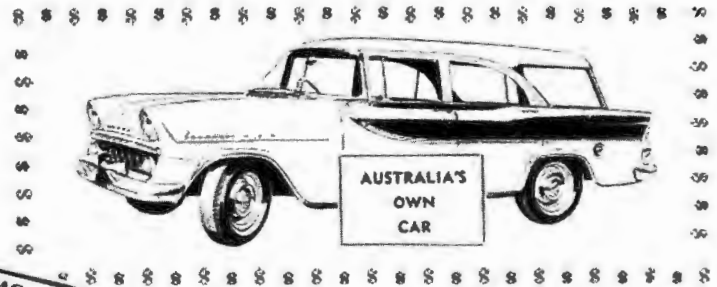
A programme for fighting Communism agreed upon by the Australian bishops was now under attack led by Dr Evatt. Unfortunately Dr Evatt would not have succeeded ... but for the assistance ... from Catholic traitors.

These are the men who put Mammon before God, self before Christ, Barabbas before their Bishops. For them the will of their Bishops is not the will of God.

It was in this climate that A.A. Calwell, deputy leader of the Federal Opposition and for over 40 years a

hero-worshipper of Archbishop Mannix, had to forsake his parish church after being continually abused there and jostled on his way to the communion rails. E. W. Peters MHR was told by his parish priest he would be refused communion. The threat was later withdrawn when Peters said he would appeal to Mannix. Peters had been responsible for moving against Evatt in caucus.

As the Cathedral anticipated, the circulation of the *CW* (which relied heavily on church door sales) fell sharply—immediately from 26,000



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The development of the Holden signalled that Australia was changing; the Melbourne church under Daniel Mannix did not always want to change with it, and the Catholic Worker sometimes got squeezed between the two. But the paper always remained personally loyal to Archbishop Mannix, as the obituaries in its December 1963 issue showed.

to less than 15,000; by 1960 to about 5000. This was probably the most severe disciplinary action taken against laity since at least the *Monitum Pastorale* of 1859, yet it went unrecorded in contemporary Catholic histories.

In the case of Fr James Murtagh's *Australia: the Catholic Chapter* (2nd edition, 1968) this was almost certainly a matter of policy (as it was for the diocesan weeklies, the *Advocate* and the *Tribune*) not to mention the *CW* at all, if possible. Dissenters, as in the Communist Party, had to become non-persons.

Historian Patrick O'Farrell at that time was not as conversant with the Melbourne scene as he later became and this may be a reason for the omission in his *The Catholic Church in Australia* (1969). There is a brief mention of the 'boycott' (a less appropriate word than 'ban') of the *CW* in O'Farrell's expanded history, *The Catholic Church and Community* (1978), but no attempt to analyse the significance of the issue.

Both Murtagh and O'Farrell extolled the *CW*'s early successes (founded January 1936) and were careful to record B.A. Santamaria's initiative as first editor, though not that the *CW* Council had to override his failure to consult its Committee when writing articles by appointing a three-man editorial team in 1937.

Nor was the ban recorded in O'Farrell's two-volume *Documents in Australian Catholic History* (1969) although it recorded part of the *CW*'s later indictment (July 1959)

of the Movement as damaging to the church.

THE ONLY MENTION of the incident, before Paul Ormonde's exposé, *The Movement* (1972) seems to have been in Niall Brennan's biography *Dr Mannix* (1964 p. 290). Brennan, then a lapsed *CW* member, also put the matter inaccurately: 'It (i.e. *CW*) was becoming more anti-Movement with each issue and was reporting things that many Catholics had muttered to each other for years.'

Meanwhile, the Movement's political *News Weekly* remained on sale at the Cathedral and in other churches. An indication of its difference in tone from the *CW* of the time can be illustrated from *News Weekly*

(10/2/1960) recording the transfer of ALP leadership from Dr Evatt to the Archbishop's former friend, A.A. Calwell. It was the Chinese New Year, said the front page columnist: the sign of the pig had given way to the sign of the rat.

Writing in the *Sydney Bulletin* (10/5/1961) Santamaria chose to see the *CW* ban not as an attempt to suppress dissent but as evidence of Archbishop Mannix's 'essential liberalism' which, he said:

resides in his practical recognition of the fact that the right of a bishop to speak on public issues involves as a corollary the right of a member of his own flock to oppose him... Dr Mannix's disagreement with the (*CW*) policy is, of course, widely known, and in the great majority of Melbourne parishes the paper is no longer sold at the Church door. But the Archbishop has quite deliberately refused to place any ban upon it, and it was until recently—and probably still—sold at some churches where the priest agrees with the policy... This inflexible liberalism is at once the most surprising and the most adamant quality in his character.

Santamaria accounted for the 'ban' by saying the *CW* had 'publicly and repeatedly attacked the Industrial Groups.' This was untrue, as any reading of the pre-1955 *CW* would have shown.

In fact, the Archbishop himself said to the *CW*'s chairman, Tom Butler: 'I know it (the *CW*) doesn't directly attack them (the Industrial Group) but does so indirectly in a niggling-nagging fashion'. Even this was hardly true. In May 1954, for example, it praised the Industrial Groups but said they should purge their ranks of time-servers, opportunists and job hunters. The *CW* had, after all, been much favoured by Mannix; its leaders paid court to him at Raheen each year and had always been warmly received. From its inception it had voluntarily submitted copy to a Mannix-chosen sacerdotal censor lest it strayed from orthodox faith and morals. *News Weekly*, as a purely political organ, naturally did not.

Probably no Catholic paper better illustrated that 'air of celebration' which K.S. Inglis noted as characteristic of Australian Catholic literature in a splendid seminal article in *Historical Studies* (1959).

The exuberance of the *CW* belied any doubt that the gates of secularism and indifference could prevail against the Church in Australia. The first issue sold out and had to be reprinted. In the first two years 730,000 copies were sold. In early 1941 it reached a peak circulation of 55,000.

QUITE PROBABLY IT HAD SOME influence on such political events as the shelving of the National Insurance Bill in 1939, the rejection of the Manpower Referendum of 1944, possibly even the determination of Prime Minister Chifley to go ahead with Bank Nationalisation and, indirectly, through its lack of support for the Movement, the decision of some Catholic politicians to support Dr Evatt during the Labor split. In its pages there are letters and exchanges with notables such as Evatt, the Queensland Premier, Forgan-Smith, Labor ministers such as J. J. Dedman and Senator E. McKenna, and even the radical Maurice Blackburn.

It would have been surprising in view of its circulation and Australia-wide ecclesiastical patronage, if the *CW*'s pulse had not been taken when relevant government policies were being framed.

Over again the paper reviewed its progress in self-congratulatory vein and its eighth anniversary prompted a 150-page book of excerpts from its files. *Design for Democrats: The Autobiography of a Free Journal by 25 Men*. This sold out rapidly and a second edition was issued.

Two pamphlets of critical analysis of the Labor program of post-war reconstruction during 1944-6 entitled *Australia's New Order—Fact or Fiction?* and *Ownership or Slavery?* were also published. The adherence to papal social encyclicals was impeccable.

The *CW* was tireless and repetitive in instructing its readers on theories of rent, interest rates, just profit and wages, and then applying them to specific budgets, Arbitration Court

decisions, company dividends and banking policies. Particular emphasis was laid on resettlement of the land on a small-proprietorial and mixed-farming basis. The need for industrial councils was canvassed, trades union reform urged. Social services were scrutinised to see that they not only improved the worker's lot but that they did not lead to Belloc's Servile State.

Mannix must have smiled benignly in view of his 1916-17 dictum that conscription was 'an evil thing' per se, when the *CW* opposed it in 1942 even though Japanese were at the door.

From March to September 1944 each leader was devoted to the August Manpower referendum. Although the *CW* declined to urge a particular vote, it expressed its feelings forthrightly on Evatt's failure to give guarantees against industrial conscription. Evatt wrote to Mannix asking him to restrain the *CW*. It accused Evatt (April 1944) of 'having enunciated ... Nazi or Bolshevist constitutional doctrine'. Obviously the *CW* men on principle voted NO but, in spite of his later stress on the principle of subsidiarity, Mannix voted YES, though giving no indication that anything but personal expedient judgment was involved.

Bank nationalisation (1947-9) was more obviously contentious and the hierarchy was divided. Archbishop Duhig of Brisbane condemned it as 'socialism' and therefore contrary to Catholic teaching. Mannix was open-minded. (Catholic morality even then could be federal.) The *CW* was in favour, believing that bank nationalisation could be reconciled with the principle of subsidiarity, especially if private banks were replaced by co-operatives.

But sales were lost.

A FURTHER DIVERGENCE of opinion between the *CW* and *News Weekly* emerged with the campaign to ban the Communist Party in 1950-1951 but then bishops appeared to differ although they did not do so explicitly in public.

Duhig advocated a YES vote but emphasised it was a personal decision not one binding others in conscience. Mannix was judicious and guarded pointing out the dangers

both of not confronting the Reds and of infringing civil liberties to ban them. *News Weekly* attacked the ALP and played down cautious statements by both Mannix and Gilroy. The *CW* scrupulously avoided telling readers how to vote but warned of the dangers involved, even leaning on Mannix's authority. He should hardly have been displeased.

Although increasingly apprehensive of the divisiveness of Catholic Action in the ALP and concerned about Evatt's leadership, the *CW* made negligible comment although committee members were well informed about Labor politics by friendly politicians and officials of the Melbourne Trades Hall. The *CW*, on excellent terms with Mannix's coadjutor, Archbishop Simonds, did not even report his pointed remark apropos the Movement following the installation of Eris O'Brien as Archbishop of Canberra-Goulburn in January 1954:

I am sure that he (O'Brien) will set his face sternly against any attempt to involve the Church in underground political intrigue ... he is too well versed in history to imagine that the Church's divine apostolate gains any permanent fruit when any of her misguided children seek to capture political power in her name.

The coadjutor's remarks were not allowed to be reported in the diocesan weeklies.

It is possible that the review of Leicester Webb's account of the 1951 referendum, *Communism and Democracy in Australia*, (February 1955) could have been perceived as sardonic by Mannix. Webb, said the reviewer, 'seems to assume that Catholic Action is some sort of political wing of the Catholic Church actively engaged in political organisation. This, of course, is erroneous'.

The reviewer stressed that the constitutions of Catholic Action forbid a person to be 'at the same time a leading member of a political party and a leading member of a Catholic organisation.' Nor could a Catholic Action organisation 'support the programme of a political party as such or allow itself to be used for party ends', nor permit

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'discussion ... at any Catholic Action meeting of a matter of purely political nature.' Webb replied in the March issue stressing the difference between principles and practice. He said gently that 'there was evidence that Catholic Action had strayed into politics recently.' The *CW* replied that 'any individuals or organisations ... (seeking) to pass themselves

Originally it was compiled for publication as an article, 'Catholic Action and the Movement'.

After an intense semantic wrangle within the committee in which the article was amended, a vote brought out a majority of one against the publication although every member seemed to agree with the content. The younger members of the Committee particularly, but certainly not exclusively, were for publication, not having quite the same awe of Mannix.

Obviously the time was not quite ripe, even for a group of committed lay intellectuals, to declare there was room for a free Catholic press with a plurality of views of what was in the best interests of the Church. The sagacity of bishops could not be even implicitly questioned in public although (as Simonds made clear) they differed among themselves.

The article itself was extraordinarily deferential, taking the most kindly view of the Movement consistent with what should have been the orthodox one—that the Movement was concerned with politics and not Catholic Action and therefore could not enjoin the conscience of Catholics.

The article refuted the allegation (stirred up by Evatt) that the Catholic Church through the Movement was seeking to control the ALP and, ultimately, through it, trying to create a 'theocratic totalitarian state'. This was 'sectarian rubbish'. The article set down the (correct) principles that had been taught by the Church's magisterium. It praised the Movement in conjunction with the Industrial Groups for breaking Communist power in a number of unions. But by 'preferring', 'in its initial stages, and for some time thereafter ... to work secretly', the Movement confused non-Catholics as to its true function and Movement members 'have at times given the impression by word or conduct that their organisation is part of Catholic Action', whereas Catholics are free to join it or judge it undesirable.

The Movement was 'pure politics' and 'with such matters ... the Church is not concerned'. Recent events have brought 'no benefit to the nation or the Catholic Church but only to the Communist Party,

the enemy of both'. Failing agreement on publications, the *CW* Committee decided to send a copy to every Australian bishop, together with a summary of the arguments for and against publication under two heads: whether the statements in the article were true and assuming they were true, whether it was prudent or expedient to publish. The cogent argument for publication was that clarification of issues was most important for the development of the Australian Church. Within three years the Vatican was to think so too.

Eleven out of thirty bishops seem to have replied, and not one agreed that the *CW* should publish the article.

ONLY TWO NEED BE mentioned here. Cardinal Gilroy said he 'was interested to read the views expressed in the article' but 'whatever the merits of the case ... you should be guided by your Archbishop'. This conveyed succinctly both Gilroy's attitude to the prospect of a vocal laity as well as the reservations that had accrued in Sydney as to the wisdom of the Movement.

Auxiliary Bishop Lyons of Sydney, soon to have the see of Sale, and a former Administrator of St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, provided the sharpest reaction. His letter conveys his intolerance of any dissent from episcopal opinion, what he thought was then mandatory and, in view of later denials that the Movement was secret, how much the laity was entitled to know:

The author of the article writes about several matters of which, by their nature, he could not and does not possess accurate information. In addition to its many inaccuracies, the article could harm the Church. It could also offend those who unquestionably follow the directions and guidance of their bishops in all matters included in or related to the lay apostolate.

Not unexpectedly, there had been no response from Mannix. Melbourne's coadjutor Simonds hardly needed to reply, his attitude being known to the *CW* committee. In any case, a statement of his position in

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off as members of Catholic Action' without a 'formal Catholic Action mandate, speak and act without authority.' Perhaps that was in the mind of Mannix before he read the offending April 1955 issue. Given the ethos of Catholic Melbourne at the time he may even have been riled by the photograph of a smiling Arthur Calwell on the front page of his March copy.

There had, however, been another statement from the *CW* committee, privately circulated among the hierarchy following Evatt's denunciation of the Movement in October 1954.

writing would have meant unprecedentedly open dissent with his senior prelate.

For Mannix, those not for him were against him; attacks on the Movement were the sort of sectarianism that he had experienced all his life. No protestation by Evatt that he could distinguish between Church and Movement would convince Mannix that there was anything at stake other than communism, sectarianism and personal ambition. Juridical questions about Catholic Action were persiflage.

When Tom Butler called on Mannix, in response to a summons to discuss the April 1955 *CW*, Mannix called it 'a most disgraceful issue. It is an attack on the Groups'.

He repeated this several times and wanted to know what Butler would use instead of the Groups to defeat the Communists. Butler replied: the Liberal Party, Mr Menzies, the Armed Forces and the Groupers themselves.

Mannix discussed the Liberal Party; they had done nothing. Butler retorted that its compulsory secret ballot legislation in unions had done a great deal but forebore to mention the Liberal's former determination to ban the Communist Party. Mannix was astonished that Butler should think that support for the Groups was an open question. 'How could you possibly think that?' he asked.

When Butler pointed out that Mannix had not replied to the *CW*'s letter seeking advice, and that this had weighed considerably with him in supporting the publication of the April 1955 statement, Mannix said he 'may have been somewhat remiss in being too liberal'.

It is astonishing, forty years on, to think that Mannix's position could have been defended—and still is. He was incapable of understanding that a political party was justified in not wanting to persevere with groups controlled by a secret organisation working under the aegis of the Catholic hierarchy and directed by persons who might not even vote for it. On 17 April 1955 Mannix, showing his life-long penchant for the fallacy of the undistributed middle, prescribed a vote in the Victorian elections: 'When ... (they) come, I shall have no difficulty in making up my

mind. I shall ask myself what side or group the Communists are wishing to win. Then, definitely, I am on the other side.'

As for the *CW*, it paid a heavy price for having been too deferential to the hierarchy. It is, of course, difficult to say what would have happened if it had openly pointed out in, say, 1950, the course into which Mannix and Santamaria were leading the Australian Church.

Almost certainly the *CW* would have been banned but, with the secrecy of the Movement destroyed, the issue would have been discussed, uncomplicated by the context of the Petrov Commission, Evatt's loss in the 1954 Federal Election and the subsequent friction in the ALP.

If there *had* to be a Labor Split, it could well then have occurred without sectarian bitterness. ■

James Griffin was a member of the *Catholic Worker* Committee from 1957-76. The above is based on an unpublished paper, 'The *Catholic Worker* and the Hierarchy 1936-59' Readers should also consult Paul Ormonde's *The Movement*, 1972 .

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Roger Heagney: Missa Consolari
Tomás de Victoria: O crux ave
Tomás de Victoria: Pueri Hebraeorum
- April 13 *Holy Thursday at 6.00pm*
Christopher Willcock: Mass 'Trocaire'
Andrea Gabrieli: O sacrum convivium
Tomás de Victoria: Unus ex discipulis
- April 14 *Good Friday at 3.00pm*
Johann Kuhnau: Tristis est animus mea
Antonio Lotti: Crucifixus
Tomás de Victoria: Tamquam ad latronem
- April 14 *at 8.00pm*
The Office of Tenebrae for Good Friday
- April 15 *Easter Vigil at 8.00pm*
Anthony Halliday: Mass of Celebration
William Byrd: Haec dies
Georg F. Handel: Hallelujah
with Canzona Brass led by John Schmidli
- April 16 *Easter Sunday*
Joseph Haydn: Missa Sancti Nicolai
William Byrd: Haec dies
Georg F. Handel: Hallelujah
with The Chamber Strings of Melbourne
- April 23 *Easter II*
Guest Choir: St Mary of the Angels
choir, Geelong, directed by Frank de Rosso
- April 30 *Easter III*
Anthony Halliday: Mass of Celebration
Jacobus Gallus: Pater noster
with Canzona Brass led by John Schmidli
- May 7 *Easter IV*
Zoltan Kodaly: Missa Brevis (1944)
C. Willcock: Give us a Pure Heart
- May 14 *Easter V*
Hans Leo Hassler: Missa octo voci
Alessandro Scarlatti: Exsultate deo
- May 21 *Easter VI*
Antonín Dvořák: Mass in D major Op. 86
Andrea Gabrieli: O sacrum convivium
- May 28 *Ascension of the Lord*
Hans Leo Hassler: Missa Octo voci
Christopher Willcock: Give us a pure heart

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Learning curves

Educating Johannah: A Year in Year 12, Anne Henderson, Allen Unwin, Sydney 1995. ISBN 1 86373 787 1, RRP \$16.95

School Matters: The Preshil Alternative in Education, Naomi Row White, Reed Books, Melbourne 1995. ISBN 1 86330 348 0 RRP \$22.

THE INCULTURATION OF THE YOUNG is a strenuous and anxious process, although most of us would like our children to see us as warm and nurturing. There is an urge to make our children into what we ourselves would like to be. That can be a benign thing, but the stress of well-meaning can put too much force in the guiding hand. And whether the educational choices we make for our children amount to irresponsible molycoddling or heartless Spartan toughening, they say a great deal about what we want our broader society to be.

these matters; they are as different in form as they are in content.

Anne Henderson chronicles the last year of her daughter's secondary schooling with an eye to the broader context. It is a thoughtful record, based tidily on a chronology of the family's experience of 1993. Henderson is very well-informed about the range of choices and, with her husband, prepared to make swingeing financial sacrifices to ensure that her child should receive the best available.

She is knowledgeable and critical, in a brightly anecdotal way, of

the recent row over the remarking of exam papers in Victoria highlights the irony of a system recently restructured to increase accessibility and 'fairness' now admitting that only a few privileged schools knew that this recourse was available.

It is impossible not to admire her commitment, and yet—there are assumptions behind it all that would bear questioning, particularly when one is reading *School Matters* at the same time. The school that Johannah attends, Abbotsleigh, does not emerge as particularly caring or enlightened: a friend is punished for

'singing an octave low in chapel'; Johannah's hard work in a stage crew in Year 11 goes largely unrecognised; there is a disturbing enthusiasm for the singing of 'Land of Hope and Glory'; ASIO is among the career group visitors on Year 10 career night.

Henderson's account is peppered with anxious asides about the unemployment rate and the uncertainty of getting into the course that you want in an increasingly competitive society:

'Having to make hard choices is preparation for the competitive real world that students will find when they leave the school womb.'

The overwhelmingly good intentions of loving parents shine through the book, but there is a determination to fit Johannah for the status quo rather than to challenge it:

'As we saw it children needed guidance and we made no apology for directing their minds. The school we chose said likewise. They could reject it all later, when they had enough learning to make a judgment for themselves.'

Taking refuge in traditional ways in chaotic times is a well-trying and

Subjectively speaking

MANY PEOPLE HAVE ASKED ME HOW I feel about *Educating Johannah*.

Well, it was a fascinating two years seeing how a book was put together; me being the main scope of the book. At first I was worried how my mother would interpret my year in Year 12. Not that there was much to interpret because Year 12 can be quite a drag. However, after it all happened and I read the book, I discovered it was actually a very funny account of quite an interesting year.

There were, however, the embarrassing parts.

Such as old boyfriends. Well, there weren't many boyfriends at the time. In an all-girls school and with so much study you don't have much time for men. Then there were my particular paranoias, like only fitting into a size 12 dress. At the time I thought that was quite a large size, I don't know why. There was also a questionable interpretation of my ripped jeans. The embarrassing parts, however, are all just minor stuff. I am embarrassed for my own sake.

As for my friends who have read the book, they love it. One friend who read it in my room just kept bursting into laughter. I hope she was laughing with me.

Some have asked if I knew my mother was going to turn me into a book. At the beginning of Year 12 she had said she was writing a book about education. But she never implied that I'd be pretty much the centre of it. Six months later I asked her about the title. She said, *Educating Johannah*. I replied, 'That's my name.' Then I began to find things I had said written down on pieces of paper on my mother's desk.

By the end of the HSC, when I was really bored and tired of study, I found a copy of the incomplete manuscript. I wanted to read 'July'. This was the month I had met Jeremy (a potential formal partner) in Byron Bay and I was a bit sceptical about what she would say. But once I started to read the book I relaxed.

As to whether anyone will write about me again, I must say I think enough has been said. ■

—Johannah Henderson

Much of middle-class culture in Australian society wants its children educated for *success*, whatever that might mean to the parent paying (or not) for the type of moulding preferred. *The Education of Johannah* and *School Matters: the Preshil Alternative in Education* treat of

educational systems in general. The unpredictability and occasional chaos of the huge VCE experiment in Victoria is compared unfavourably with the relative safety of the NSW system that deals with her daughters. Her comments, based on experience in 1993, still have relevance:

often successful strategy, and that is the route the Hendersons follow, though not uncritically. They take a tolerant approach to their elder daughter's support of a Labor candidate in the 1993 election. The way Elizabeth puts it to her parents is interesting:

"I've decided to help Mary Easson in Lowe," Elizabeth announced in the first week of the campaign. "I think she's got a good chance of winning and she'd be good in Parliament."

Scarcely a member of the tomato throwing socialist left. The careful explanation given by Henderson of her elder daughter's leftwing tendency is illuminating in itself. And it is a little disquieting to see a few lines later that when at school, Johannah, in supporting her sister, found it 'wise not to talk politics when one member of the family was out door-knocking for the other side.' and '...Johannah learned the delicate art of maintaining silence in adversity, her self-defence against the politically righteous.' Some things one can put up with.

School Matters shows Preshil parents and teachers (particularly the redoubtable Margaret Lyttle, niece and heir of the founder, Greta Lyttle) using a similar benevolent determinism to achieve the broadly similar end of their children's success.

BUT THE DEFINITION OF SUCCESS is where Abbotsleigh and Preshil might part company. The Hendersons stake a good deal on the hope that their daughters' academic needs and future ambitions will be met by fitting into the self-interested aims of Abbotsleigh. The means are also different: Preshil is famous worldwide as being Australia's answer to Summerhill, the 'experiment' launched by A.S. Neil.

That comparison is an interesting one because Henderson mentions a documentary on the bullies' paradise that Summerhill has become, with a houseparent asserting that 'It's your William Golding *Lord of the Flies* type of thing. It happens in every school in the country.' He is referring to an incident showing 'a group of students chasing and

beheading a black pet hare in the school grounds'. 'Only the strongest survive anywhere' says the houseparent. It is perhaps the only statement that the Hendersons might agree with (without of course accepting any of the violence).

It becomes apparent in *School Matters* that Preshil's success owed everything to the influence of its 'benevolent despot', Margaret Lyttle. 'Charismatic' is a term frequently used about her. And

that Preshil allowed itself to end up with. There is a strong sense of place centred around the school and the two strong women associated with it. There is a heavy reliance on anonymous oral history, not necessarily in chronological order. That can be irritatingly woolly and vague. There are hardly any surnames, few firm dates. There is a sense that a great deal more might need to be written on the subject. But the use of myth and legend is something the Preshil community would find comfortable.

Some postmodern methodology is evident in such



Schooldays: from left, Johannah, Priscilla, Nicole, Amber and Kristine

if she seemed to identify herself a great deal with the place, the results seem to bear her out. The children who attended Preshil were sent there for a number of reasons. The parents' faith in a type of education that was more 'natural', more play-centred, was based on reaction against authoritarian structures and a sort of optimism that is the opposite of Golding's vision: children are inherently good and unconsciously wise about their needs; punishment does not train, only brutalises; art and myth (rather than institutionalised religious practice) help the child become a 'whole person'; structures need to be under continual review to ensure that they are not inimical to personal freedom balanced with the good of the community, and so on.

Naomi Rosh's treatment of her 60-year subject seems to operate very much within the kind of structures

a treatment; I found myself longing for more clarity—something the Henderson book has in buckets. But Preshil comes out looking very caring of its students, largely because Margaret Lyttle was always sturdily focused on the welfare of the children, rather than the obstinate pursuit of a hard-core libertarian ideology, which is, I think, what contributed largely to the deterioration of Summerhill after A.S. Neil. Whether Preshil will survive her retirement is something to be seen and to be hoped for. ■

Juliette Hughes is a regular contributor to *Eureka Street* and a former teacher.

A Barbarian Catechism

*No, dear friend,
I don't have a full heart
for all the Christian stock and barrel, but
with half a mind still need
much of it some of the time, at least until
something more serious
comes along, which hasn't happened yet.
Epiphanies are for real, given
that 'man is not equally moral all the time',
according to clever, dangerous
Nietzsche, who liked to say he was really Polish,
not a goofy German,
and declared that Christianity came along
in order to lighten the heart.*

*So Christmas is hard to get away from still,
despite the cards and toys,
those haunting carols again and again calling back
our own childhood as well
as His, an absolutely important
child in a wintry manger,
prickly with straw, whether or not he was
the child of God, like us
or seriously different. Yes, he died in the spring,
which was autumn down here in Australia,
but his sacrifice has got muddled with rabbits and eggs.
Again, I am pretty dodgy
about angels and saints, while the life everlasting
is an awesome whatnot which
just keeps on changing utterly all the time.
Grace I can understand;
it would make sense to a perfectly heathen soul
and so might Blessing.
Indeed, lacking Grace, how could we endure
the painfulness of days?*

*For these, for all the incomparable stories,
tall articulate churches
and Piero della Francesca's 'Baptism of Christ'
I give wholeminded thanks
and bless a tradition that sheds a various light
like stained glass windows
on the stuttering thisness of our here-and-now.*

Chris Wallace-Crabbe

Good tidings from the abyss

LAST YEAR, THE NEW Professor of English and Cultural Studies at the University of Melbourne, Simon During, devoted his inaugural lecture to arguing that the discipline of 'English' had had it. Cultural Studies rules, OK? One wonders how the traditionalists in his department (if there are any left) feel about this mildly remarkable lecture—and whether the new professor will give back half his salary? It's a safe bet that there will be little or no scandal. The 'dangerous' ideas that caused such a stir in the humanities even 10 years ago have been steadily gaining ground, so that now it is accurate to speak of a radical establishment. There are whole university departments for which the world began in 1968, has restarted a number of times since then, and just keeps getting better.

In any case, serious controversy between the new and the old, humanists and anti-humanists, moderns and postmoderns, what you will, has never amounted to much in this country. For one thing, it is hard to find a battle ground when the troops are using different maps. As the blandness of Professor During's lecture demonstrates, the now-secure radicals see no reason to bother with the old guard, and are busy—those who still believe in argument—arguing among themselves. Status quo restored. Fundamental disagreement is a painful and alien thing to many Australian academics, who have always been better at living off ideas than living by them.

In the United States, by contrast, although there is a radical establishment, it forms the cultural leftwing



On Looking into the Abyss: Untimely Thoughts on Culture and Society, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1994. ISBN 0 679 42826 7

Postmodern Ethics, Zygmunt Baumann, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1994. ISBN 0 631 18693 X RRP \$39.95

to a liberal centre and a conservative right. All are vocal: conferences are arranged; something is felt to be at stake. Gertrude Himmelfarb's book can fairly be called conservative, in that she is concerned to preserve and protect values she believes are indispensable.

She believes, for example, that historians should provide footnotes. (Many now do not.) She believes, guardedly, in liberalism. She believes that there is a thing called literature, not a seamless universe of 'texts'; that some books are better than others, and that writers, not critics, are what really matter. She even believes

in heroes. She could not, in short, be less fashionable.

According to Himmelfarb, one principal threat to her beliefs and values comes from postmodernism. Like 'nature' in the 18th century or 'new' in the early 20th, this word today is ubiquitous and elusive. No doubt, in the next millennium, a gigantic literature will accumulate explaining what we all meant by it, a literature which, with our passion for history-on-the-wing, has already begun. Undergraduates are presented with anthologies of postmodernist writing—or is it writing about postmodernism, or is there, indeed, an 'ism' at all?—and these questions are right

there, in the anthologies, along with a web of cultural reference dense enough to entangle even supple-minded youth. To make life even harder, not only is lucid and systematic explanation of these matters uncommon, it is held by many to be a Bad Thing.

Himmelfarb, a distinguished historian of 19th century England, writes straightforwardly and is always prepared to say what she means. For her, postmodernism is a set of doctrines whose 'forefathers' are Nietzsche and Heidegger and whose 'fathers' are Derrida and Foucault. (The masculinist diction is typical of the book). The combined effect of these doctrines' she says, is 'to impugn traditional rational discourse'.

In literature, postmodernism amounts to a denial of the fixity of any 'text', of the authority of the author over the interpreter,

of any 'canon' that privileges great books over lesser ones. In philosophy, it is a denial of the fixity of language, of any correspondence between language and reality—indeed, of any 'essential' reality ... In history, it is a denial of the fixity of the past, of the reality of the past apart from what the historian chooses to make of it, and thus of any objective truth about the past.

That the writing of history is always an interpretative act is a familiar modern belief. But while to modernists (or as they are now confusingly labelled, 'traditionalists') disparate interpretations ideally converge in a truth independent of any of them, to the postmodernist historian, the narratives of history are *nothing but* 'aesthetic creations of the historian'. There are no independent truths. 'What the traditional historian sees as an event that actually occurred in the past, the postmodernist sees as a 'text' that

modernist theory. Where there are no facts, and no concept of truth, why should any historian's construction have any claim over another? Two feminist/postmodernists quoted by Himmelfarb return an answer that is increasingly common: 'the only grounds for judging one [story] better than another are "its persuasiveness, its political utility, and its political sincerity"'. Stalin wasn't actually wrong to cut all those people out of photographs—just a bit heavyhanded. There would seem to be something of an ethical crisis here.

On Looking into the Abyss is not just about postmodernism. The title, taken from a famous essay by Lionel Trilling, indicates the author's belief that the 'crisis in the humanities', in itself of fundamental social importance, is part of a wider crisis of legitimation. There are two long central essays: one traces the development and declension of Marx's ideas from their base in Hegel.

Himmelfarb's conclusion emphatically reaffirms central liberal

church and state—with the curious result that the photograph of a crucifix immersed in urine can be exhibited in a public school, but a crucifix not immersed in urine cannot be exhibited.

For Himmelfarb, postmodernism is a set of destructive negations accompanied by a bid for power, and its central weakness, though she does not develop her claim, is its ethical incoherence. Zygmunt Baumann's position is more complex, more comprehensive, more challenging, and it must be said, considerably more difficult to read. Those, however, who share my prejudice against sociological prose may find, as I did, their discomforts swept aside by the power, the abundance and the command of this remarkable book.

Postmodernist Ethics addresses itself to what, in an earlier study, the author described as an 'ethical paradox'. Baumann sees postmodernism, not as a set of doctrines that threaten the liberal polity, but as the name of our historical situation, wherever we may live. The modern period, which began at the Renaissance, was a dream of order, of a society governed by reason and aimed at perfectibility. It was marked by a search for universal moral principles, securely based on a 'foundation'.

All that has come unstuck. In the new decentred world, a world that has abandoned the idea of one controlling system, be it Marxist, socialist or liberal, ethical confusion is no longer a 'temporary (and in principle rectifiable) irritant': it has become a permanent condition. To some postmodern theorists, Gilles Lipovetsky, for example, (*The Twilight of Duty* 1992) 'ethics' is the name of just another repressive discourse from which Foucault and company have delivered us.

This is not Baumann's position. Instead he argues that the work of destruction achieved by Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida and those other demons who assail Himmelfarb was a necessary ground-clearing, a dismantling of structures that in the name of Enlightenment had deprived the moral agent of autonomy.

We are thus set free to rediscover our moral being and we find, to the

To some postmodern theorists, Gilles Lipovetsky, for example, (The Twilight of Duty 1992) 'ethics' is the name of just another repressive discourse from which Foucault and company have delivered us.

exists only in the present.' It follows that the historian's text need not be a narrative, need not assign causes to events, can even consist of a heap of items from which readers can construct their own stories. Hayden White, author of *Metahistory*, is the doyen of postmodernist historians.

However (Himmelfarb goes on) the new fictions contrived by historians are not neutral. The older fictions pretended to be 'knowledge', which, according to Foucault is merely the 'régime of truth' corresponding to and upholding a given power structure. The dismantling of this power structure—authoritarian, patriarchal, élitist, Eurocentric—is the task of the new history. But why, we might wonder? What kind of discourse, what commitments, set this agenda?

Here we encounter one of the standard difficulties of much post-

ideas of freedom, individuality and the priority of consciousness over being. Evenhandedly, she then goes on to an essay on liberalism itself, differentiating between a good tradition based on Montesquieu and the better ideas of John Stuart Mill, and a bad libertarian tradition stemming from the same Mill's celebrated *On Liberty*. There are essays on the new nationalism and on 'history from below'. The essays are grave, sensible, authoritative—on 19th century matters—and attractively undemonstrative: the voice remains level, even when it recounts an absurdity worthy of Swift.

... the same liberals who advocate the largest freedom for artists (including the freedom to be subsidized) also tend to support, in the name of the same freedom, the strictest separation of

despair of the system-builders: that our natures are morally ambivalent; that moral phenomena are inherently non-rational; that morality is incurably 'aporetic'; that it is not universalisable, where this means a doctrine that smothers difference; that if it can be said to have a 'foundation', it is very different from the clear, systematic expositions of the modern period.

The origin of morality—the capacity to be moral—lies in the encounter between the Self and the Other, as described by Emmanuel Lévinas who, for Baumann, is the provider of the only viable postmodern ethics. 'I do not come first: the Other does. I come alive morally when I answer the claim of the Other for my regard, but this claim is not initiated by the Other, and I do not know what it is—indeed, once that step is taken, once the Other makes explicit claims upon me, we have passed from the realm of morality into that of ethics, and from the elementary 'moral party of two' to a social relationship.

THIS 'BEING-FOR-THE-OTHER' takes place when we are placed in proximity, not of course, only a physical nearness, but a shared moral space, and people can find themselves in this proximity at any time: the capacity to enter into moral relationship is not prescribed by social or ethical rules. It follows that it can subvert them. In itself a condition which can produce the most profound love and the most intimate cruelty, the moral life, as Baumann reads Lévinas, is always in tension with society's efforts to regulate and control our relationships.

From this basis, Baumann goes on to develop an account of ethics-in-society, the forms of order, such as the management of social space, that are indispensable and yet always in tension with the moral life properly so called. In the city, there are rules governing our meetings with strangers, and other rules that free us to gaze at one another for the sake of the spectacle, that *flâneurisme* which turns other people into aesthetics. Both these kinds of attention are cut across by the moral life: a stranger may become a brother; the

whole project of taking pleasure in the other as object of my fantasy can suddenly be undermined if the necessary gap suddenly yields to proximity.

This is a book, and a writer, worthy of close attention.

Baumann's passionate engagement, the complexity of his formulations, the breadth of his intellectual interests make him a formidable theorist of postmodernism, and his book should be read by anyone trying to think about ethics today.

Some questions and musings for a conclusion. One question, perhaps the most fundamental, concerns the claim that 'we', that is, all of us, are inescapably now 'in' the postmodern condition. Is this not, in itself, before we even get going on the details, to smuggle back in the belief that history is a progress, after all? And isn't that a structural feature of all those post-Enlightenment creeds from which we are now said to be delivered?

Secondly, there is Baumann's characterisation of modernism itself. He began his career as a humanist Marxist, and his intellectual formation is Polish, German and French; only belatedly and accidentally did he find himself holding down a chair in Leeds. For him, as for any orthodox European thinker, liberalism is a belief system that was dead by 1918 and is still taken seriously only where people speak English.

This might help to explain why, throughout his book, he characterises the grand narratives of the Enlightenment, liberalism included, as uniformly intent on eradicating the ambiguity, doubt and conflict, which he sees as inseparable from the moral life. That, however, is precisely what differentiates liberalism, in its more adequate and subtle forms, from Marxism, which, one comes to feel, is the prisonhouse

from which Baumann's career, from one view, has been a long escape.

There is a convergence here between the two works under review. The tutelary deity of Gertrude Himmelfarb's book is the literary critic, Lionel Trilling. Trilling is only one

*Faith, of a kind, is what Baumann is talking about.
His studiously atheistic work reminds us that the most intense
and vital connexion between human beings cannot find
expression without the language of religion.*

of many, indisputably 'modern' writers who do not fit Baumann's scheme. We did not have to wait for postmodern theory to recognise the inhuman tendencies of systems based on Reason. Himmelfarb quotes this passage from Trilling's 1947 essay, 'Manners, Morals, and the Novel'.

Some paradox of our natures leads us, when once we have made our fellow men the objects of our enlightened interest, to go on to make them the objects of our pity, then of our wisdom, ultimately of our coercion. It is to prevent this corruption, the most ironic and tragic that man knows, that we stand in need of the moral realism which is the product of the free play of the moral imagination.

Finally, there is Baumann's dependence on Lévinas for the moral foundation of the new order. It is not just the austerity of the texts, although it must be admitted that if the naked, pre-ontological encounter with the Face is to be the only surety it will not, frankly, be easy to make converts. Where there is such a radical disparity between the good and its forms, we are dangerously close to an exclusive faith. For faith, of a kind, is what Baumann is talking about. His studiously atheistic work reminds us that the most intense and vital connexion between human beings cannot find expression without the language of religion. ■

Bruce Williams is Head of the School of Arts and Media at La Trobe University

Darn shootin'

I COMMENTED AT SOME LENGTH in these pages back in February 1994 on the musicals that were sweeping audiences off their feet and into theatres all over the western world—and certainly in Australia—in 1993. As I predicted then, the vogue for glitzy productions of nostalgic old Musical Comedies (hyped up with increasingly flash theatre technology) continued unabated through 1994. There is no sign yet that the trend is weakening.

Last year, we had touring productions of *West Side Story* (with an American lead and a set so technologically complex that it appeared to sway in the breeze), a *Me and my Girl* whose choreography, costumes and put-on acting-style appeared to have come straight from the British Museum of show business circa 1937 and a camped-up, over-the-top *Pirates of Penzance*. At the dawn of the new year, the Victorian Arts Centre (with the usual gang of co-producers) hosted a revival of good old *Hello Dolly!*, which was also destined for semi-national touring.

Between these, there was a New Zealand production of the northern Englishman Willy Russell's much more recently-written *Blood Brothers*. This was relatively unsophisticated in its staging but interestingly 'daring' in its narrative structure in that it used a 'Brechtian-style' ironic narrator who even predicted, in driving *songspiel*, the shockingly tragic ending. Audiences (including myself) were still startled when it came. Here was a music-theatre piece on the popular commercial stage where-in content at least challenged form.

At the same time, there have been transfers to Sydney, Adelaide and elsewhere of '*Phantom*,' *West*

Side Story and others and returns of the vacuous *Cats*. The old Capitol Theatre in Sydney has been refurbished for just this sort of purpose.

Elsewhere, small but enthusiastic Melbourne audiences enjoyed a refreshing local music theatre reinvention of the Argonauts' Odyssey story from Penelope's point of view (a piece called *Opa—a Sexual Odyssey*), while Adelaide had its new Australian musical in the rather more prominent form of the State Theatre's *The Emerald Room*, courtesy of Dennis Watkins and Chris Harriott. This show about a nightclub owner and her loves and struggles was not exactly a big hit: Tim Lloyd was moved to say, in the *Adelaide Advertiser* of 24 November, that 'You can safely say that the search for the great Australian musical is not over', and he was not alone in his disappointment.

Meanwhile, plans for 1995 include the Walt Disney version of *Beauty and the Beast* (reportedly with such stars as Bert Newton as a clock and Robyn Archer as a teapot) in Melbourne and the latest one-hit, big-prop wonder *Miss Saigon* (with its helicopter—a considerable advance, no doubt, on the humble chandelier of *Phantom of the Opera*) in Sydney.

At the same time, gnawing away occasionally at the fabric of popular music theatre is the name that sensible commercial music theatre managements in Australia dare not utter: Stephen Sondheim.

Sondheim's works are certainly done in Australia, pretty well all of them appearing here reasonably soon after their American premières. It's just that they're more likely to be seen performed by non-commercial

organisations like the Sydney and Melbourne Theatre Companies—or, indeed, in often fine productions by gutsy suburban amateur groups like the Cheltenham Light Opera Company (and I swear I'm not making this up) — than by the monolithic impresarios who pump millions out of the works of Rice, Lloyd-Webber, Rogers & Hammerstein and Boublil & Schönberg. I have vivid and happy memories, for example, of Roger Hodgman's production for the MTC of *Sweeney Todd—the Demon Barber of Fleet Street* with Peter Carroll and Geraldine Turner, which compared very favourably with the televised American version with Angela Lansbury *et al*, which I saw around the same time.

Which brings us to *Assassins*, the latest of Sondheim's works to be staged in this country. This is a Melbourne Theatre Company production, directed by Roger Hodgman and designed by Tony Tripp and Anna Borghesi, with a three-piece musical ensemble directed by Jean McQuarrie, and it's performing in the refurbished George Fairfax Studio of the Victorian Arts Centre. The MTC has finally left its Russell St Theatre in the city (at least partly, one imagines, to pay off its debts) and now mounts all of its productions in the Arts Centre.

ON ENTERING this cosy little amphitheatre, we are instantly confronted by the image of a giant pistol suspended above a bulb-lit fairground backed by a wall of eight archways, each topped by a vaguely-lit image of an American president. It so happens that each of these presidents was shot at by an assassin, or would-be assassin—four of them fatally.

The book (by John Weidman) and lyrics and score (by Sondheim) explore the lives and motives of the various shooters, beginning appropriately enough with the actor John Wilkes Booth, whose successful pot-shot at Abraham Lincoln was fired in retribution for having brought down his (i.e., Booth's) image of the land of the free, and ending with the hapless Lee Harvey Oswald, a dead-set loser who brought down John F. Kennedy pretty much *because* he was a loser (at least in the world of Weidman's and Sondheim's show, although more of that in a moment).

The point that is subverted in this gritty, 100-minute piece is that, in the land-of-opportunity rhetoric, anyone can become President of the United States; everyone can pursue happiness. In this particular fair-ground (symbol for the unreality of the American Dream?), if you have *not* achieved the aforesaid happiness you can at least achieve what Andy Warhol called your 'fifteen minutes of fame' by *shooting* the President of the United States.

The shadowy figures who first appear in the show (whose structure owes more to the British topical revue tradition than it does to the orthodox American musical comedy) are in fact inveigled into this darker side of the American Dream by a fairground proprietor, with his excellent and highly ironic ballad 'Everybody's Got The Right'. Once furnished with guns purchased from the fair, they materialise into the 'assassins' of the title and embark on their sinister careers.

Thus, the deranged Charles Guiteau kills President Garfield (1881) because of his failure to appoint the assassin ambassador to France; the Polish immigrant Leon Czolgosz assassinates President McKinley (1901) because of injustices done to mine workers ('I done my duty', he cried as he was led from the scene of the crime).

Thus too the botched attempts on President Ford, by the bizarrely comic duo of Lynette 'Squeaky' Fromme and Sara Jane Moore in 1975, and on President Roosevelt by Giuseppe Zangara in 1933 (which gives rise to the wonderfully comic song by a group of by-standers, all of whom claimed to have 'saved

Roosevelt') and so on.

It is a very witty show, not least in its musical structure. Everything that we celebrate about American popular music is subtly distorted here, from the Carpenters' love ballads to the barber-shop quartet to the American national anthem, an alternative version of which is adumbrated in the assassins' chorus of 'Listen/ There's another national anthem playing/ Not the one you cheer/ At the ballpark; We're the other national anthem, folks/ The ones that can't get in ...'

Unhappily for Sondheim and Weidman, however, their show happened to open right on the eve of George Bush's war in the Persian Gulf with Saddam Hussein—the butcher of Baghdad, as he was portrayed in the press. As Joanne Gordon points out (in her monograph on Sondheim, *Art Isn't Easy*), 'This seemed an inappropriate time for a piece of theater which not only dramatized the lethal power of guns but more significantly examined the lies implicit in the American Dream.'

HODGMAN'S ADMIRABLY SHARP, swift-moving production does justice, on the whole, to a tough-minded and intense play. He is well served by good actors who can sing and good singers who can act well enough for the job. Above all, it's a production which is alert to the levels of irony which Sondheim delights in.

The only criticism I would have of it is that it could afford to be even tougher and more dangerous. This is especially so in what is a slightly soft ending in the book, where a self-defeated and indecisive Lee Harvey Oswald is egged on to his brief moment of fame by a background chorus



of all the assassins—his ancestral family in crime as it were—who croon: 'We're your family/You are our future/We're depending on you/ Make us proud...'

A bit corny, this, but a moment which gained tremendous force in the original production when Oswald and his 'family' then fired the ultimate shots out of the Texas book depository window and *into the audience*. Here, instead, Oswald merely shoots the floor.

That quibble aside, I still found this a memorable piece and one which ably demonstrated that the music theatre still has the capacity to have something to say about the human condition, even if it has to do so by subversive means. ■

Geoffrey Milne is Head of the Department of Theatre and Drama in the School of Arts and Media at La Trobe University.

Lee Harvey Oswald (David Adamson) with gun, being 'urged on' by other assassins in the MTC production of Stephen Sondheim's Assassins
Photo: Jeff Busby.

S Caste critic

HEKHAR KAPUR, DIRECTOR OF THE internationally acclaimed Indian film *Bandit Queen*, spent two years working as an accountant in London, before it all got too much for him. At 25 Kapur, a passionate photographer and film lover, quit his job to attend film school in London, before returning to India, determined to work in the movies.

'My family thought I'd gone quite crazy. The general impression in India is that only louts go into the movies.

'I started out as an actor—I wasn't very good, but I learnt a lot. One day a producer who I'd helped, came up and said, 'you're not a very good actor—why don't you direct a film?' So I said, 'you're absolutely right—why don't you produce it?' Fortunately the film was a huge success and my career as a director took off.'

Since then Kapur has worked in TV and directed several feature films, the most notable, the 1987 children's film, *Mr India*, rated by many Indian critics as a classic.

Bandit Queen, Kapur's first international film, has attracted enormous controversy since it first screened at the 1994 Cannes Film Festival. The film tells the true story of Phoolan Devi—a low-caste Hindu woman sold into marriage at the age of 11 and repeatedly raped and bashed over a period of 10 years by high-caste Thakurs—who became a national symbol of the oppression of low-caste women.

'I was trying to tell the wider story of India. I wanted to make people

feel a lifetime of oppression of being a low-caste woman in India.'

Despite Kapur's insistence that the film should be seen as a general comment on the caste system and the position of women in India, he has been criticised by many, including Phoolan Devi herself, for paying too little attention to the facts of her life.

'No film can tell a story spanning 24 years in two hours. I took the personal story and picked the aspects of her life relating to the larger story, but the main events are all true.

'The film is based on a book by a woman called Mala Sen, who also wrote the film script. Mala spent 8 years with Phoolan Devi, fighting for her, trying to get her out of prison, getting her family looked after. She was the closest person to her. Mala would come and tell me all time "she needs this film".'

'At the time she'd been in prison 11 years—the agreement with the government was that she'd go to prison only for eight. She was a forgotten woman and was very keen we make this film. Then, through a sudden unexpected change in the politics of that state, she was freed, so her need for the film wasn't that much anymore.'

Kapur is more understanding than angry about the controversy stirred up by Devi's condemnation of the film, but remains adamant Devi's story must be told.

'After she was released from prison she was embraced by the upper crust, rather Victorian society in Delhi. Now for her, acceptance has suddenly become important, but they have certain rules of acceptance, one being you should be ashamed. Today she's looking to survive in another kind of world—but that doesn't take away her importance.'

'She was one woman who refused to carry the burden of shame of being a woman. When she was raped she retaliated and she's accused of retaliating by going back and killing 24 men. Her story is important because there are no convictions in India for rape and it's such a common crime. Millions of women are raped and forced to carry the burden of shame and guilt of that society.'

ACCORDING TO KAPUR, ATTITUDES to the caste system are slowly changing, but one of the biggest obstacles is getting people to talk about these issues.

'I don't understand everything about the caste system, I don't think anyone does. It's an insidious, evil system, and it's evolved continually like bacteria, over 2,000 years. It changes from district to district, it has a kind of omnipresence, like God. People are unable to explain it, they're unable to politicise it, but they constantly live with it.'

'What amazes me is Indians I've met around the world who say we know it's true, we know it happens, but why do you have to show it to understand it. They all say, "there are so many wonderful things about India, why don't you make films about those?"'

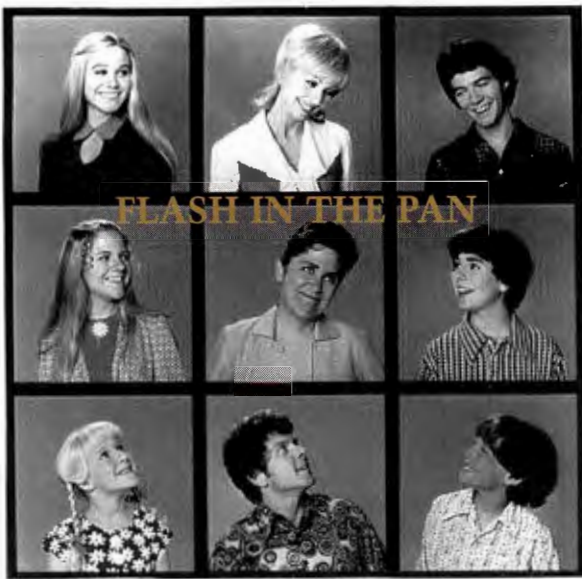
'I just tell them every serious film-maker criticises his own society. When you do this sort of film you're on the couch yourself, you are the doctor and you are the patient, and you're constantly analysing yourself.

'Without really delving deep into your own attitudes and dissecting those, and analysing those, and having to throw out some of those, you are unable to make a film like this.'

Tim Stoney is a *Eureka Street* staff writer.



Shekhar Kapur.
Photograph
courtesy New
Vision Films



Here's the story

The Brady Bunch Movie, dir. Betty Thomas (Hoyts). In view of the recent fashion of Hollywood remakes of old TV series, *The Brady Bunch Movie* is long overdue. As expected, little has changed in the Bradys' idyllic suburban world of the early 70s—except the Bradys of the 1970s now live in the 1990s.

Despite this shift, they remain blissfully ignorant of the changing values and mores of the world around them. Threatening influences from outside the family, in particular government and big business, are dealt with by reassuring words from Mike (Gary Cole), 'remember we're Bradys, and there's nothing we can't handle together.'

King's men

The Shawshank Redemption, dir. (Hoyts). Based on Steven King's 1982 novella, the film concerns the lengthy incarceration of Andy Dufresne (Tim Robbins) and Red (Morgan Freeman) in Shawshank Prison, beginning in 1946.

Andy, a mild-mannered banker, has received cumulative life sentences for the murder of his wife and her lover. Red has already served 20 years for murder when Andy arrives. Red, the hardened prison fixer, and Andy, the withdrawn and somewhat superior ex-banker, become friends.

The friendship flourishes, despite the brutality and the cruelty of their grim surroundings, enabling Red to find hope and love, and the withdrawn, controlled Andy to lower his personal barriers and communicate with another human being.

While the film and Morgan Freeman have been nominated for Academy Awards, when that lottery is drawn, it is Tim Robbins who should feel put upon. His is a finely drawn and controlled performance with the camera's record of his face often making dialogue superfluous.

Freeman as Red and Robbins as Andy is the inspired casting of which great movies are made. Although almost exclusively a male cast, the film still has a delicate softness in which love, hope and human endurance are never overwhelmed by violence or converted to corn.

The Shawshank Redemption ranks with *Quiz Show* as the best mainstream commercial release of 1995.

—Gordon Lewis

Eureka Street Film Competition

Tell us in 25 words or less where you would like to *send* the neo-Brady Bunch, pictured above, and we'll award two tickets to the film of your choice for the answer we like best. Send entries to: *Eureka Street* film competition, PO Box 553, Richmond 3121. The winner of January/February's competition was, Michael Nunn from Torrens, ACT, who thought Boris Karloff would say to Robert De Niro, 'Dr Livingstone's, I presume.'



This is the dominant message of the film, as it was in the original TV series. There's enough familiar material from the series—the story is basically a clever blend of a number of the TV episodes—to keep *Brady Bunch* devotees happy, with a few clever ironic twists on character and cameo appearances from a number

of the original cast.

All this adds up to a good fun film. It's a must see for anyone who grew up with the 'story of a lovely lady bringing up three very lovely girls....'

NB: 'Gilligan's Island—The Movie' is the next adventure on the way.

—Tim Stoney

Face to face

Une Pure Formalité, dir. Giuseppe Tornatore (independent cinemas), is an irritating film to review. Not because of its defects, which are few, but because, as with *The Crying Game*, there is a catch. Give it away and you diminish the pleasure for prospective audiences. Keep it to yourself, and you risk making the film sound like just another well-made psycho thriller.

So let's try it this way. Hitherto Giuseppe Tornatore has been best-known for *Cinema Paradiso*, a film about a movie theatre that lives up to its name by giving the inhabitants of an Italian village a taste of bliss beyond their mundane reality. *Une Pure Formalité* is about a police inspector (Roman Polanski) who gives a murder suspect (Gerard Depardieu) a taste of hell that means mundane reality can never be the same again.

Depardieu plays Onoff, a famous writer who is found wandering in the rain at night near his farmhouse retreat. He cannot remember the past 24 hours of his life, which is a problem because the local police are investigating the discovery of an unidentified corpse. Enter Polanski, a cop with a literary bent who appears to know Onoff's works almost verbatim.

The rest of the film is a series of interrogation scenes, interrupted by flashbacks to the previous day. It sounds leaden but isn't, because of excellent performances by the two principals, and cinematography that evokes psychic states with the same horrible clarity as can be had from Hitchcock at his best.

Placed alongside *Cinema Paradiso*, this film reveals Tornatore to be a director of extraordinary versatility. And, like *The Three Colours* trilogy, it exhibits an intriguing revival of interest in faith and transcend-

ence (though of a Platonising rather than a Christian kind) in the work of the best contemporary European filmmakers.

—Ray Cassin

Argy Bhaji

Bhaji on the Beach dir. Gurinder Chadha (Independent cinemas). This vibrant British movie will be easily enjoyed by Australian audiences. A Channel 4 project, (as was *The Snapper*) it covers territory that has resonances for us here, while adding some fascinating touches. It's a kind of tragi-comic road movie, a group of Indian immigrant women on a day trip to Blackpool.

That sounds rather dull and worthy, but *Bhaji on the Beach* is the opposite: sharp, colourful and funny. It shows an extended family and the rebellion of its younger generation: the younger women are challenging the sexism of their men and the older generation is at a loss, cut off by distance and twenty years from their formative influences.



Aguiar Street, Havana.

from *Que Bolá!*, a photographic essay by Tania Jovanovic, published by Clique, Melbourne, 1995. Information address: M33 Photoagency, Tel: 61 3 527 1547 Fax: 61 3 527 7049

The complicated guilt feelings of middle-aged Asha (Lalita Ahmed) translate into extraordinary visions/hallucinations that should pose no comprehension problems for survivors of a 1950s Catholic education. Her niece, Ginder (Kim Vithana) has fled her violent husband and is living in a refuge. Another niece has just found out she is pregnant to her clandestine West Indian boyfriend.—

marginalised immigrants have their own racial prejudices. But the sexist white yobbos seem to be the lowest of the low, as their violent racism (fruit of the unspeakable Enoch Powell's self-fulfilling prophecies) is shown in all its ugliness.

There is a splendid evocation of the heady mix of gaud and drab that is the essence of Blackpool. 'Bombay on the beach,' marvels the flamboyant Rekha, visiting from the old country and setting them by the ears with her tarty clothes and liberated attitudes; time has not stood still in sophisticated urban India either.

—Juliette Hughes

Beam me up

Star Trek: Generations, dir. David Carson (Greater Union), is the 'long awaited big screen meeting' between the original crew of the USS Enterprise and the less colonially-minded 'New Generation'. For those who never made the leap from the original *Star Trek* series to the *Next Generation* this may not be the movie for you, as it is essentially a feature-length episode of the latter.

Three members of the original crew feature in the the film, but only Captain Kirk (William Shatner) and Picard (Patrick Stewart) form a bridge between the old series and the new. Surprisingly, the meeting is largely devoid of relevance to the film and generates no real chemistry between the two old stagers. The main problem is that Captain Kirk has become something of a parody of himself, cracking jokes at his own expense.

For fans of *The Next Generation*, however, this is a most enjoyable trip. The plot centres on an 'energy ribbon' through which people can pass to the nexus, a world of mindless bliss. The mandatory psychotic genius Soran, played with relish by Malcolm McDowell, attempts to control the ribbon for his own

purposes, but in doing so threatens to destroy an inhabited planet as well as the USS Enterprise. Along the way we meet the familiar *Next Generation* crew and some distinctly hostile Romulans. And, as one would expect, the cinematography and special effects are first rate.

As to how it figures in comparison with other *Star Trek* movies, it's probably one of the better ones, but the card-carrying trekkies will see it regardless.

—Warwick Davies

Honest to God

The Making of ... And God Spoke, dir. Arthur Borman (Independent cinemas). To the best of my knowledge, nobody has tried to write a funny book about writing the Bible. Even committed humorists must be reduced to gravity by such unfunny material.

But imagine the four evangelists working on applications for Australia Council grants. And then imagine their work, grinding through the publicity mill and undergoing a round of opinionated reviews. Eventually somebody decides the four books could work as a collection and the idea of the New Testament is born. Well, if you could squeeze out a few laughs they would be entirely at the expense of the publishing industry.

The Making of ... and God Spoke is a satirical documentary about creating a biblical epic for the big screen. It's a genuine ribtickler, principally because the producer and director of the would-be epic (Marvin Handleman [Stephen Rappaport] and Clive Walton [Michael Riley] respectively) take themselves so seriously.

We see extracts from their early work (including such tawdry films as *Nude Ninjas*), see them typecast an 'unknown' as God, see them cope with the fact that they have cast as Eve someone who is covered in tattoos and as Noah someone who is allergic to animals, see them find 'product placement' for Coke in the Ten Commandments scene, and see them stop production because it would be 'theologically fraudulent' to have only eight apostles. They compromise and have 10.

This is an inventive and genial comedy. It doesn't tear strips off



Hollywood in the way Robert Altman might, but it doesn't do too badly either. It's marred by a somewhat predictable ending but veteran viewers of junk TV will be satisfied that Soupy Sales has at last found a role commensurate with his talents.

—Michael McGirr SJ

Threadbare

In *Pret a Porter*, dir. Robert Altman (Village and Hoyts), you'll see Danny Aiello hitching up his size 16 pink Chanel suit as he gallops down a gala staircase, Marcello Mastroianni howling like the Ghost of Virility Past as Sophia Loren removes her stockings, and, perhaps most surprisingly, the ever-elegant Lauren Bacall trying to flog turquoise cowboy boots to Paris couturiers.

Pret a Porter has been described as *The Player* of 1995. (*The Player* was Altman's 1992 semi-documentary deconstruction of the film industry). But the man who directed *The Player* and *Nashville* (1975) knows a lot more about the film industry than he does about its fashion counterpart, and in *Pret a Porter* it shows.

As a film, and a critique of the industry, *The Player* worked because, in addition to the skeleton 'cast', an unseemly crush of film stars appeared in bit parts, playing themselves. Although fashion models provide the bulk of *Pret a Porter's* scenery, actors play everyone else: designers, magazine editors and photographers. If you look carefully, many of the fashion intelligentsia are there, but they just don't get to say very much.

Perhaps Altman thinks—as do many others—they don't *have* much to say. But, if you've ever seen Karl Lagerfeld (the man who revolutionised Chanel) at his acerbic best, the bronzed Ralph Lauren talking pieties about the family, or the real editor of *Vogue* discussing Ivana Trump's 'dress sense', well—no one does it better, worse or funnier.

There are some inspired moments in *Pret a Porter*, and a surprisingly serious and affecting ending, but overall Altman has missed a great opportunity to dip into the sweaty reality behind an industry that, like it or not, fascinates the world.

—Catriona Jackson

Bergmania

The Seventh Seal, dir. Ingmar Bergman ('Movie Legends', SBS, Friday 14 April at 9.30pm). It is not true, as is sometimes alleged, that this is the most parodied movie of all time. That distinction surely belongs to *The Exorcist*. But the masked figure of Death who appears in the *Seventh Seal* is spoofed in *Love and Death*, an early film of that erratic Bergman devotee Woody Allen, and the *câche* of grotesqueries unleashed on the world by the Monty Python team bears more than a passing resemblance to Bergman's lurid images of the Middle Ages.

The film's title refers to the seven seals mentioned in the Book of Revelation, the ones binding the scroll



that is opened on Judgment Day. Keen Apocalypticists will recall that when the seventh seal was broken 'there was silence in heaven for about half an hour', and Bergman's film examines how such a pregnant pause in the deliberations of eternity can still encompass plenty of temporal mayhem. Death (Bengt Ekerot) comes to claim a knight returning from the crusades (Max von Sydow), and the knight challenges him to a chess game to gain time. Death gets his due in the end, of course, though it is not quite the due he was expecting.

This film, Bergman's 17th, won for him the Grand Jury Prize at Cannes in 1957 and cemented his reputation as an international filmmaker. Whether the plodding narrative really sustains the metaphysical baggage it is made to carry is a moot point, but the strength and beauty of the film's images are beyond doubt. Witness the extraordinary scene in which the knight's companions link arms and dance along a beach: an ecstatic evocation of the Brueghelian *danse macabre*.

—Ray Cassin



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The Moonface also Rises

VIKRAM SETH BEAMED. He eyed appreciatively the gift that had just been presented to him, and pronounced it unlike anything he had ever been given before.

This judgment, one can be sure, was neither irony nor hyperbole, nor even ordinary politeness. After all, who would think of welcoming Vikram Seth by giving him a Bamix? Bert Newton, apparently—or at least, the producer of Newton's talk show on Channel Ten, *Good Morning Australia*. And, although the result may not have been one of television's most unforgettable moments, it captured something very likeable about Seth, and about Newton too.

Here was this *littérateur*, suddenly dropped into middle Australia after being trotted round endless talkfests. And Seth, like most of the guests on *Good Morning Australia*, seemed to find Newton's slice of middle Australia an engagingly hospitable place in which to be. Those who saw the novelist during his other public appearances in this country usually noted his nervousness and reluctance to be fêted. It was not so among the Barnixes and Rotomatic Wonder Slicers with which Newton entertains and, sometimes, honours his guests. Seth looked like a child who had suddenly discovered, dare one say it, a world of suitable toys.

Unlike Seth, the host of *Good Morning Australia* has never been noted for nervousness. But Newton does share with him that reluctance to be fêted. Perhaps it is a consequence of all those years of being a foil to Graham Kennedy and Don Lane, or perhaps it is just native courtesy; but Newton's style of TV chat remains a polar opposite to that which has been made an industry standard by the egregiously

David Letterman and his dull Australian imitator, Steve Vizard. The last two have a way of ingratiating themselves with their guests that, insidiously, turns the conversation round to focus on the interviewer. Thus, in the United States, people become famous by being invited on to the David Letterman show. But Newton, a surviving link with the infancy of television, still operates on the assumption that his guests are supposed to be interesting for their own sake, not because they are his guests. This sometimes comes as a shock to younger people raised on the assumption that narcissism comes naturally to a talk-show host.

None of this means that Newton tackles his subjects with the blandness of a Ray Martin. King Kennedy's straight man was self-deprecating, never self-effacing, and so he has remained. It is as though he has a contract with those whom he interviews: *I won't smarm, if you produce the goods.* This is essentially a political skill, and one of the surprises on *Good Morning Australia* is that its host is quite capable of introducing questions of wider politics, sometimes without the guest even realising it.

Neale Fraser appears to tell us about sport for those who are no longer young enough even to day-dream about playing in a Davis Cup match, and this drifts into talk about Fraser's own mid-life career as an international sports administrator. He likes the company of sportsmen, he says, for whatever their country of origin they have the knack of cooperating easily with one another. 'Yes, Neale, sportspeople speak an international language,' replies Newton, gently correcting the gender balance.

The one-line rejoinders become sharper when Newton judges that the guest ought to know better. The rock journalist Glenn A. Baker comes on to do a promo for the Rolling Stones tour; he has just returned from Johannesburg, where the band has been seen for the first time, and his spiel takes on the quality of a paean to the new South Africa: 'Bert, you should have seen these audiences full of middle-aged white people, suddenly able to see the band they grew up listening to on the radio.' Baker appears to have no difficulty with the racial complexion of the Rolling Stones concerts. After all, Jagger and Co have always been thought of as playing variations on the theme of white-boy blues. It does not occur to Baker that these middle-aged white audiences are also middle-class, and that blacks just might not be able to afford the tickets. Newton does not ask this question but draws attention to the journalist's naïveté nonetheless. 'Glenn A. Baker appeared on *Good Morning Australia* by courtesy of the South African Tourist Board,' he announces with a hint of mockery. The studio audience grasp the point and laughter does the rest. Middle Australia ain't as dumb as some of those who dismiss chat shows as lowbrow waffle would like to think it is. Newton understands this, and part of the charm of *Good Morning Australia* is that this show, in which the chat is interspersed with frank attempts to sell household appliances, so cheerfully ignores facile distinctions between the public and domestic realms—distinctions that, if the cultural studies clique is to be believed, are articles of faith sustaining uncomprehending suburbia.

WHEN BRENDAN NELSON, WOULD-BE LIBERAL politician, appears to explain why Parliament needs him, Newton is properly admiring of Nelson's record as president of the AMA—and politely sceptical of his readiness to discard a longstanding adherence to the Labor Party. Not that there is any suggestion that Nelson is an opportunist; Newton accepts that his guest is the decent family doctor he seems to be, and instead asks a question about Australia's political malaise: 'What is the difference between the Liberal and the Labor parties these days, Brendan?' It is a question that Brendan cannot really answer. Newton has made his point and does not pursue it further. In one relaxed moment on a cosy television chat show, we have heard the crucial question of late 20th century Australian politics; and it has been asked with a clarity and directness that would almost certainly be missing when the same question is asked on *Meet the Press*.

Newton didn't give Brendan a Bamix, or even a Rotomatic Wonder Slicer. Perhaps he assumed that your average Aussie medico can get such things for himself if he wants them. But perhaps Newton could have asked Big Kev, *Good Morning Australia*'s chief gadget demonstrator, to give Brendan a Barracuda Knife. Big Kev's Barracuda Knives are a wonder to behold, and a symbolically appropriate gift for any aspiring politician. My favourite *Good Morning Australia* question, a question even more acute than the one about our collapsing political allegiances, was this one addressed to Big Kev: 'Will the Barracuda Knife cut through all crustaceans, Kev?'

Ah yes, don't come the raw crustacean with Bert, or you'll be sliced up good 'n' proper. ■

Ray Cassin is the production editor of *Eureka Street*



Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 32, April 1995

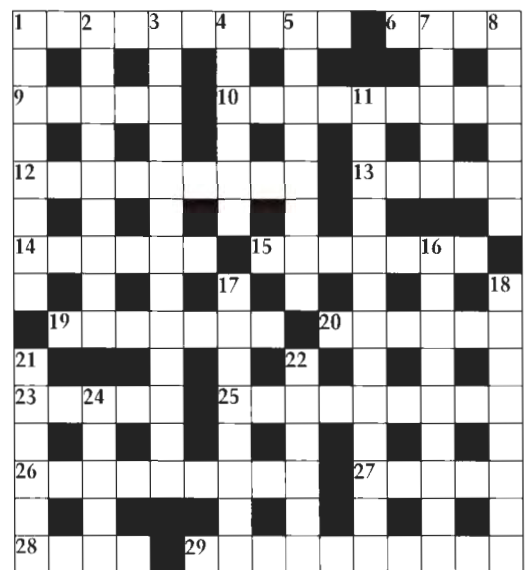
Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM

ACROSS

- 1 Direction at present covered like mountains in high 16-down, possibly. (10)
- 6 Some mystical moments produce stillness. (4)
- 9 Beam penetrates to the heart of Sheila's ermine cape. (5)
- 10 Publicity will recur, so PR could become the harbinger of forthcoming events. (9)
- 12 Goes round a road and refuses admittance to many. (5,4)
- 13 Many healthy people live here. (5)
- 14 Cowardly about blackbird's attack perhaps? (6)
- 15 Roll them out and have lots of fun with the casks. (7)
- 19 Alcohol by any other name could make North loathe spirits. (7)
- 20 The feaster gives up food at first to prepare for this season. (6)
- 23 The sort of passage Alan's confused about—he smells a rat perhaps! (5)
- 25 Operatic tenor who introduces a VIP to art, maybe. (9)
- 26 Tame Trent characters. That's the way to deal with them! (9)
- 27 Part of chateau d'Italie undergoing business scrutiny. (5)
- 28 Hear him with song of praise. (4)
- 29 Maintain the self's early involvement, with intrepidity. (10)

DOWN

- 1 Is there a way between sun and frozen snow on June 21st, for instance? (8)
- 2 Noticing old boy and old retainer? (9)
- 3 Almost dead body of French dance and French company? (5,2,6)
- 4 Swap dad back for the tropical fruits. (6)
- 5 Curiously a year without a VE-day celebration is ordinary. (8)
- 7 Sounds as if I'll be expected to walk the passage. (5)
- 8 You can rely on me sometimes only. (6)
- 11 Landing gear smashed, car gear ruined! (13)
- 16 If these are over 50 degrees, for instance, the mountains are likely to be 1-across. At least they should give free scope! (9)
- 17 Finish preparation to contend, without the learner. (8)
- 18 The exquisite workmanship of it! Starry transformation of a dull piece! (8)
- 21 Suddenly grasp the fragment. (6)
- 22 It is difficult to hold some Slav at arms-length in order to approach the divine manifestation. (6)
- 24 Strangely, mates in teams tend to let off hot air. (5)



Solution to Crossword no. 31, March 1995



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