

EUREKA STREET

Vol. 1 No 5 July 1991

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Fiddling for funds

Margaret Simons on the state of play in Universities



Howe now

Jack Waterford on cabinet changes and the new federalism

K.E. Power on Women, Sex and Sin

We trained hard, but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form teams we were reorganised. I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet every situation by reorganising, and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency and demoralisation.

—**Gaius Petronius Arbiter**,
Proconsul of Bithynia in the time of Nero.

(See 'Fiddling for funds', p.8
and 'Howe now', p.15.)



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Design Consultant
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The lie direct

THERE IS A STREET IN WARRNAMBOOL called Liebig. I understand that it was not named after the profession of politics, though there is talk of erecting a statue in it to the memory of Bob Hawke. I do not know if a statue would be a suitable memorial to the career of that most extraordinary figure who (at the moment of writing) guides the nation's destiny. What is certain is that politics, and perhaps democratic politics in particular, pose special problems for its practitioners in the matter of cultivating and sustaining the virtue of honesty.

Honesty involves more than veracity, but includes it. The honest man keeps faith broadly; his word is his bond and he doesn't lie. But what are lies? Why do they matter morally? And how strict is the prohibition against them?

Although theorists have differed strikingly on how to define a lie, there is a core of agreement that a lie is at least the stating of what one believes to be false with the intention of giving the audience to believe that it is true. For some, this is not a sufficient characterisation because they think we do not lie if we speak thus to an audience that has no right, in the circumstances, to the truth. They would say that the woman who tells the Nazi thugs that she has no Jews in the house, though she knows she has a Jewish refugee in the cellar, is not lying because the Nazis have no right to this truth.

One advantage of this sort of definition is that it may enable us to hold that lying is always wrong, because it excludes the most awkward cases of what seem to be good 'untruths' from the category of lies. I prefer to operate with the more descriptive definition of lying, which makes no reference to rights, and which then must face up to the question of exceptions.

Either definition shows how absurd were the apologists for Mr Hawke who claimed that he hadn't lied to the electorate when he said that he would serve a full term as leader from 1990 because (look!) he is going to serve a full term after all. If Hawke was being straight with Keating, then he lied when he said he would serve a full term, even if he later changed his mind. On the other hand, if he lied to Keating then he was not lying to the electorate—and this turns out to be true even if he turns out not to serve a full term because Keating challenges again and defeats him.

What the speaker believes is all important, and in the case of Hawke, part of our problem seems to be that even he has trouble knowing what that is at any given time.

The intent to deceive is a crucial element of the definition, because we do not want to say that many jokes or literary pretences that involve falsehood are lies, or that uttering false statements in the course of testing someone's hearing are lies. My false statement at the beginning about the talk of erecting

a statue to Bob Hawke was produced for a certain effect that did not include deceiving the audience.

But neither is all deception lying; deception is a broader category than lying and may sometimes be justified where lying is not. I cannot be obliged to make sure that everyone has true beliefs so I may very well be entitled to remain silent about the truth when it is clear that someone who might expect me to correct them is in error. Furthermore, it is possible to deceive someone by telling them the truth, for you may know they will make a false inference from your truth-telling.

Definition aside, there is the issue of morality. Lying is wrong because dishonesty is a vice. Communication is built on trust, and so is much else that is essential to our lives together. Liars trade upon and betray this trust, usually in pursuit of self-interest, and their activities debase the currency of language and undermine the ease of communal interactions.

BUT IS LYING ALWAYS morally wrong? Some of the greatest thinkers in our tradition have thought that it is. St Augustine and Immanuel Kant are among the most unyielding rigorists in this matter. Kant declared that the duty not to lie was an 'unconditional duty which holds in all circumstances'. Lying vitiates the source of all law and deforms the liar by destroying his human dignity and making him worse than a mere thing.

Yet so stern a position is hard to accept in several types of circumstance. These embrace the extremes of triviality and disaster. Some lies are so removed from the context of harm and benefit that they seem morally insignificant. Someone who is embarrassed by another's effusive thanks for some kind act which cost quite a lot may nonetheless try to stop the flow of thanks by saying untruthfully, 'It was nothing, really.' Or we may greet a tiresome acquaintance with 'How nice to see you' while feeling nothing but distaste for the encounter. Some of these utterances may not even be lies because the strength of convention can attach to them in ways which eliminate their force as statements or override any intent to deceive.

At the other extreme, lying to save an innocent person or group from a genuine disaster may be quite justified by the very requirements of virtue which ground the proposition on lying itself. This is especially cogent

when one lies to those who are malevolently bent upon inflicting the disaster (as in the Nazi example).

If we allow such exceptions we must guard against their spreading, and we should be particularly wary of establishing practices of deception lest we erode the habit of truthfulness, and deceive ourselves about the necessity and value of lying. Confronted with the prospect of lying in a good cause, it is a useful test to put yourself in the shoes of the victim and ask whether the lie would be acceptable to them when they know the full circumstances. A parallel consideration is to see

whether you could publicly defend the principle underlying the exception you propose to make.

Some claim, following Machiavelli, that politics is so different from other areas of life that normal moral virtues do not apply to it. This might appear a comforting doctrine for politicians (though alarming for the rest of us) but the fact is that politicians themselves seldom endorse it overtly, unless they are stuck for justifications. In the case of lying, what is true is that democratic politics puts such a glare of publicity upon politicians, and such a premium upon their vote-getting capacities, that they are under very strong temptation to lie their way out of trouble and into power.

But a temptation is not a justification or an excuse.

Three Heads, by Mathis Grünewald

What is alarming about so much of democratic politics is the way in which politicians have come to treat their own plans or ambitions as justifying a distressing degree of lying as if the survival of this or that politician, policy or party is tantamount to the averting of massive disaster.

The destruction of trust which this has involved is one of the principal reasons why our politicians are held in such contempt, and why the electorate is so cynical about democratic processes. A capacity to compromise and negotiate is essential to political life, but when everything, including character, is up for negotiation then the craft of politics becomes merely crafty, and contempt is the proper response to it. ■

Tony Coady is professor of philosophy at the University of Melbourne and director of the Centre for Philosophy and Public Issues.



Under fire on the home front

POPE JOHN PAUL DECIDED TO TACKLE the sins of his countrymen and women last month, when he made his fourth visit to Poland in 12 years. Lately no issue has dominated Poland's moral debate more than abortion, and as John Paul has now seen at first hand, no other issue has so raised the hackles of Poles against their church. The controversy has highlighted the difficulties Rome faces as it seeks to use the fall of communism in the Soviet Union's former satellites as the catalyst for a Christian re-awakening across Europe.

Shortly before the Pope's arrival, the Sejm (lower house of parliament) decided to shelve a hardline bill supported, and many say foisted upon the legislators, by the church. In a country where abortion on demand has led to an estimated 600,000 terminations of pregnancy a year, the bill proposed not only to make abortions illegal, but to introduce gaol terms for those who carry them out and those who have them.

Calls for a referendum on the issue have been rejected out of hand by the church: 'One doesn't debate, even by referendum, on good and evil.' In any case, the bill will now probably have to wait until after the next legislative elections, which are due in October. Some hope it will just fade away.

The church was furious that the pope's 'present', as some have described the proposed law, was not ready when he arrived. The Polish primate, Cardinal Josef Glemp, spoke of his country as a new death camp. At an open air mass at Radom, 130 kilometres from Auschwitz, the pontiff was unable to resist taking up the theme, comparing the Nazi extermination of the Jews and the allied bombing of Hiroshima with 'another vast cemetery, that of the unborn, of the defenceless whose faces even their own mothers have not seen.'

The ensuing outcry from Jews around the world was predictable, the criticism from parts of the Polish press telling. 'The Pope', said one top Solidarity figure, 'perhaps cannot make any mistakes, but he does make a lot of nonsense.'

It is not so much the church's stance on abortion that is at the heart of growing resentment towards it, but rather the manner in which it is attempting to prevail. Vera Rich, a consultant on Eastern Europe at the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London, and a frequent visitor to Poland, says that many Poles are no more willing to have their affairs regulated by the church than they are willing to see the return of a communist dictatorship.

Alaw on religious education passed last year was bungled, Rich said. 'There was a ministerial ruling, no consultation,' she said. There were a few catechists, and much of the teaching was being left to 'dear old nuns' with virtually no qualifications. As the abortion row has heated up over the spring, children have reportedly

been thanking their parents, at the behest of their religious instructors in school, for having 'let them live'.

In a country groaning under a moribund economy, there are many desperate mothers simply unable to cope with more children. What they need, argue many—feminists, former communists and Solidarity members alike—is a system of social support, not draconian rulings on what they have come to regard as a right to a choice.

Attendance at mass has officially dropped by 20 per cent since the fall of communism, and according to one survey up to 67 per cent of Poles believe the church has too much say in affairs of state. Hardly encouraging for the Pope's dream of putting Poland in the vanguard of a new European evangelism. The church has had to accept that, while even non-Catholics used to attend

Mass a few years ago, it is no longer the rallying point of a people against its rulers.

MOST OF THE TOUR took the Pope to towns near the Soviet frontier, and he repeated that it was his desire to visit Moscow. As though measuring the ramparts of a last enemy bastion, he gave spiritual succour to the thousands of Greek-rite Ukrainian Catholics, and Byelorussian and Lithuanian Catholics who streamed across the border to see him. No dates have been named, but the Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, hinted in May that a papal visit to the Soviet capital might take place next year.

Liberty, the Pope said, requires maturity, but his pleas to bury the bitterness of the past will hardly mask the complex knot of ethnic resentment that seems an integral part of the region taking in eastern Poland and the western republics of the Soviet union. There is no love lost between the Poles and the Ukrainians. Each group has substantial minorities on the other's territory, and a quarter of a million Byelorussians in Poland have been, in the words of one observer, 'trodden on'. The Vatican is widely felt to have little interest in these minorities, regarding them rather a hindrance to its dealings with Moscow.

According to some estimates, the visit cost Polish taxpayers almost \$US 24 million, hard to justify at a time of economic paralysis. Planning began under the old regime, which saw advantage to be gained from its association with the Pope. The present government has less to gain, and although crowds continue to flock to see the Pope, many others wish he would stay at home. Another short visit, however, has already been scheduled for August. ■

Damien Simonis is *Eureka Street's* European correspondent.

Brave voices

From Jennifer Willis

As a science teacher who often battles to achieve thoughtful, informed debate in the classroom, I was pleased to read Michael Walsh's report of the Catholic hospitals' ethics conference, 'Consensus: shaping it or seeking it?' (May 1991)

It was refreshing to discover that the difficult ethical issues raised were not entirely bogged down in dogma and that there were brave voices ready to insist on 'accurate clinical understanding of the issues' and 'reasoned argument'.

Jennifer Willis
Montmorency, Vic

Consensus? No way

From John Wilks, for 'Pharmacists Who Respect Human Life'

After reading the report on the Catholic bishops' hospital ethics conference by your correspondent Michael Walsh, I sat for some time trying to decide if Mr Walsh and I had attended the same gathering.

Mr Walsh states that part of the cardinal's address created an 'uneasy dichotomy between faith and reason'. This seems a curious statement given that in 90 minutes of question time only one person directed an explicit comment on this point, two others made passing reference and a Lutheran strongly supported the cardinal. In fact, controversy on this point, i.e. fideism versus rationalism, was notable by its absence.

Another error is the claim that Fr Connolly 'strongly criticised' Fr Harman's treatment of the so-called 'dynamic Christian conscience'. The tone that Fr Connolly used was at all times one of respect, both at an intellectual and a human level. What contortion of reason would allow Mr Walsh to make the above comment, when Fr Connolly referred to Fr Harman as 'my good friend' and thanked him for providing an advance copy of his paper?

My final objection strictly pertains to philosophy. Mr Walsh states, with regard to the treatment of anencephalics, that 'before consensus can be reached on such an issue, there has to

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be much more philosophical discussion of the significance of human life'. How strongly can one state that issues that directly impinge upon human life and its continuity are not the stuff of consensus? The only need for further 'philosophical' discussion is so that all those involved in treating the anencephalic child will have a full understanding of the true metaphysical characteristics of the soul of the unborn child. Contemplation of the eternal destiny of the soul and the love that God has for that soul are what are deserving of our attention. The superficiality of judging 'significance' by appearance or potential rather than by essence, nature and being are also important considerations within this metaphysical framework.

Consensus has no part in this arena. What is right always was, is, and will be right.

John Wilks
Baulkham Hills, NSW

Michael Walsh replies:

If the wording of my report gave offence to any of the speakers I apologise, but I fail to see why strong disagreement with someone's views

need be interpreted in personal terms. Nowhere did I suggest that Fr Connolly's strong criticism of Fr Harman's presentation on conscience was in any way lacking in respect for the speaker. I am sure that their difference of opinion would do nothing to damage their friendship.

The fact that little time was devoted to discussion of the relationship of faith and reason does not persuade me that it was not a problematic point in the cardinal's address.

Mr Wilks' main disagreement with my views appears to be on the question of the management of the anencephalic *in utero*. A major focus of the conference was the discussion of draft protocols for ethics committees in Catholic hospitals, and the success of such protocols depends to a large extent on achieving consensus. Protocols will not succeed unless there is a general consensus on their handling of the underlying issues. The problem of the management of the anencephalic *in utero* is not simply resolved by an appeal to the nature of the foetus. It must also deal with the question of the mother's obligation to continue the pregnancy to term, or the possibility of her requesting early induction. Further discussion of potentiality, of human life as distinct from physiological functioning, and the responsibilities of all involved will aid in the search for truth. Discussion ought not be closed off prematurely.

Michael Walsh
Concord, NSW

North of the border

from Martin Royackers SJ, managing editor of *Compass* magazine

Your masthead names Michael Harter SJ as your 'North American' correspondent. I don't know if New Zealand and Australia have this problem, but Canadians tend to get paranoid about American expansionism. Unless Michael Harter is a very unusual American, he would know little about Canada. I suspect that he is really your US correspondent.

Martin Royackers SJ
Toronto, Ontario

[Michael Harter SJ, now our US correspondent, was a Toronto resident for four years—ed.]



Fiddling for funds

*The state of play in Australia's tertiary education institutions
—a Eureka Street special report*

IT IS SAID THAT EDUCATION makes people easy to lead but impossible to drive. It is a sentiment that John Sydney Dawkins, the silvertail socialist from Perth, might have mixed feelings about. Three years ago he set out to mine the universities for their wealth, reinforcing his reputation as a minister capable of implementing real change. But change has been achieved more by a calculating use of carrot and stick than by leadership. And now, amid much talk of Australia's urgent need to become the 'clever country', it is not at all clear where the tertiary education sector has been driven to.

In July 1987 Dawkins replaced Susan Ryan as Education Minister. In an extraordinarily short time, tertiary education became the focus for the Hawke government's most determined and radical attempt at restructuring. The shock waves from Dawkin's 1988 white paper on education, which set out his plans for the tertiary sector, will be felt into the next century.

At a boozy but tense dinner early this year, a philosophy professor met one of the new tertiary education bureaucrats thrown up by the Dawkins reforms. The bureaucrat, flushed with the importance of his post, peppered his conversation with the buzz words of the 1988 white paper—competition, accountability, and measures of excellence. Finally, something in the professor gave way. With chin jutting over the cheese board, he said: 'Surely one of the definitions of excellence in universities is a questioning of prevailing orthodoxies, particularly in government institutions such as your own.' He paused for effect. 'But I doubt that that would be included in *your* definition.'

The altercation between the professor and the bureaucrat goes to the heart of the debate about the desirability of the Dawkins program for change. That debate is about subversion, as opposed to subservience—about whether the educated should seek to criticise society, or merely to serve it. Some believe that the submerging of tertiary institutions in the rest of society is an inevitable end to the progression of universities

from the monastic, literally cloistered, institutions of the Middle Ages through to the liberal model of the 19th century. It is hardly surprising that many academics who pride themselves on their radical politics are deeply conservative when it comes to their own profession—they seek to retain the subversive tradition.

A left-wing academic, Professor Stephen Knight of Melbourne University's English department, describes the white paper as 'clarifying the government's view of the mercantile nature of education ... It is the one-day cricket version of providing tertiary education.' In his book *The Selling of the Australian Mind*, Knight argued that the ground for selling the Australian mind is laid by denigrating it—by suggesting 'that cerebral powers are only a set of instruments to generate desirable possessions'.

DAWKINS' PROGRAM HAS BEEN OPPOSED almost every step of the way, and there is a real question about whether it has been achieved. Yet, three years down the track, one cannot but be aware of one quiet victory for Dawkins—almost everyone speaks his language. Even his opponents use terms such as 'competition', 'relevance' and 'measures of excellence' to express their reservations. Few attempt to analyse what they mean.

The Australian vice-chancellors' committee has released a report claiming that the government's rhetoric conceals dangerous inadequacies in higher education, caused by a decline in funding per student at a time of burgeoning student numbers. But, in arguing for yet more expansion and more money, the vice-chancellors said: '(Higher education) will also be critical in the development of the intellectual basis on which Australia can position itself to move from reliance on a primary resource base to the development of a strong secondary and tertiary economic base. Australian universities provide the foundation for the clever country.' The language and the argument could have been lifted straight from the dreaded 1988 white paper.



Photos: Bill Thomas

They have changed the nature of teaching. Teaching is more likely to be about passing on established orthodoxies than about questioning them.

Judith Richards, La Trobe University

Dawkins wanted a big expansion in tertiary education places—from fewer than 90,000 a year to 125,000 a year within a decade. Although total funding would be increased, the government also wanted more for each education dollar. Universities would be made 'accountable' and efficient, and money previously given to productive and unproductive alike would have to be fought for, to ensure 'excellence'.

Many academics believe Dawkins began his program without sufficient knowledge of what universities were already doing—he thought universities were centres of privilege that needed shaking up. One who is more supportive of the Dawkins reforms than most, the dean of arts at Monash University, Professor Robert Pargetter, says: 'There are fewer rorts now than there used to be. The few spongers there are in the system do more work, and some are under pressure to resign. More importantly, good people have greater access to opportunities and resources.' But the union representing academics, the Federation of Australian University Staff Associations, claims with pride that, although it was obliged to accept the phasing out of tenure, and procedures for redundancy and dismissal, they have hardly been used.

The most immediately disruptive changes brought in by Dawkins were the amalgamations accompanying

Assessment panels tend to be dominated by individuals with particular affiliations. Therefore, the grants go to the same old universities—Melbourne, Sydney and the University of NSW

Professor Robert Pargetter, Monash University

the end of the 'binary' system, which divided tertiary institutions into vocationally oriented colleges and research-based universities. Dawkins wanted, and got, a 'unified' national education system with big, multi-campus institutions. As a result, the total number of tertiary institutions has dropped from 76 at the end of 1989 to just 36 at the beginning of 1991. The figures are dramatic, but cannot fully communicate the disruption that has accompanied the changes.

Dawkins says that he did not force the amalgamations—the institutions chose to merge. However, the 1988 white paper left little room for manoeuvre between carrot and stick. It said that institutions with fewer than 2000 students would be excluded from the new 'unified national system ... Size is not an end in itself; rather, in most cases, it is a necessary condition for educational effectiveness and financial efficiency ... Institutions that are part of the unified national system will benefit from liberalised resourcing arrangements and a share of the growth in the system. Those that choose to remain outside the system will have no guaranteed base of Commonwealth funding.'

Three years later, with institutions still struggling to come to terms with their shotgun marriages, even Dawkins' supporters agree that the amalgamations have not achieved any cost savings. Pargetter says: 'There are



savings, but there are costs as well. What you save on senior management, you have to spend on a highly efficient middle management to help coordinate the campuses.'

Whether there are other benefits depends very much on the individual cases. In South Australia, where the University of Adelaide has taken in the Roseworthy Agricultural College and parts of the nearby College of Advanced Education, things have worked well, according to the vice-chancellor, Professor Kevin Marjoribanks. But he is quick to point out that they were the subject of proposals by the university before the white paper was written. Elsewhere, such as in Victoria where Monash University absorbed Gippsland College of Advanced Education and Chisholm Institute of Technology, the combination of geographically remote campuses and radically different institutional cultures is expected to create problems for years. One academic said: 'The amalgamations will absorb at least 10 years of administrative effort.'

†clever *adj.* from ME *cliver*, expert in seizing

'It's a ludicrous slogan. Clever to me means to be a clever dick: superficial, smart, slick. The sort of person you wouldn't buy a used bicycle from'.

Professor Paul Burke, RSSS, ANU

'I think it's wonderful. It's probably only rhetoric, but at least we've got the rhetoric. In England, you can't even find a politician who will act as though they think being intelligent is of value.'

Professor Paul Davies, University of Adelaide

So what was the real reason for the amalgamations? The vice-chancellor of the University of Melbourne, Professor David Penington, says: 'The whole argument for amalgamations was shallow and hypocritical. I think the real motive was to establish a system of control from Canberra. Whereas the federal government already had control over tertiary institutions, the colleges were controlled by the states. Dawkins has a basically centralist political philosophy, and centralism is what it is all about.' Penington's suspicion is supported by the amount of information tertiary institutions now have to provide to the government about students, staff, and their research and teaching performance—some of it based on dubious methods and put to obscure uses.

Professor Paul Bourke, director of the Australian National University's Research School of Social Sciences, helped compile a study of tertiary education for the former Education Minister, Senator Susan Ryan.

Among other things, the study recommended the retention of the binary system. Bourke saw this idea, and many others, rejected by the incoming minister. 'I was going around talking about the ideas in the Ryan document, and it was like walking around Moscow in the 1940s talking about the works of Trotsky,' he said. 'Dawkins wanted to get rid of the ideas in that document, and the people who had been involved in it. He totally cleared out the department ... I think the principal aim of the white paper was to deliver control of the higher-education system into the hands of the government.'

IN 1988, DAWKINS TABLED IN PARLIAMENT the guidelines for his newly established National Board of Employment, Education and Training, which was to replace the old Tertiary Education Commission and its school counterparts, with their arms-length relationships to the government. Balder than the white paper, the guidelines left little doubt about what the Government wanted.

In a covering letter to the board Dawkins said that its advice 'should be framed in recognition of the economic, social and budgetary priorities which are outlined in these guidelines'. In other words, priority is to be given to educational initiatives that will help in restructuring the economy and making Australia more competitive in international markets. 'A more highly educated, competent and flexible workforce is an essential ingredient in the transformation we must continue to undergo,' the guidelines stated.

As intended, the board has become the carrot in Dawkins' attempt to drive the education sector towards 'relevance'. As one of its constituent bodies, the Australian Research Council [ARC], allocates research grants on the basis of competition, in particular towards areas of 'national priority'. To concentrate the minds of academics the council operates largely by the so-called 'claw back', under which universities must now compete for money that used to be distributed as part of their general operating grants. To maintain their standing, let alone make headway, institutions must attract council funds.

Yet in spite of the clarity of Dawkins' guidelines the research council seems to have strayed from its rather narrowly laid down path. Not surprisingly, given the rhetoric, those in the humanities and abstract areas of science feared that the council would discriminate against anything except immediately 'useful' research. In *The Selling of the Australian Mind* Knight commented: 'A well-mechanised, precisely detailed, non-intellectual project will probably do well for funds. What will probably not do well is a project where a researcher wants to ... consult, think, read in order to tackle an idea he or she has imagined.' Perhaps ironically, Knight last year succeeded in gaining a \$20,000 research council grant for a study of Australian crime fiction.

The worst fears have not been realised. It is apparent that the 'peer-review' committees which distribute the money (they are composed of other researchers) have a broader view of research than their political masters

The white paper clarifies the government's view of the mercantile nature of education ... it is the one-day cricket version of providing tertiary education.

**Professor Stephen Knight,
University of Melbourne**



Photo: Bill Thomas

do. In the 1990 grants, classical studies and prehistory received by far the largest amounts of money going to the humanities—\$488,107 and \$566,725 respectively—with some of the biggest individual grants being for excavations in Europe. Apparently ‘useful’ subjects, such as developing computer software, got slightly more than half of these amounts—\$298,309.

This is not to say that there are no criticisms of the council. Its former chairman, Professor Don Aitken, was massively unpopular, not least because he publicly stated he believed there were more ‘wankers’ in the humanities than in the sciences. (He later apologised). His successor, Professor Max Brennan, is less controversial, and many academics now consider the council is working ‘tolerably well’. Nevertheless, there are

problems, and like so much in the tertiary education sector, they focus on a buzz word. Brennan states proudly that ‘competition is the touchstone for everything the ARC does.’ Yet the competition has not greatly changed the way money is allocated—the old universities still get the lion’s share.

Pargetter said that the research council assessment panels tended to be ‘highly institutionalised, and ... dominated by individuals with particular affiliations. Therefore, the grants go to the same old universities—Melbourne, Sydney and the University of NSW. When one person leaves, he or she recommends their replacement, so you get representatives of the same sorts of groups, and the same sort of institutions.’ The concern, according to Pargetter, is that the peer assessments of

academics from the ‘top universities’ are given undue weight. Brennan disagrees: ‘It is factually correct that the money is going to the top universities. It is also a matter of fact that because this is done on a competitive basis, it means that is where the good people are.’ Brennan points to the high success rate for first-time applicants as proof that the process is not biased towards the establishment.

Whatever the inclinations of the research council’s committee members, there are structural factors that work against the humanities. Most humanities researchers do not need the large amounts of money their scientific colleagues require, and this can make them less likely to get

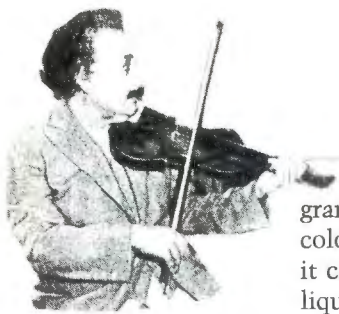
†**clever** *adj.* from ME *cliver*, expert in seizing

‘That phrase is a problem. Whatever it is meant to mean, so far, it is certainly more rhetoric than substance. Where is the real commitment?’

Michael Bartos, FAUSA

‘Even the alliteration puts you off. It is clever as opposed to lucky country, I suppose, but in recent years it strikes me we have been too clever by half. I am all in favour of the intelligent country. I am not sure that clever is the same thing.’

Dr Anthea Hyslop, ANU



grants. For example, examining sources for a history of colonial Victoria is easier with a research assistant but it can be done without one. Conducting research into liquid nitrogen, however, is impossible without appropriate laboratory facilities. So if a grants committee is faced with a choice between those two projects in the absence of other considerations, the science application will have an advantage.

†**clever** *adj.* from ME *cliver*, expert in seizing

'The omens for the clever country are not good. There is a genuine struggle to keep up standards of academic excellence and teaching, but increasingly people are beginning to listen to advice which says that in order to survive we have to lower our standards ... I am not sure that anyone ever worked out what the clever country meant'

Judith Richards, La Trobe University

'It's mostly political rhetoric. Of course as a nation we have to make better use of our intellectual property, but just talking about a clever country doesn't achieve anything.'

Professor David Penington, University of Melbourne

Judith Richards, a La Trobe University historian and former president of the staff association, says: 'What humanities people need is time, and with the increase in student numbers, we get less and less of it. Because the ARC works towards big grants, it is increasingly hard to get money for teaching support.' This problem has been partly addressed by a system of 'small grants' that the universities themselves distribute, and which can be directed towards the humanities.

Allegations abound that the expert committees which select research projects are biased towards particular institutions or particular disciplines. One of the 'priority areas' for example, cognitive science, has granted a large amount of money to psychologists, in spite of the fact that the best-known Australian researchers in the area are philosophers. It is also the case that in 1990, three of the five people on the grants committee were themselves the recipients of modest grants. However, in a system of peer review, where the committee must necessarily be made up of active researchers, this may be inevitable and not inconsistent with merit. Other committees have also granted money to their members—in at least one case to the chair of the committee.

What of the other buzz-word, 'efficiency'? Because money for infrastructure—the libraries and laboratories where research is done—relies on the success or otherwise of the institutions in getting research council money, writing grant applications has become an essential activity. One dean, who asked not be named, said: 'I spend a lot of my time going around bullying people who don't really need a grant to put in an application. "Can't you use a research assistant?" I say, and they look surprised, say they suppose they could, so in goes the application, and it if is successful, the department gets some more money for books or whatever.'

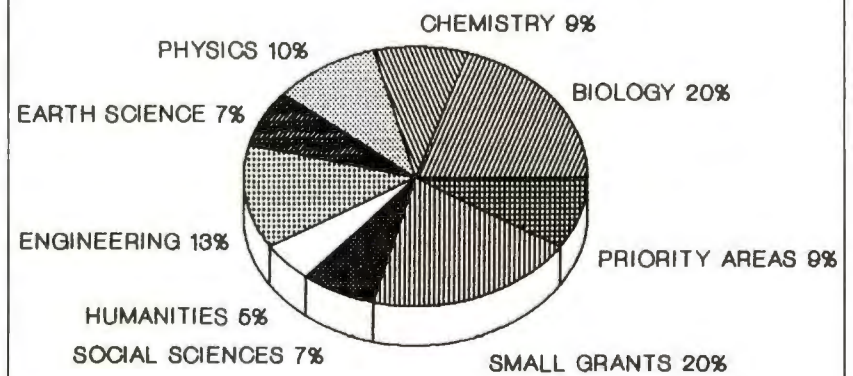
A head of department commented: 'It is no longer a merit for a project to be cheap. The more expensive we can make it, the better.' And another said: 'The word competition is a talisman. It is assumed that if you put it into the system somewhere, then everything will work well and be efficient. But the system has structural flaws which prevent that from happening. The idea of competition is fine, but you have to look at how it actually works.'

PERHAPS THE BIGGEST CHANGE wrought by Dawkins has been in the culture of universities. In spite of their opposition, academics have proved surprisingly amenable to the call for 'relevance'. There are more philosophy courses in topics such as business ethics. There are more summer schools. Vice-chancellors are more entrepreneurial, and many academics are more aware of the communities of which they are part.

And what of the clever country? Dawkins' reforms have not resulted in the rush to learn science and technology that seems to have been his aim. Indeed, during the past three years science and engineering courses have become less popular with students, and the demand for

Continued page 14

Distribution of Research Funds



Fleeing the philistines



Paul Davies: 'It's great to be in a country where debate ... is conducted in the open'

HOW DID THE Australian tertiary education system, in the midst of eroding salaries and changes which are driving many top academics overseas, come to attract one of the world's leading physicists?

Professor Paul Davies, famous for his work in cosmology, arrived at the University of Adelaide about a year ago to take up a post as head of the physics department. He took a salary cut to come here, and unlike most of his colleagues, feels warmly towards the Labor Party's education reforms.

Davies regards himself as a refugee from Thatcher's Britain. He spent the ten years before coming to Australia at the University of Newcastle-on-Tyne. 'I felt like I was a double loser. Government ministers actually said that professors were useless. People virtually sniggered when you said you were a professor. Plus I was in the north of England, outside Thatcher's charmed circle. I was in the wrong job and at the wrong end of the country.'

He has found Australia in many ways a more cultured society than Thatcher's Britain. 'There is nowhere near the antipathy towards intellectual endeavour that there is in England. At least you get the impression that the politicians care about what you are doing, and think that it is worthwhile.

'In England, Oxford and Cambridge regard themselves as an elite, and most politicians in England have been there. They all regard a university as a place where you punt on the river and drink champagne. They have no idea of what a real university does.'

He says the quality of students in Australia is better than it was in Britain, and the amount of money available for research and infrastructure, while never enough, is more than comparable. Davies admits that his rosy view may be partly influenced by the fact that the physics department has been little affected by amalga-

mations, and that the University of Adelaide has done well out of the Australian Research Council grants scheme. He has himself received a grant.

His view is also affected by the fact that he believes the mercantilising of academia is inevitable, and that people will come to pay for the expertise of university academics in exactly the same way they pay for the expertise of an accountant or lawyer.

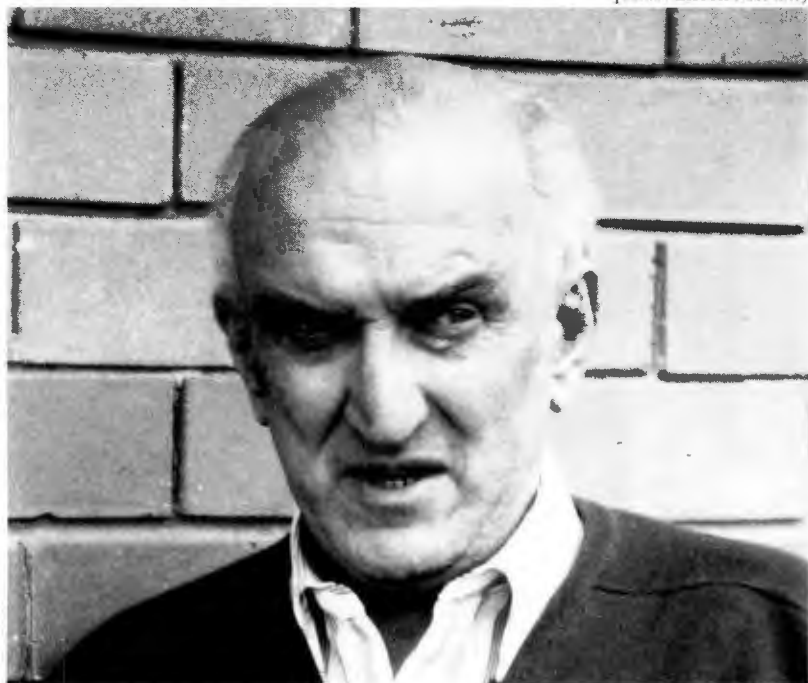
'The time has to come for universities to be seen as the incredibly valuable repositories of knowledge they are, and for the people who use them to recognize that and pay for it. There's no free lunch.'

A strange view, perhaps, for someone whose study of how the universe began is hardly likely to lend itself to being harnessed to national goals and priorities. But Davies argues that, in England, sales of his books and television shows brought more money into the country than was spent on his research.

'We must get away from thinking about material things as the only wealth people want. I believe we are entering a postmaterial age, and information will be recognized as a valuable commodity which must be nurtured and paid for. It is inevitable. We live in very hard-nosed times.'

'Personally, I think it's great to be in a country where the debate about tertiary education is actually conducted in the open, and as though it matters. Where white papers are issued and stories appear in the newspapers. In Thatcher's Britain, it was all being done nudge-nudge wink-wink, with the old boy's network and no discernible policy at all. It amounted to vandalism. Here at least some thought has gone into it.

'From what I have seen I don't believe that there are these people in Cabinet sitting around working out how all these clever people can be brought down a peg or two. I don't believe people think that way here.' ■



I was going round talking about ideas in the Ryan document, and it was like walking around Moscow in the 1940s, talking about the works of Trotsky. Dawkins wanted to get rid of the ideas in that document, and the people who had been involved in it. He totally cleared out the department.

Professor Paul Burke, RSSS, ANU

From page 12

humanities courses is now so high that the entrance scores required for them are often higher than those for science or engineering courses. Especially popular are the vocational courses of law and accounting. As David Penington comments: 'We live in an over-regulated society. Young people see security in those roles which regulate rather than those which contribute to our economic and cultural wealth. It is a challenge to the leadership of our nation to turn this around.'

Although everyone parrots the talk of a clever country, there is real concern that the quality of teaching is suffering. Some suggest that the competitive allocation of research funds has meant good staff spend more time in research, and less time with students, while poor staff do most of the teaching. As well, the increase in the number of student places, with only marginal increases in funding, mean that class sizes have grown. Over-enrolments this year have taken the situation to a

crisis, with some institutions having to cope with 10 per cent more first-year students than they had expected to handle. Judith Richards says that by forcing an artificial divide between the teaching and research functions of the university, the reforms 'have changed the nature of teaching. Teaching is more likely to be about passing on established orthodoxies, rather than about questioning them.'

SO, AFTER THREE YEARS OF UPHEAVAL, there are more students, and a more centralised control, perhaps with the potential for abuse, although there is little or no evidence for actual political interference. As one academic put it: 'There certainly is far more ability for the centre of power to influence what is going on now. Whether or not that is a good thing depends very much on what the centre is doing.'

As for 'competition', 'efficiency' and 'cleverness'? There is little reason to think there have been anything but tiny gains in any of these areas. The dust hasn't settled yet, so it is hard to say where the Government's carrot and stick have taken tertiary education. Certainly it has changed the rhetoric. But then, given the poverty of the buzz words, it is hard to say precisely what the government was driving at anyway.

So far, it seems that while Dawkins may have failed in his quest to make universities subservient to government ends, his management may have in any case made them less able to be subversive. ■

Margaret Simons, a freelance journalist based in South Australia, writes regularly for *Eureka Street*.

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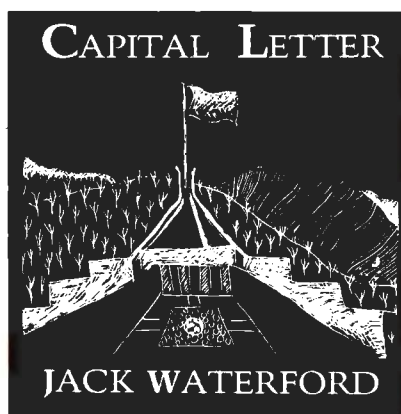
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Howe now



A NEW FEDERALISM or a new new federalism? The ascent of Brian Howe to the Deputy Prime Ministership, and to a special position advising the Prime Minister on Commonwealth-state relations, has created an opportunity to reshape debate about an exchange of powers between Canberra and the states. Howe is no longer simply the person who, as Minister for Community Services and Health, is capable of giving away most to the states. Issues of microeconomic reform, such as a national railway freight scheme and a national electricity grid, have now come within his bailiwick.

The process of wooing the left, by both Bob Hawke and Paul Keating in the lead-up to the leadership struggle, has also put some of Howe's ideas about a new cities policy on the government's agenda. Although his argument has been rather vague, it is clear that Howe is not advocating a return to the 1970s Department of Urban and Regional Development and the costly seweraging-and-servicing-the-cities programs it embraced. But he is taking note of the fact that outlying areas of the big cities, especially Sydney and Melbourne, have high unemployment, are poorly served with schools, health centres, child-care facilities and other community services, and that families spend fortunes in getting access to jobs and services.

Howe is virtually the only man of talent among the parliamentary left, and his new role gives its concerns some clout. The left also has an eye on the implications of microeconomic reform in the power and transport utilities, both of which have considerable capacity to upset its industrial power base. And Howe is under pressure to shovel millions of dollars into Victoria, to help the beleaguered Socialist Left premier of that state, Joan Kirner. (Apart from the left, the rest of the federal ALP is united in wanting the Kirner Government to be defeated as quickly as possible, in the hope that the rage of Victorians might have faded by the time federal Labor has to face the people.)

Of course, what Kirner wants is untied money, not the sort of funding contemplated under the new federalism negotiations that have been under way since November last year. About 30 Commonwealth and state ministers are involved in these negotiations, not to mention hundreds of bureaucrats. There has been little public consultation, even with affected groups. But they have generated some heat, and Howe's response to it prompts the question of where he stands on the issue.

In April, the Minister for Social Security, Graham Richardson, wrote a letter to the Prime Minister expressing concern about the negotiations. The new federalism had generally been seen as a Hawke idea, and as involving the risk that Hawke would hand over welfare to the states, almost without conditions, in return for the states' economic and industrial powers. Parts of Richardson's letter were leaked to *The Canberra Times*. He reiterated most of the arguments I raised in an earlier column (*Eureka Street*, March 1991) about the incompetence of the states as welfare providers. He also pointed out that state welfare services tended to come from large institutions that were often heavily unionised and resistant to change. This, he said, was in sharp contrast to the Commonwealth's focus on funding smaller, more accountable and client-oriented groups. Richardson commented bitterly that at the same time as the states were demanding more money with fewer strings, they were cutting social services at all levels and had opted out of responsibility for homeless youth. He warned that the voters regarded most of the responsibilities in question as national ones, and that if the states failed to deliver the Commonwealth would get the blame.

RICHARDSON'S INTERVENTION had the effect of getting Hawke to put the issue on the cabinet agenda—though deft footwork prevented it from being discussed—and of signalling to backbenchers that there was potential trouble ahead. Hawke calmed the caucus by promising that the Commonwealth would not let a single person be disadvantaged by any changes, and by reiterating that the negotiations were still at an early stage.

Howe, who had previously allowed himself to be described as worried by some of the implications of the new federalism, remained conspicuously silent. So did his junior minister and fellow member of the left, Peter Staples, who had privately been squealing his concern to all and sundry. Staples has day-to-day responsibility for the \$500 million-a-year Home and Community Care Program and the \$131 million Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, which are earmarked for handover to the states.

Why were Howe and Staples so silent? There was a suspicion that Richardson was trying to raise the issue as part of a Keating leadership plot, and the left did not want to play his game. As it turned out, they might well

have been right. But people close to Richardson insist that his concern is genuine, and he does have an interest—most clients of the two programs mentioned above are also Social Security clients, and would come screaming to Richardson's department if the new arrangements came undone.

Howe's staff complain that many of the objections raised to the negotiations are unfair. The Commonwealth is aware of the states' shortcomings, they say, and the states will have to address those shortcomings before there can be an exchange of powers. But, Howe's staff argue, this problem should not prevent a close look at the inadequacies of the whole welfare system, state and federal.

A few examples. It is often better for people to get nursing care in their own homes, or in nursing homes, than in hospitals. And it is usually much cheaper. But since hospitals are funded by the states, and nursing homes and most community nursing services are funded by the Commonwealth, simply switching to community nursing also costs the Commonwealth more money. It would be better, both for people in need and for budget planners, if the Commonwealth and the states had an integrated policy. There is a related problem in rural areas. As they decline in productivity and their populations grow older, state governments are closing local hospitals and the Commonwealth is opening more nursing homes. So far there has been little coordina-

tion, but there should be. In many areas, delicate fiddling by the Commonwealth creates extra clients for the states, or vice versa. And some people miss out altogether.

In short, the Howe argument runs, the states are not being offered a bargain—something has to be done about the waste, duplication and mismanagement. The Commonwealth will insist on a role in setting policies, performance standards and systems of accountability. The states may get greater flexibility in organising the delivery of services, but only if they agree on the rules of the game. If that happens, all might be well. But the states are complaining that the Commonwealth is dragging its feet. WA's Carmen Lawrence—desperately hoping issues such as this will distract attention from the WA Inc royal commission—even threatened to drop out of negotiations unless the Commonwealth was more forthcoming. For their part, the states have yet to offer Canberra anything in exchange for a handover of welfare powers. It might all come to nothing.

Or to something quite different. As preparation for the negotiations, Commonwealth public servants have conducted some of the most extensive reviews of policy yet attempted. Just the sort of thing that an incoming John Hewson might find useful in sorting out his new, lean government. ■

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

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Charting the course

Many Liberals believe they will be Australia's party of government in the '90s. A former press secretary to the Victorian opposition leader discusses the party's prospects.

LIBERAL HOPES OF REGAINING GOVERNMENT in Australia have been frustrated because policies aimed at increasing productivity are electorally unappealing. Simply, the numbers are on the side of eternal prevarication. The unexpected swing against Nick Greiner's mildly reformist government in NSW contradicted widespread Liberal hopes that the Australian electorate would happily embrace less as more, or that it would understand the virtues of self-reliance and reward their proponents. After the NSW election, the party will be torn more than ever between a productivity-oriented program and one that amounts to paternalism. Should the Liberals renege on reform, it won't just be bad luck—it will be a national tragedy.

So what are the chances? Do the Liberals have the talent and the ideas? Can they produce and sustain alternative governments, let alone the fearless reforming administrations that will be required? Except in NSW, the Liberals have now been in opposition for almost a decade, and they suffer from the relative anonymity that prolonged opposition brings. Oppositions are restricted to talking about things, whereas governments do things—and what they do gets reported. When key opposition figures are mentioned, people tend either to register blanks or to respond negatively.

Oppositions have even greater trouble trying to get voters to imagine them as alternative governments. Parties in prolonged opposition do not register in voters' minds as directly interchangeable with parties in government, even though that is what they are. For instance, the federal ALP has made much of the allegedly superior calibre both of its front bench and of those in the queue to join it. Until recently its favourites in the press gallery wrote lovingly of Paul Keating's grasp of economics, of John Button's quick wit, of Gerry Hand's ethical dilemmas, and of John Dawkins' well-directed aggres-

sion. There was even serious talk that the Hawke cabinet might be the sharpest in Australian history.

This was a very smart operation. In the context of such an audacious claim the opposition looked ordinary. Andrew Peacock suddenly began to fail intelligence tests, John Howard failed personality tests and Neil Brown looked pompous. The rest of the coalition front bench became a formless group of talentless, grey men and women. It helped the government when people forgot that in 1983 Paul Keating was thought of chiefly as a dangerous caucus snake, Button and Dawkins were unknown outside caucus, and Gerry Hand was seen as the Socialist Left ideologue from Victoria who had tried and failed to stop Bob Hawke winning preselection.

It did not help the opposition when people forgot that Peacock had been a successful foreign minister, or that John Howard had pulled the levers which allowed Paul Keating to take the credit for financial deregulation. The Victorian case is even more instructive. It may be unbelievable now, but for six years the Cain government was seen as the very embodiment of economic competence. Local reporters were convinced that the Victorian opposition had no one to touch Rob Jolly, Steve Crabb, David White or Evan Walker.

The result was that in 1985 and 1988 the Victorian opposition was regarded as a lacklustre, talentless bunch. Labor's devastating weaknesses—its inability to separate itself from the union movement and its misconception of the wellsprings of economic growth—were potentially the Liberals' greatest source of strength. But they did not surface before the electorate as bases from which to compare the parties.

THERE WAS NO CONSPIRACY INVOLVED. Rather, the sort of comparison that most favours an opposition inevitably requires putting a government's historical record beside

an opposition's hypothetical performance. The variable is the government's record. What the opposition would have done is significantly unknowable, so its unique strengths are discounted accordingly. As a result, Labor won the 1985 and 1988 elections on its record and if it loses the next election this will most likely be caused by the deterioration of its record. Whether in front or behind, an opposition will find it difficult to be accepted for its real strengths.

Let's try the question again. Have the Liberals got sufficient talent and ideas to produce alternative governments? We cannot be sure, but we know that some of them did form parts of governments once, and that the Liberal Party historically has been able to come up with reasonably competent governments. There have been no real Liberal shambles in the postwar era. The real question is whether the Liberals can come up with

the fearless, reforming administrations that Australia will require in the 1990s. And at state level it seems obvious that the answer to this question is yes.

The key states where Liberals have been out of power for a substantial period are Victoria, Western Australia and South Australia. These states share the heritage of Labor's failed and discredited state entrepreneurialism. Their debt levels are extremely high, and at present unsustainable. In each state, Labor's special relationship with the union movement has underwritten significant growth in public-sector employment, and an over-generous provision of unionised services. Each state has bankrupted its main government-owned financial institutions, leaving state budgets heavily burdened in the absence of revenues previously generated by these institutions. Finally, each state is unable to balance its books easily, due to the veto power of the union move-

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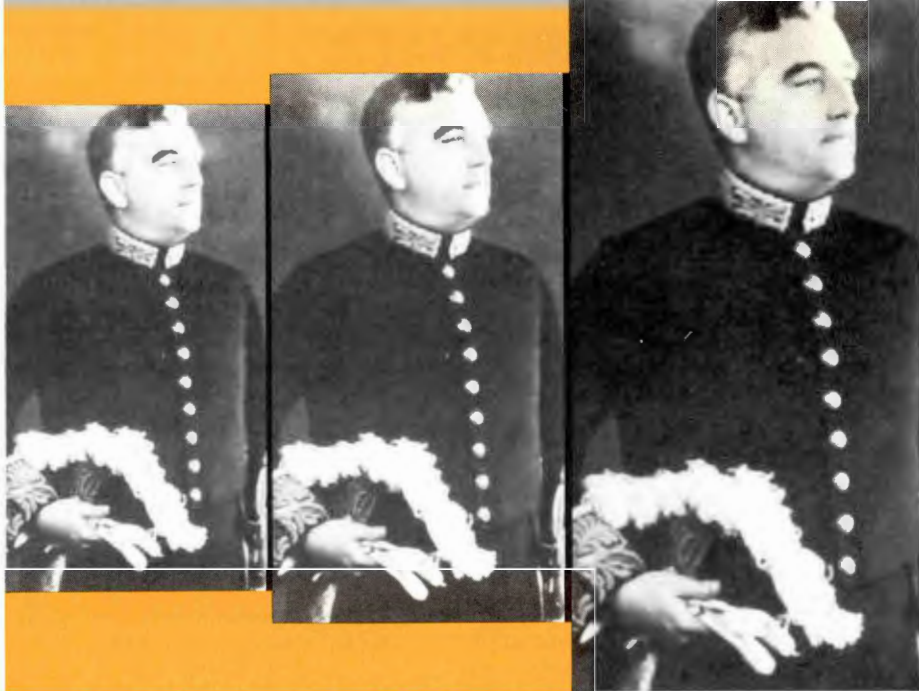
ment within the respective Labor governments.

The tasks for incoming Liberal administrations are therefore largely already determined. They have to cut into the size of government, reduce debt and raise revenues through extraordinary means such as asset sales, privatization, or private-sector equity shares. Some Labor governments are attempting these tasks already but, constrained by the relative power of unions within each state Labor branch, progress is slow and frustrated. By comparison, potential state Liberal governments are well-positioned to do what has to be done. This time around, the only way to go in government happens to coincide with Liberal philosophy, and only a party with no strings to the union movement can safely take the reformist road. Even if a Liberal state government goes for a dose of populist protectionism, there will not be any money to underwrite it, so the risks of waywardness are small.

THE FEDERAL SCENE IS NOT SO straightforward. The same responses apply to questions about the calibre of the federal parliamentary Liberal Party. The federal Liberals seem dour and anonymous by comparison with the characters on Labor's front bench, but this is part of being in opposition. When they are able to do things in government, the individuals will emerge. As for their ideas, in many areas there are few differences between the opposition and the government. Both believe that the Australian economy requires restructuring to move resources into tradeables. Both are committed to reforming government business enterprises to make them more competitive.

The federal Liberals hold the same card over Labor that their state counterparts possess—their freedom from the limits of union vetoes on reform. This freedom can be used, as in the states, to restructure government enterprises in pursuit of efficiency gains that will improve productivity for the economy as a whole. It does not take much to imagine the Liberals confronting transport and communications reform with radically greater effect, simply because they do not have the same internal constraints upon them as the Labor Party does. The lack of union ties can be also be played more indirectly, to hasten labour-market reform. One of the chief barriers to productivity improvement is Australia's habit of treating workers who work for companies as though they worked for industries. The nexus between effort and reward is notoriously weak when wages and conditions are treated on an industry-wide basis, yet this is the keystone of our industrial relations system.

It can be expected that a federal Liberal government would speed the pace of change in this area, simply because it will not be signatory to an accord that would otherwise slow it up. In this sense, the Liberals really do have an historic opportunity during the 1990s. Historically, labour-market regulation and tariff protection have been the chief means used by Australians to move resources out of tradeables, and to redistribute them to a larger domestic economy. With tariff protection un-



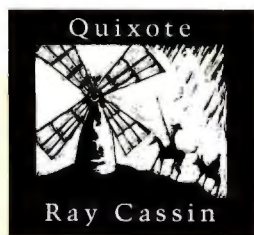
der serious challenge, comparative wage justice is the next cab off the rank, and the indications are that the Liberals are in a better position to get on with it than the Labor Party. Once the accord is consigned to history, Australia stands to make massive productivity gains, simply because the accord has been the main obstacle to quicker productivity improvement throughout the 1980s.

There is one obvious caveat to this. Whether tariff reform will remain tolerable to the business wing of the Liberal Party is an open question. At the federal level the Liberals will have real policy choices that are denied their state counterparts, because of the restricting heritage of Labor's state financial failures. This lends far greater importance to the question of the personal talent available in the federal parliamentary party. Weaker Liberals are likely to substitute Labor's corporatist administrative style with a mates' club of their own, legitimised by arguments about employment on the one hand and foreign debt reduction on the other.

Clearly, the federal Liberals have to be tested. But it is worth pointing out that the protected manufacturing sector is smaller than it was when the Liberals were at their peak in the 1960s. This alone will give them more flexibility than their forebears enjoyed. As well, the costs of protection are much better documented than they were. Finally, much of the manufacturing sector that survives is now integrated with Australia's export-oriented resource sector. Although the protectionist lobby is likely to revive, the Liberal Party is better positioned to withstand it than it used to be.

Have the Liberals got it in them to govern so that Australian productivity improves and the nation begins to become competitive? At the state level they do without any doubt. Federally they possess great political advantages over Labor due to their distance from the union movement. They may yet again answer the siren's song of protection, but at this stage they are treating it with suspicion. ■

Tim Duncan is co-author of *Australia and Argentina: On Parallel Paths*. Until April this year, he was principal press secretary to the Victorian opposition leader.



High society

TRAVELLING HAS BECOME AN ORDEAL that my distinguished ancestor the Don would not recognise, despite the many hardships he endured on the road. In the mythical past through which he travelled there were no journeys, only quests. One just meandered around looking for something really useful to do. Like tilting at windmills. But the modern obsession with efficiency has made worthy pursuits of this kind quite impossible. Our attitudes to travelling now come in two forms: what I call the submarine mode, and the home-away-from-home approach.

I prefer the submarine mode. You pack one bag, throw away anything that won't fit, buy a ticket, find a seat on the plane or train, and then shut up for the rest of the journey. Since modern travelling involves being confined in a moving metal tube with a large number of complete strangers, this submarine mentality seems generally considerate towards one's fellow passengers. It respects their privacy and is a tactful way of hinting that they might like to respect one's own privacy, too.

Alas, submarine ethics are not popular. Most people seem determined to pretend that the moving metal tubes do not exist. Instead of the tube, they think about their *seat*, which they are resolved to convert into a surrogate home. For home-away-from-homers, a seat on a plane or train is a reality that must be denied. And the way to do this is to cover it in pillows, neck supports, space blankets, a portable library, the entire stock of a medium-sized confectionery shop, cassette players and whatever other electronic gadgetry one can smuggle through luggage checks without starting World War III. I have not yet seen anyone perusing a stack of paint charts, wondering how they might redecorate their seat to the envy of their neighbours. But if I do, I shan't be surprised.

Of course, the submarine mode is sometimes a luxury, even for those determined to practise it. It is very difficult to persuade children of its merits.

I was moved to these reflections by a visit to a friend who lives in what I believe is called the Red Centre. Well, near there, anyway. The sort of destination that requires a trip in a noisy, turboprop aircraft belonging to an airline with a name like Sunshine, or Sunstroke, or something similar. The passenger list could have been drawn up for an Antipodean version of *Canterbury Tales*. Sitting at the back of the cabin, drinking beer, were three shearers who called each other Nev, Kev and Trev. Across the aisle from the shearers an affectionate female couple clutched each other protectively. There were various students returning home from the city for the semester break. There was a pin-striped mercantile type frowning over his pocket calculator. There was me, reading galley proofs for my forthcoming self-help manual, *Quixotry: A User's Guide*. And we were all at the mercy of the most uncompromising pair of home-

away-from-homers I have ever seen. And their son.

To be fair to the parents, the vast load of bedding, children's games and sticky comestibles they dragged aboard may have been an attempt to shield us from the degradations of their eight-year-old Attila. But distracting such a bundle of malevolence for more than a few minutes is no small matter. After his parents had managed to occupy not only their own seats but two vacant ones and half the aisle as well, Attila began to act in the spirit of his ancient namesake. When in Rome, sack it.

After removing some partially-chewed sticky comestibles from his mouth, Attila began flicking them down the aisle. (Sunstroke Airlines' planes are small enough for an eight-year old barbarian to do this). A treacly mass hit the side of Kev's face. Too drunk to correctly identify his assailant, Kev lunged at Nev but hit Trev instead. The trio collapsed into a brawling mass, beginning an enmity that is probably destroying shearing sheds all over outback NSW and South Australia.

Encouraged by success, Attila switched his attention to corporate finance. Another deadly arc of undigested treacle sprayed through the cabin, this time landing on the keypad of Mr Pinstripe's calculator. Pinstripe tried to clean the keys with a monogrammed handkerchief but forgot to clear his interrupted calculation first. Complex estimates of income and expenditure skewed badly, and Pinstripe tapped furiously at the keypad in an effort to balance the books. It was too late. Lumps of toffee adhered to his fingers, moving from key to key, and an auditor's nightmare was born.

Around the cabin, people began preparing for the mother of all battles. The students, experienced food-fighters all, armed themselves with the crusts of airline sandwiches. Attila looked around for a convenient target and his gaze rested on the affectionate women. Their grip on each other tightened, and they raised two pairs of feet clad in Dr Marten's 11-eyelet boots. Divining that they were accustomed to repelling noxious males of any age, Attila turned to me.

I was saved by the flight attendant. She could not save herself. Advancing down the cabin, a professional smile fixed firmly on her face, she tried disarming Attila with a professional 'Oh-what-a-sweet-child' caress. His parents, hitherto silent, beamed their gratitude. But barbarians do not understand the civilised art of diplomacy, and Attila spewed the rest of his treacly ammunition down the front of her uniform. They remained locked in a sticky embrace for the rest of the flight.

When we landed my friend was waiting to meet me. 'Did you have a nice flight?' she asked. Now I know why no one ever asked the Don if he had had a nice ride when he returned from a quest. ■

Ray Cassin is production editor of *Eureka Street*.

Reclaiming women's past

*Is the church irredeemably patriarchal?
Melbourne theologian
Dorothy Lee-Pollard (right)
looks at the work
of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza.*

ONE OF THE PROBLEMS CHRISTIAN FEMINISM FACES is how to assess the history of the church in regard to its treatment of women. How are Christian women, with the insights of the present, to relate to the history of the past? Are the pages that deal with the church's relationship to women so misogynist as to damn the Christian church forever?

The issue focuses sharply on the role of the Bible: is it an irredeemably patriarchal text or does it still have something to say to women in the church? Behind this question lies the broader issue of how women in general—whether Christian or otherwise—deal with their own history. Under the broad umbrella of religious feminism, several options have been suggested. On the one hand, there is the work of feminists who want to finish with the past, wipe the slate clean and begin making history afresh. On the other hand, there are those who, like the feminist theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, believe that it's possible to embrace the past in a way that empowers women.

Feminism in the Christian church dates itself classically from the publication of Mary Daly's book *Beyond God the Father*. It followed in the wake of the Second Vatican Council (at which Daly herself was present) and alerted the church community to the question of women's participation in the life of the church. It raised the fundamental issue of the patriarchal nature of Christian history and theology.

Daly herself subsequently moved beyond her earlier position and now considers the book naive. In her most recent metamorphosis, she regards Christianity as having nothing to say to women. She has left the church, describing herself as 'post-Christian'. The church, she argues, is by nature a patriarchal institu-



tion and no amount of feminist theologising can alter that. The only alternative for the intelligent woman of faith is to shake the dust off her feet and begin religion anew in the company of other women.

Daly's position represents the end point of disenchantment with the church and its past. It is the theological arm of a radical separatism. The past and present order of things is so rotten, she concludes, that the only alternative is to leave it behind. A number of women have followed her lead—most spectacularly, in the recent past, Daphne Hampson, Professor of Systematic

Theology at St Andrews University, Scotland. Hampson remains in her academic post, but has now rejected the Judaeo-Christian theological worldview. Her response to patriarchy in scripture and tradition is to attempt an emigration beyond it and to participate in the movement for a new religious expression. Accordingly, the new religion will be by and for women, shaped and determined by women's experience as the sole authority for its life and action.

WHAT DALY AND HAMPSON ARE PROPOSING is a bleak alternative for Christian women struggling to face the reality of their exclusion from various levels of the church's life. The pressure is strong from post-Christian feminism to abandon the church, leaving behind the patriarchal structures of the past. Yet what real alternative is offered? Post-Christian feminism offers a religion which has wiped clean the past and lives without any link between a transcendent divine reality and historical human reality.

Instead, the new religion idolises the self as the only source of authority. At its best, it is pantheistic, the worship of the creature over the Creator—an idolising of the created order. At its worst, it is a form of female narcissism, an ego-centrism which is fundamentally auto-erotic. It has an uncanny resemblance to fundamentalist movements of religious enthusiasts down through the history of the church: they too appealed to the authority of the self as the final court of appeal.

But why should Christian women be forced into emigration by 'post-Christian' feminists because of the undeniable problems that exist in the church? And why should women be told that no true feminist can possibly find her roots and identity in the traditions and history of the church? The implication of both Daly's and Hampson's arguments is that Christian feminists are living a lie: in their view, a woman cannot be both Christian and feminist at the same time. Ironically, this is the same message given by the conservative arm of the church. Radicals and conservatives agree that the church always has been, and always will be, patriarchal and that feminism and theology don't mix.

Certainly it is true that women who stay in the church live in a painful degree of tension. However, it is arguable that, far from playing it safe, they have chosen the more difficult option. They live with the unwelcome knowledge that the very traditions which exclude them on one level nourish them on another. But they refuse to surrender these traditions because they believe that this history belongs equally to them. They have no desire to leave behind the God who in the Jewish tradi-

tion created women in the divine image: the God of Sarah, Hagar, Miriam and Mary of Nazareth. They refuse to leave behind the divine love and acceptance they find in the figure of Jesus, who loved women and related to them as intelligent human beings, who called them into discipleship and challenged the community to a radical lifestyle of love and mutuality. For such women, Judaeo-Christian history is a fundamental part of what they are.

It is precisely on this point that Schüssler Fiorenza's work is so important. Her field is Scripture (she is Professor of New Testament at Notre Dame) and she works with the twin foci of history and theology within the biblical text. Her book *In Memory of Her. A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* is difficult and challenging. It stretches one's language almost as much as one's thinking. But it is an eminently worthwhile book with which to struggle—not because everything the author says is right or indisputable, but because she offers, for thinking Christian women, an intelligent alternative on the question of history, one which refuses to buy into the separatist option of Daly, Hampson and others.

What is inspiring about Fiorenza's work is that she is not interested in sitting back bemoaning the male chauvinism of the church's past. Without denying the pain and oppressions of women's history in the church, Fiorenza makes a spirited attempt to reconstruct the church's origins from an open and self-conscious women's perspective. She doesn't try to play God and pretend objectivity. She admits from the start her subjective involvement in the issues, arguing that

such subjectivity enables women to reach into a past that is otherwise inaccessible to them. Over against post-Christian feminism, she argues that women's power and self-esteem lie fundamentally in their history. She attempts to rediscover the history of women's suffering, but also reconstructs the history of women's strength, women's faith and leadership in the life of the early church. History, the way Fiorenza reads it, provokes women to a critical self-awareness. When read with new eyes (not the eyes of propaganda but the eyes of openness to new perspectives, new truths), history discloses the possibility of a new being, a new world.

discloses the possibility of a new being, a new world.

FIORENZA'S RECONSTRUCTIVE WORK runs something like this: in the early decades of the church's life, the history of women, when read through sympathetic eyes, reveals the radical gospel proclaimed by Jesus which implicitly challenged hierarchical structures of domination. The theology and praxis of Paul similarly re-



Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

veals a history of freedom and responsibility for women in many respects. The Gospels have an astonishingly embracing and liberal attitude to women as disciples, leaders and witnesses to the resurrection.

Over against this, the later writings of the New Testament show the church resiling from its earlier principles of equality. Here many of the misyogynist texts are to be found, denying women's authority and confining their role to home and child-bearing. The tragic irony is the way that later history has tended to follow this trend, in spite of the principles of the founders.

For women in the Australian church who live Sunday by Sunday in the tension of love and anger, who sit through religious ceremonies that nourish and yet exclude them, who are caught in the pain of loving and hating the traditions on which their lives depend—for such women, Fiorenza offers a new vision—a vision which refuses to reject the past. She knows the perils of ignoring the past, just as she knows the pain and joy of its rediscovery.

There is no need to break irreparable ties with the past—no need to cut off the branch from its roots. The post-Christian solution is not the only one available to Christian women. On the contrary, the reading of past history, through Fiorenza's imaginative perspective, can be for women a genuine experience of death and resurrection. Through it they can rediscover their lives as full participants in human history. ■

Dorothy Lee-Pollard teaches New Testament at the United Faculty of Theology, Parkville, Victoria. She is a Uniting Church minister.

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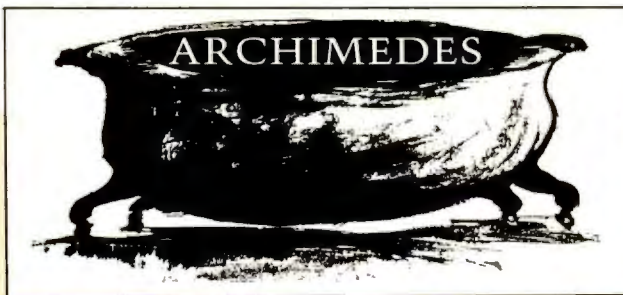
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1063 and all that

NO, ARCHIMEDES DID NOT ESTIMATE that the number of grains of sand in the universe was 1063, as claimed here last month. The error was, at least partly, due to a computer. The number that Archimedes came up with, in modern terms, was about 10^{63} . A much larger number, certainly, but it is a *real* number, one we can imagine having a meaning.

There are other kinds of numbers which have a meaning but which we can never quite get at. They play no small part in our mathematical description of the universe. For example, a consequence of Pythagoras' theorem is that numbers like square roots came into mathematical vocabulary. Archimedes made a great leap forward when, in his treatise *On the Measurement of a Circle*, he announced an approximation for $\sqrt{3}$:

$$1351/780 > \sqrt{3} > 265/153$$

In modern terms, this is like saying that

$$1.7320512... > 1.7320508... > 1.7320261...$$

Archimedes never told us how he discovered these estimations for *irrational* numbers, as Plato had first called them. We can see, however, that he got pretty close. On the other hand, we do know how Archimedes estimated the value of π , that magic number which connects the radius of a circle with its area and circumference. By inscribing a polygon with 96 regular sides within a circle, Archimedes showed that the value of π lay between two other numbers:

$$22/7 > \pi > 223/71$$

Again, Archimedes was very accurate, since in modern terms he was declaring that

$$3.1428571... > 3.1415926... > 3.140845...$$

But there is no definite value for π , even though it reflects something real, namely the ratio between the radius and the area of a circle. It is called a *transcendental* number: it goes on forever after the decimal point.

In modern physics we have even more abstruse numbers, like $\sqrt{-1}$. Such *imaginary* or *complex* numbers have no relevance to our ordinary arithmetic, because it is impossible to multiply a number by itself and come up with a negative value. Yet $\sqrt{-1}$, usually called *i*, operates in the formulation of quantum mechanics, the most general theory we have for describing nature. The presence of complex numbers in quantum calculations suggests that our apparently countable reality is more 'complex' than we realised (even though a complex function is equivalent to a pair of real functions). What does this mean for the connection between physics and reality? The jury is still out.

What we can see and count, however, may not be all that there is. Being able to count up to 10^{63} will never be enough. We need to learn to count in lateral ways. Uncle Scrooge may not have known that, but Archimedes had a fair idea. ■ —John Honner SJ



Morag Fraser

Letty



PARTY TRICK.

WEDNESDAY IS OPEN DAY, when all the cartoonists in New York go around to the magazines with their work, and then you have lunch. We went to the Algonquin, downstairs—pretty low level sort of stuff. I can't remember any great wit, although they were marvelous, huge people. I think cartoonists are great, intelligent, funny, cheerful people, very generous. So New York seemed pretty good. They gave me a room up in the *New Yorker* office, on 43rd Street. It was the room James

Thurber used to have. You couldn't believe, could you? He must have died soon after but he was still there then because Mrs Thurber rang up one day and asked, "Is James there?" I was paralysed. I desperately wanted to communicate something to the man's wife.'

'So what did you do?'

'Just what polite Australians do when they can't think what to do. I said, 'No, he's not here. Can I take a message?''



BRUCE PETTY IS A POLITE AUSTRALIAN. He is modest, self-deprecating, and wickedly, wickedly funny. When he talks, somewhat reluctantly, about himself, there is a ripple just below the surface of speech, a kind of comic counterpoint to everything he says. Occasionally it breaks right thorough his conversation, transforming his short, often serious, history of the progress of Bruce Petty, artist-cartoonist, into one long, picaresque, Antipodean lark. It's almost as though he is surprised at having got away with life.

The other great thing about Petty is that there is some age on him. It is lightly worn (we had to tread softly past his young baby asleep downstairs) but nonetheless he is old enough to have grown up listening to the Sunday ABC radio comedy quarter hour, with Spike Jones and the like. He was in England in the fifties, through the Suez crisis, the winding down of empire, the Soviet invasion of Hungary. He was briefly in New York during the Kennedy period. Later, he just happened into Cuba during the first days of the revolution but the experience fortunately didn't transform him into instant authority or travel journalist: 'They were shooting people in the sports ground. And no, I didn't hear Castro speak. The place was full of young rebels walking around the street as heroes. It looked exciting, without revealing very much. I went on to Panama and caught a ship going through to Aussie.'

In Australia, in the early fifties, he'd been given a taste of new design ideas while working at Colourgravure in Melbourne. 'Colourgravure was full of brilliant designers. They had a touch for what was then the frontier of what was going on. One guy—he was a bit crazy—used to say 'Want to go and see Mr McGoo?', or some weird animation, or 'Want to have a look at this book?'—it might be *Catcher in the Rye*. For me, that was an introduction to the idea that there were things around done by people who weren't just entertaining or telling stories or playing footy. (Petty used to play, 'in a desperate sort of way, in all positions, all over the place'.)

In England he became friends with a miner and so began the kind of political education Box Hill High School in Melbourne had not prepared him for. 'It was a good school, but maybe these things are too hard to teach. There it was assumed that you rang the bell and some super democracy and justice would just happen. We knew there were mines and miners and that they had a rough time pushing trolleys underground in the 18th century. But what it is like to be a miner in Britain and to have limited access to your country because of your class—I suppose all these connections started to occur to me.'

For a 22-year hopeful the art and design world of 1950s London was also an eye-opener. Not that from Petty you would expect any Germanic seriousness about his formative years. 'I went to London with a lot of rather pretentious designs and illustrations. They were based on what seemed to be the frontier of design then—which was evading anything that looked realistic. I was very impressed with Feliks Topolski. And James Thurber—he didn't seem to know how to draw but he could do these brilliant things. Those sort of people suggested you could have a go. So I went.'

London did not disappoint him. 'It was very energetic, a lot of things happening—plays being written, a lot of new design ideas. The magazines were all flipping over new designs, even *Punch*. Muggeridge was editor then so I took some drawings along.'

What were they like?

'They were pretty weird. I mean I was doing what everyone was doing, trying to draw with different bits of equipment, like quills, broken glass and bottle ends. Searle was drawing then and leaving blots, and all that energy was flowing about on the page, looking good. So we all left blots and we scribbled like Topolski and put in something like Thurber. It was an awful mess. But if I worked hard enough I could get *Punch* to buy a couple a week. I had an agent who thought I might be a cheap Topolski. Topolski would charge 500 quid and I would

do it for ten. But there was a huge difference between what Topolski was doing and what I was doing. I was just trying to wheedle into the business. He was passionately drawing what he felt.'

FOR PETTY, ART, NOT POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT, was the starting point of what was to become a career as a cartoonist. Politics: well—'Politics, just because I chanced to be where it was happening at the time.' So he says. But politics keep cropping up in his travel accounts, mixed with other things but always prominent. Coming home, via America, he stopped in New York and met a cartoonist called Ed Fisher. 'He was drawing terrific things. But he also knew a lot. He was a Sicilian. He knew his own history, he knew other people's history. He had a Bruegel on his wall so I put a Bruegel on my wall when I got home.'

Fisher and the history of an immigrant people made up one New York experience. The other, for Petty, was getting work on *The New Yorker* magazine and failing to meet its most famous cartoonist, James Thurber. Back home in Australia in the sixties, he did commercial art to stay alive, was knocked back by *The Age*, and finally employed on Murdoch's *Sydney Daily Mirror*, almost certainly the only ex-*Punch* and ex-*New Yorker* cartoonist ever to grace its tabloid pages.

Generous people, cartoonists. Petty remarks of Douglas Brass, then editor-in-chief of Rupert Murdoch's papers that, 'He was an interesting surprise because he was a very intelligent, sensitive guy and knew what I was. I shouldn't really have got a job there on the basis of what I'd sent him. I mean I had the *New Yorker* and *Punch* cartoons but that's hardly *Daily Mirror* stuff. But he gave me a go. I stayed there for a few years and then went to *The Australian* when we all went to Canberra for a year or so.'

Petty has been around long enough to see Rupert Murdoch in various phases of political preference. He has himself come and gone as Murdoch sensed a change in public taste. 'In about '74 Murdoch decided that Labor had exhausted its energies. Whitlam had miscalculated and the paper shouldn't be supporting him. So he wanted the paper to look different. He just sensed the mood of the country. I was on the paper through the sixties and he knew then that there was a readership for alternative views of things. I suspect he thought it was

peripheral and wasn't going to last but it was worth a few readers to have me there. I think he was very clever. He's a good editor. If you want someone who knows what people in the street are thinking, he knows it. I mean it is sad that he *just* wants to know them. He is not really interested in advancing ideas or querying orthodox market place views. It's not his business, he would say.

Petty moved to *The Age*. His fellow cartoonist, Larry Pickering, stayed at *The Australian*: 'He was obviously more in touch with what the paper was saying. He was a brilliant cartoonist, I thought and he decided to draw jokes. Which I think is fair enough. There is a way, I think, of drawing politics, extracting the humour out of it. Seeing the sort of perverse side of it in an even sort of way. I mean they're all going to blow it, they're all going to make mistakes. They're on an impossible human course trying to represent an entire country, one as diverse as this, and they only have a few little levers to pull, particularly now. So he decided to draw jokes. I mean he used to draw very powerful political stuff in Canberra and he still does occasionally. I suppose, I don't know his story. I don't know why he draws like he does, but it's marvellously popular and funny. I think that there is a case for just raising people's spirits and being funny. They are golden, those people who do it.'

Pressed on whether it is possible to do more, to raise spirits and awareness, Petty is cautious: 'You can do both. But it is a bit awkward, doing both. I don't know when you start to devalue what you do when you become known as a person of a particular persuasion or a particular point of view. The key to humour is surprise and ambivalence and uncertainty and inverting things. If you keep inverting the same thing endlessly it becomes tedious.'

Which brings us to the nuts and bolts of daily or weekly cartooning. How do artists stay fresh? Are there techniques? Only a fool, of course, would expect a straight answer. 'Stay fresh? I'm not sure that I do ... Sometimes I've got to use the same set of ingredients and think of another analogy. Without using Shakespeare. If you get really pushed, use Shakespeare. In fact I don't much but you know there's a quote from Shakespeare for everything you want to write. Just dress someone up as Macbeth and you're nearly there. Any PM dressed as Macbeth...'



On Murdoch: If you want someone who knows what people in the street are thinking, he knows it. It is sad that he just wants to know.

Politics over the last decade, with its obsessive focus on economics, has not been kind to cartoonists. It is not easy to caricature a rising or falling bank rate or dress up the yen, dollar or Deutschmark as Macbeth. Petty is better equipped than most to cope with recalcitrant subject matter because he has an established style which successfully animates abstract concepts. He talks a lot about economic levers; his cartoons are full of them, and pulleys, mechanisms, machines. For years now he has imagined and commented wryly on complex processes in a fury of articulate lines which no longer owe anything to Topolski. There has been a marked change in another area, however. When he left Canberra, Petty gave away the the characteristic little cabinet clumps and political families. Now, working from Sydney, he says he is not close enough to the details of alignments and misalignments. So no more posies of faces forced into a bunch by expedience; no more malevolent McMahons bucketing colleagues.

[See p. 14] Something of the sport is gone.

BUT IT'S NOT JUST PROXIMITY that is lacking. Petty thinks politics is a changed game. 'It's partly that I think people realise politicians haven't got the answer. It's as though, in a way, we've decided that we've had the big experiments, the key ones being the Soviet one and the East European one, and they haven't worked. They have been seen to be a disaster. Similarly we've had the Whitlam experiment and that was regarded as a failure by most of the community and we've even had the Labor Party experimenting with conservative politics. It's as though something has happened in a global sense that has forced everybody to be suspicious of the pursuit of social justice. Now we've just got to let the market do all these things. I think that's what has happened since '83 all over the world.'

What effect would such a belief have on cartoonists? 'Well it's hard to draw without it being utterly pessimistic. People know this, people know that something peculiar has happened. I don't think it's permanent. I think it will swing. I believe there is another way, but it will take a massive persuasion job.'

As Petty heats up the familiar images from his cartoons emerge in his language. So does the social concern set in train when he was meeting miners in Britain in the 50s: 'Property arrangement on this planet is just

obscene. On the news today it said we've had a Labor government for eight years and the gap between the rich and poor is widening. This is *this* country, this great paradise island—and it's widening. We've given up all the key areas of regulation, and therefore the gap can't do anything but widen. The way it is arranged seems to me to be just so grossly unfair. The power is just given to one set of people and a token set of pieces of different apparatus given to the other and if nothing happens, because nothing seems to happen, it's called balance. You can get a huge element balanced against a tiny one if you put the fulcrum in a special place. That's called called balance, and that's just what we've got.'

When asked if he is in part talking about an agenda for artists and cartoonists when he describes the point of balance we have not got, Petty is forthcoming, but in a measured way; soapbox is not his style. 'I think art—anything that shifts the head around is worth something. I think that the best thing we do—cartoonists generally—is to flip things around, invert things.' As to the rest: 'It is very old fashioned to suggest that people should have ideals and programs. It's very old hat to actually think there is a solution or a good process and a bad process. It used not to be an embarrassment to have reforming zeal but one can hardly use the word now without sounding silly.'

Is he a closet zealot? 'I don't know where I am in the political spectrum or in the reformist spectrum.' But he does know he likes and admires his fellow cartoonists at the *Melbourne Age*. Petty lives in Sydney but goes to Melbourne for the pleasure of their company. 'They are all different, all those artists. that's the key to it. And they are all bright people. Go to lunch and it gets pretty heavy and passionate and funny. I think there is a nice curiosity there. I think the place is probably a bit freaky. And none of us seems to borrow from the other. Except I have a good look at how Les [Tanner] draws people if I want a caricature—see if I've got it right, because I'm not so hot at caricaturing faces as Les.'

And the last touch—what else but a characteristic debunking? 'I do think there is a strange sort of strength there. Partly it's desperation, with people wanting a bit of clarity. But whether we are ever anywhere near the truth or not we do *look* as though we have great insights. There is an awful lot of that around.'



If you really get pushed use Shakespeare. Just dress someone up as Macbeth and you're nearly there. Any PM dressed as Macbeth ...

Facing up to dying

Western society is slowly relearning the skills of caring for people close to death. Adrian Lyons and Kate Lindsey spoke to patients, professionals and family members.

Michael Ashby is director of palliative medicine at Royal Adelaide Hospital, and medical director of the Mary Potter Hospice, Calvary Hospital, North Adelaide.

MICHAEL ASHBY IS GENEROUS with his time, his speech measured and warm as he outlines the new medical and ethical approaches to which he is committed.

In Ashby's view, when life-threatening illness is diagnosed three stages need to be distinguished. These he names as curative, palliative and terminal. The transitions from one mode to another are important and need to be managed gently. People need to be prepared for what is coming.

In curative mode you aim at prolonging survival. In that phase, a doctor accepts a high level of toxicity, even risk of death, in the effort to achieve a cure.

In palliative mode we are dealing with a disease which can neither be eradicated nor achieve complete remission. You treat symptoms such as pain or shortness of breath, but you cannot cure the patient. In this mode any medical intervention should be less toxic. Care is now directed primarily at comfort.

On terminal mode Ashby comments: 'I believe there is a dying process, though it is difficult to define. People deserve the right to say, "I'm going to lay my bones down shortly, and I have lots of evidence that this is

going to happen quite naturally. I have a disease that is progressing. My body systems are failing. I am acknowledging this mentally, and possibly spiritually as well. I have started anticipatory grief in myself, the family have started also, and we are all behaving as if there is something going on here".'

Ashby believes that a person should be told that death is near. 'Truth and honesty are important. Shielding patients from the bad news, colluding to spare them the pain—which goes on on both sides: families protecting patients, patients protecting families—this is a disaster in nearly every circumstance. Only rarely is it the happy way to go. Most people will come to acceptance over a period of time—a few hours or a few days, sometimes longer.'

In the palliative and terminal stages, medical care should aim at providing comfort, with treatment neither burdensome in its side effects nor taking up the dying person's precious time unduly. 'The whole process should be as natural as possible and, if it is the person's wish, most of it take place in the home.'

The idea that you cannot die unless medical professionals know exactly what is wrong with you, exactly where the tumour is, and so on, is foreign to the Ashby approach. Michael remembers medical students' jokes about not allowing people to die unless they are in electrolyte balance.

'We all expect too much of modern medicine—we have been conditioned to expect too much'. Ashby quotes Alistair Campbell, professor of ethics at Otago University, about our need, as a society, to reintegrate death into life. Both men enjoy the words of another Alistair Campbell, the New Zealand poet whose origins are part Scottish and part Pacific Islander:

It will be like this one day
When I sail home to die—
the boat crunching up on the sand,
then wading through warm water
to the beach
the friendly voices
round me in the darkness
the sky dying out
behind the trees of Omoka
and reaching out of hands.
—Alistair Campbell,
Collected Poems, p. 103

For those reared in developed countries, the announcement of impending death can be a huge shock. 'We are used to a great deal of control over our lives, and most of us witness death later and less often than did previous generations. In a cultural sense we have all denied death. In earlier generations babies died commonly, young people died of infections, and world wars engulfed communities directly. Post-war generations have insulated themselves from death and suffering. It is a long way to fall when you do.'



Dr Michael Ashby

Ashby notices an emerging reaction to medical technology. Instead of being impressed by the marvels of modern medicine, many people are asking what impact this technology has had. 'At present there is a kind of yin-yang swing, which of course always overshoots, but I see here a certain consistency with the ecological movement, looking into the box and finding it's rather empty. People now say, "When I'm old and demented, I don't want high-tech medical procedures done to me".'

Modern palliative care is usually dated from the opening of St Christopher's Hospice in London in 1967. At the same time there were important developments in the fields of neurology, physiology and anaesthetics for chronic pain. The focus on palliative care from the hospice side was very low-tech, contrasting with the scientific approach in anaesthetics. Palliative care was the more embracing of the two, looking at comprehensive care, not just pain control.

Ashby speaks emphatically against

the 'mythology' that surrounds the use of opioid drugs—morphine and its pharmacological family members—in treating cancer pain. 'People should now know that using morphine regularly and in sufficient doses to overcome the pain is safe, ethical and does not kill people prematurely. Neither is morphine addictive in those circumstances: there is definitely a balance between drug and pain and side-effects. They definitely do marry up and addiction is not an issue for cancer-pain patients.'

But older attitudes continue both inside and outside the medical profession—'It will take a long time to turn them around.' Given that Michael Ashby is now a speaker in demand at medical conferences, as an educator he is likely to speed that process, to the benefit of patients, families and nursing staff alike.

Annette's husband, Michael, died of cancer.

WHEN MICHAEL WAS 26, and the father of one son with another on the way, he was injured playing sport. Annette remembers joking about it at the time, but when test results revealed a tumour, her laughter ceased. The discovery heralded a nightmare: chemotherapy, lymphograms, more tests, X-rays and surgery. In the early stages of Michael's illness their second son was born. Daily trips to hospital and rigorous courses of chemotherapy later gave way to daily doses of morphine.

In January Michael's left lung was removed; he died in September, at home in Annette's arms. It had been a wearisome, disheartening battle but until the moment Michael died Annette refused to believe that his illness was fatal. She mentions the classical stages of adjustment to loss, only to explain that for her there were none. Together they accepted the cancer but denied the consequences.

Annette recalls the night the specialist told her Michael had only two months to live. 'I remember it clearly, because I was dishing up peas. I told him Michael was not to know.' To save him pain, she decided to absorb the full force of his fate. In both their minds, maintaining a normal lifestyle

was crucial. So Michael headed off to work each morning; they entertained friends and set goals. The sole deviation from normalcy was their daily trip to hospital for the 'chemo' treatment. The doctors had given Michael a 50-50 chance of survival, and he and Annette clung to the prediction like survivors to a buoy.

Annette remains unsure about Michael's own thoughts through that period. Outwardly, to family and friends, he demonstrated remarkable courage and strength—even, Annette suggests, 'a degree of pigheadedness'. His work kept him busy; he enjoyed the dinner parties and social outings. Even after a painful lymphogram, he would pull on socks and shoes and head off to work.

There were times when Annette wondered how aware he was of his future. Occasionally she would catch him watching their boys play, tears streaming down his face. Unable to cope with seeing kids who had leukemia, he changed his regular afternoon appointment at the hospital to a morning one.

Asked to explain what was helpful at the time, Annette replies: 'Friends—and trying to get on with our lives in spite of the tumour.' In an era when cancer was a dirty word, the two of them battled the disease alone, unaided by extended family, medical staff with pastoral training, or professional counsellors. Annette speaks of the frustration, never knowing or understanding what they were facing. Doctors could sometimes be helpful—if you confronted them.

Adequate literature was scarce. There was no liaison with other families struggling with cancer. Neither Cancer Care nor Outreach existed then, and patients were 'bundled home' to battle the turmoil on their own. 'The specialist was great, but he didn't have to change the sheets every night; he could go home and forget.'

If communications had broken down within the family, Annette reflects, there would have been no-one to turn to. It seemed no-one wanted to know. No one said, 'We'll mind the kids for the weekend; you and Michael take off for a while'. Annette's only confidante, a neighbour who often babysat for them, was killed in a car accident during Michael's illness. After his death isolation and confusion

persisted. 'If you are separated from your husband, he takes the kids every second weekend. If he dies, you are alone. And there are no breaks, no time to breathe, let alone grieve.' Annette remembers one woman who sought to console her by saying, 'I know how you feel, my grandfather died last year.' This only added to the frustration.

HOW HAS ANNETTE'S perspective on life changed? 'A lot. I live my life to the fullest and I encourage my children to do the same. No-one knows when they are going to die—and that is not being pessimistic.' Her attitude to God has fluctuated through the years. She was raised a strict Methodist, and during Michael's illness her belief in God was strong. Today it wavers—'Everytime I believe in God, something happens.' Now she is inclined to believe that God has ruined her life.

She speaks of her children: Tom [the younger son] was too young to remember his dad and seems unaffected by the loss. But Chris was four years old at the time, and losing his dad proved a great burden for him. He used to sit and wait for his father to return from work each night. 'The night of Michael's death, Chris was whisked off by his uncle in the middle of the night. Annette intended to explain everything later, but she never had the chance. Chris heard about his father's death on the radio. He has never really recovered, she believes. And when she adopted a 'mask' afterwards, laughing and entertaining, to a confused child it seemed his mother didn't care.

Annette realises now that she should have approached the entire situation differently. More communication was needed between Michael and herself. And they needed to grieve together. Today she is adamant that the boys should have seen their father after he died and had his death explained to them immediately. She speaks to them lovingly of Michael and the times they enjoyed together, and answers their questions about him.

For Annette, confrontation with life-threatening illness has given her strength. Today, given the extensive help available, one hopes the experience of other families will be less traumatic. Much less.



Nicole Rotaru RSM, counsellor with Mercy Hospice Care

FOR NICOLE ROTARU, professional skills have their place but are much less important than the quality of shared experience and the fellow-feeling built through joint discovery. Nicole listens with unusual intensity, listening also, she confides, to the changes within her own self—emotions, inner promptings and the messages carried by her own body. This kind of alertness makes up much of what she offers to others, especially those whose health is precarious. Her work at Mercy Hospice was mainly with people who had cancer. Occasionally, she says, their illness was all too visible but generally it was internal, sensed only through nausea and diffused or concentrated pain.

Nicole recalls her own moments prior to major surgery—minutes of fear, until her woman doctor appeared beside her reassuringly. A moment before, the loneliness was terrifying. 'While I still had to go through the experience of surgery alone, having her presence for that moment enabled me to give myself over.' That kind of presence for others is exactly what Nicole hopes to be.

Nicole is convinced that strong relationships are also crucial for terminally ill people in their efforts to deal with pain and heartbreak. Her own observation suggests that there are many levels to a person's adjustment to cancer. 'There is no sequen-

tial experience, no particular order or set of stages. Rather, every person's dying and death is a unique experience.'

She notes that many people in hospice care demonstrate an intense hunger for knowledge—consuming medical journals, books, newspapers and TV programs with astonishing energy. They seem to find in the information and shared experience a degree of comfort. With their new knowledge, many turn at some point to alternative medicine, experimenting with naturopathic herbs, acupuncture and much else. But if pain returns, says Nicole, they often go back to conventional medicine.

She observes, too, a kind of inbuilt 'she'll be right, mate' attitude, a specially Australian kind of stoic self-control. Instinctively, some hide their emotions in an attempt to protect their family from undue stress. Families can find it specially difficult to cope with the phenomenon of apparent withdrawal, even rejection, while the person facing illness retreats into a sheath of depression. This, Nicole believes, ought to be understood as a necessary reflective time, needed to ease the chaos of an overloaded mind.

NICOLE IS STILL TRYING to reckon with the fear she has felt, and has seen in others, in face of death. In someone known to be religious, an apparent lack of faith at such moments can be very disturbing. Others—usually those with a fairly structured kind of religion—may experience an equally disarming confidence, an inner assurance that God does understand. Such people may welcome death's relief.

In any case, Nicole is sure, hope is absolutely necessary for confronting life-threatening illness. Hope, a pain-free existence, finishing off, patching up old wounds, reflecting on the past—these are components in approaching death peacefully.

Nicole reinforces one's sense of how important it is for everyone to come to terms with terminal illness. In her experience, the way people approach the inevitable generally mirrors the way they made previous life-decisions. Nicole's counsel is implicit in what she does and says: Live! Make the most of this incomparably precious time.

THIS WORK REPRESENTS the collective experience of a group of carers and professionals who have been involved in the support of dementia sufferers. Its purpose is to assist anyone facing the difficulties of caring for someone with Alzheimer's disease or a similar affliction.

The editors are professionals who have worked in support of carers of the demented. Gerry Naughtin, a social worker, is a former director of the Alzheimer Society of Victoria. Terry Laidler, before becoming a radio commentator, worked as a consulting psychologist. Importantly, both editors have gained insight into the disease because dementia has affected the lives of people close to them. I think this personal insight into the onslaught of Alzheimer's gives the book its impact.

The first section of *When I grow too old to dream* is a useful introduction to the syndrome of dementia and the diseases that cause it, highlighting the principal one—Alzheimer's disease. A deliberate attempt has been made to keep this section brief and non-technical but it does suffer from one slight omission: no attempt is made to link what is seen under the microscope and on the brain scan to the behaviour a dementia sufferer might exhibit. My experience is that relatives of Alzheimer's patients benefit from a more detailed explanation, which demonstrates that the problem is due to unavoidable damage within the brain, not to the self-will of the sufferer.

Section two is devoted to the stories; the recollections of professionals and carers of people with dementia. These are the book's great strength: experiences, simply told and carefully edited, of a wide diversity of carers. Also included is the occasional glimpse of the ordeal of dementia told through the eyes of someone with this condition. The problems described include the simple and complex, both practical and emotional, and the details alert one to the diversity of the illness and the flexibility required of carers.

When I Grow Too Old To Dream: Coping with Alzheimer's Disease. Edited by Gerry Naughtin and Terry Laidler, Collins Dove, 1991. ISBN 0 85924 926 3. RRP \$16.99. Reviewed by Leon Flicker.

Section three is an attempt by the editors to draw some tentative conclusions and guidelines to aid in the care of the person with Alzheimer's disease. The section is written well, although some of the editors' conclusions may be contentious. To take one example—the issue of whether or not to tell Alzheimer's sufferers that they have the disease. Many sufferers, even in the mild stages, do not have the ability to retain this information. They experience a catastrophic reaction, one which may be repeated with each subsequent attempt to inform.

However, apart from my having a differing view or emphasis on some of the details, I considered this section to be a mine of simple straightforward advice which may assist many carers.

When I grow too old to dream relates the experience of carers from an Australian perspective and in doing so fills a gap; the use of community services and accommo-

dation varies from country to country, state-to-state and even rural to urban situation. The short bibliography of other books in the area is also helpful.

Lastly, the book would provide useful background material for policy makers and planners of care for the elderly. Dementia may affect up to 80 per cent of nursing home residents and a considerable number of the elderly living in hostels. However, the majority of dementia sufferers continue to live in the general community. It is important for those people involved in changing the framework of existing services, and introducing innovative programs to have full knowledge of the way these services affect dementia sufferers and their carers. ■

Leon Flicker is senior lecturer in geriatric medicine at the University of Melbourne.



Noala Flynn is a hospice administrator.

NOALA FLYNN READ ALL she could about hospice nursing, and waited for her children to grow older, before joining Mercy Hospice Care in Melbourne's western suburbs. She came there after seeing an advertisement, then hearing an address by Sister Margaret Ryan, founder of Mercy Hospice. Then an experience with one of her own children alerted her to the special needs of those facing life-threatening illness, and the needs of their families. 'I had a daughter of my own with leukemia, whom I nursed. I wanted her to die at home but she died in hospital, largely because my husband was keen for her to be there—and I had to think of our marriage, and in fact we worked things out'.

Her time in hospitals, including Catholic hospitals, convinced Noala that something was missing for those facing terminal illness. 'Mainly it had to do with dignity and the family not being present with the person who is ill'. But does every patient want to be accompanied? 'Most want to know that someone with whom they have rapport is around. But many like to be alone. It happens that if you are caring for someone at home, and you go out to put the kettle on, you return to find the person has died. It's as if they waited for you to leave the room.'

Noala now heads the hospice's administration. She is adamant that no one can answer the question, 'How much does it cost to look after a patient?'. One can say how often a nurse or social worker attends a patient or family, and for how long, but emotional, spiritual and psycho-social care cannot be costed.

Noala speaks of a woman patient who has just died. Afterwards, staff remarked, 'Isn't that good'. In Noala's terms, this was 'a good death'. The woman in question was widowed and lived alone. Her son and two daughters wanted her to be in hospital. She insisted, 'I am staying home'. By the last night, says Noala, the family were saying, 'Aren't we wonderful, what we've done'. They weren't talking much, she adds, but they were hugging, which is natural.

Noala says that hospice staff become a little upset when their patients go into hospital. About 85 to 90 per cent of those they nurse die at home, which they see as the point of their work. Hospice staff and volunteers meet people in their homes at critical and privileged times, when families are appreciative—and vulnerable. 'We have a fairly strict rule that our people can go back two or three times after a



Noala Flynn

death, and then it is time to say goodbye and give the family space. They cannot be allowed to fulfil needs of their own by returning over and over.'

For those engaged in hospice nursing, every case is different. 'You can't come in with a formula. The work is creative, and has to be. Some families welcome us as if they've known us all their lives, others are very guarded and have to be allowed time. Even in pain control, no two people are the same. So there is need for excellent nursing skills.

If we offer too much, people are quick to tell us to back off, especially if we are trying to give them something they are not used to having. It's hard to go into a home where there are no sheets on the beds. But many people live in humble fashion, and that's the way they are going to die.'

John Maguire is a cancer patient.

IT'S CANCER. NO IFS OR BUTS.' A seemingly innocent exploratory operation ended in major surgery. 'I went in there thinking the worst would be that I had an ulcer.' At first he was 'rocked' by the diagnosis of a malignant growth. But now he is adamant that he still has a lot of living to do. 'Well, right-oh, what are we going to do about this?' typifies his attitude. 'My family are just having grandchildren now. I may be selfish here, but I would like to see my grandchildren grow up a little bit before I leave this planet.

'I haven't ever needed my wife before quite like this. I can see it has changed her, and also changed the kids.' John feels he has not changed much, but he sees differences in the way family members relate to him. 'They are aware, it seems to me, that dad's not going to be around forever.'

John found encouragement and healing his family's support. Without them his life would lack its vitality and resilience. He remembers that his first thoughts after the operation were for his family. How would he tell them? Who would he tell first? Now, on reflection, he would advise people in such circumstances to take a friend along.

He speaks of some changes the cancer provoked within him. 'It has made me think more about God: I am grateful for everything I have.' He has, he says, no fear of death. Is this only a courageous front to protect his family and friends? John thinks not: 'I am not frightened of when the time comes. We all have to go there one day. I would just like to know that I've got a few years longer.' His cancer is now in remission. 'Now I never put anything off', he adds. Like many cancer victims, John has discovered, perhaps in the hardest way possible, that life is a mystery. He receives many words of encouragement from friends. And stories about cancer sufferers who are fit and well fourteen years down the track help him to face his own future.

John considers himself to have had a rich and fortunate life, and hopes he will be perceived as such.



Caught in the crossfire

Earlier this year two Australian women visited the isolated Marag Valley, in the Philippines, as part of a medical relief team.

Angela Savage and Andrew Nette report

IN 1985 THE MARAG VALLEY in northern Luzon, Philippines, was declared a 'no-man's land' by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) as part of its campaign against the communist New People's Army (NPA). Many Australians know that the Philippines is in a state of civil unrest. Few know the human costs.

Two young Australian women, Sara Waylen and Nadine Liddy, were among members of the first fact-finding mission to enter the Marag Valley in nearly six years. Organised by the Ecumenical Movement for Justice and Peace, the mission's findings belied claims by the military that no civilians have been affected by recent military activities in the area. In particular it noted the devastation of the area's tribal people, the Isneg and the Aggay.

Destruction and resistance are not new to the indigenous tribes of the Marag Valley. For over two centuries they fiercely resisted the missionaries and military forces sent by the Spanish, and were only eventually

subdued during American colonisation in the early part of this century. Conditions worsened under subsequent Filipino governments, particularly during the Marcos administration. Due to sparse population and limited voting power, the Isneg were left to survive without any government support and services. Schools, hospitals and other basic social services, long sought by the indigenous people, have been consistently denied them.

With a mixture of corruption and repression which became institutionalised under Marcos, the plunder of the Marag Valley's natural resources began. When the military finally moved to isolate the NPA in the Marag, the Isneg and Aggay tribes refused to evacuate the area. The spiritual, cultural and material life of this tribal people is inseparable from the land.

For these beliefs they are caught in a battle zone. No one can get in or out of the valley for fear of being shot or arrested as NPA members or sympathisers. Government services are cut off, all forms of restrictions and blockades have been imposed, and roads are guarded by military check-points, denying people access to even the most essential medical provisions and food.

Guides were required to escort the mission team through the forest to avoid hidden pits lined with spikes, placed there by the local people to protect their trees

One of the team's guides stands beside a rice granary destroyed by the military.

photo: Sara Waylen



The funeral of two children who died from pneumonia, contracted while recovering from measles. They are surrounded by their brothers and sisters who, doctors claimed, were also fatally ill.

photo: Sara Waylen

from logging. At least one hundred people, mostly children, had died in the months prior to the arrival of the mission. The displaced tribal people were too frightened to light fires for cooking in case the military traced them. 'They didn't want to rebuild their houses as they were expecting the military to come back,' Ms Waylen said. So efficient had the military destruction been that only one house in the entire area was left standing. People had started planting new rice crops, but it would be several months before they could be harvested. Meanwhile they live on *ubog*, the soft flesh of the rattan plant, coconuts, roots and sugarcane.

When, after five hours' walk, the mission arrived at a huge cave, they found that 500 people had come to meet them, some walking for several days to be there. 'They had high expectations,' Ms Waylen said. 'They thought that we would be bringing a lot of food and clothing. That was hard for the people on the mission, too, to disappoint these people.'

The team cooked what food they had been able to transport and fed as many people as possible. They were then entertained by the tribal people. 'A child recited a poem about the area and there was singing and dancing. After this small 'morale-boosting activity', the doctors sat down with torches and started to treat as many people as they could.'

Health conditions among the tribespeople are appalling. With only the clothes in which they stand,

makeshift shelter, and no soap, they suffer from all the illnesses associated with lack of hygiene such as eye diseases, skin disorders and urinary tract infection. Malnutrition is a major problem, lowering resistance to other diseases.

The tribespeople had extensive documentation prepared for the mission, recording the number of houses destroyed, families displaced, and deaths among the local communities, as well as the number of military people in the region and the dates of bombings.

The government does not keep a record of the number of people forced to leave their homes and villages because of the war in the countryside. The Commission on Human Rights in the Philippines does not consider displacement forced by military operations to be to be a human rights issue.

Military officials deny the existence of refugees. Brigadier-General Lisandoro Abadia, AFP deputy chief of staff, recently told Filipino journalists: 'The other side will take every ounce of advantage to highlight the negative. Refugees? No, it's just media hype.'

Meanwhile, the suffering of groups like the Isneg and Aggay continues. ■

Angela Savage is a postgraduate student at Melbourne University. **Andrew Nette** is a postgraduate journalism student at RMIT.

WE MISSED LUNCH to be early for Manning Clark's funeral. Just as well, because St Christopher's Cathedral filled up rapidly with the many who had come to pay tribute to, and perhaps to pray for, Charles Manning Hope Clark. Surprisingly, the writers and publishers came early: Helen Garner, David Malouf, Murray Bail, Drusilla Modjeska, A.D. Hope, Tom Keneally, Judith Wright, Sara Dowse, Marion Halligan, Robert Drewe, Hilary McPhee. Across the aisle sat Susan Ryan.

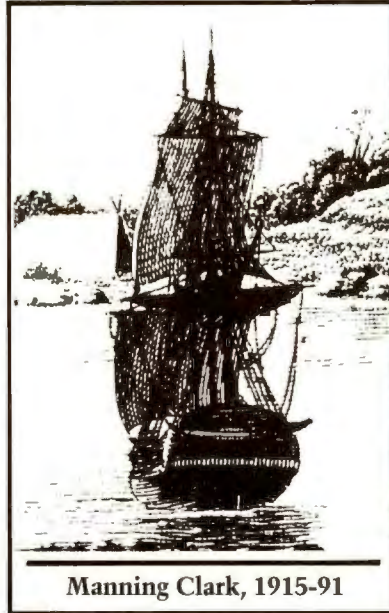
Tony Cahill, editor of *The Journal of Religious History*, and his wife, Rosemary, were soon joined by Melbourne's Noel McLachlan, Jim and Helga Griffin, and John Ritchie of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. Russell Ward was there, and Oliver MacDonagh. When Paul Bourke, director of the ANU's Research School of Social Sciences, came in, war historian Michael McKernan, alongside me, whispered that when he was about to go to the research school for his PhD, Manning Clark had said to him, 'Watch out for yourself up there, Michael ... they think'.

Half the Cabinet seemed to be present: Kim Beazley, John Button, John Dawkins, Neal Blewett and John Kerin. Bob and Hazel Hawke, Paul and Anita Keating and the Haydens arrived in a bunch. Sitting there, I remembered an election 15 years ago when I had asked Manning for a donation towards a mutual friend's candidature. Back came a generous cheque and the message, 'Tell them about the glory'.

An orchestra was filling the cathedral with moody music. Their moment of glory would come with Samuel Barber's *Adagio in C minor*, a musical setting of the unresolved tensions between hope and pragmatism, the theme of each volume of *A History of Australia*. A second peak came when Glen Tomasetti sang an unaccompanied setting of David Campbell's poem, *Windy Gap*.

There was a third high moment when four of Manning's sons spoke nakedly about their father. When Axel Clark spoke I remembered a morning in November 1979 in Sydney's Mitchell Library. There was Manning restlessly turning the pages of bound copies of the Melbourne *Punch*. I knew why he was filling in time there: that morning Axel lay on an operating table nearby, his future very indefinite.

But, of course, for everyone, the day was filled with memories like that. When, at Manning's request, we sang John Henry Newman's *Lead, kindly light*, I recalled sending him, in 1978, a photograph of Newman for his birthday and he replied that a passage from Newman's *Apologia* was central to everything he had written.



Manning Clark, 1915-91

That memory stirred another. Organising a conference for the Newman centenary last year, I had asked him to speak. In an introduction I mentioned that, the next day being the annual City to Surf race, it was worth noting that Newman had been a jogger until well into his sixties. (There is a letter of 1866 in which Newman speaks of running in the Botanical Gardens.) In his address Manning referred to 'muscular Christians' and, when someone asked who they were, replied: 'They're people who believe you can sort out problems of chastity by jogging'.

I remembered another conference with Manning some years earlier. Asked suddenly to introduce him as a speaker, I found myself speaking of Santa Croce Church in Florence, where Michelangelo, Galileo and Dante are commemorated in long Latin sentences carved on their monuments. Among this thicket of words there is one inscription startling in its simplicity: TANTO NOMINI NULLUM PAR ELOGIUM: NICHOLAUS MACHIAVELLI. (No eulogy is adequate for such a great name as Nicholas Machiavelli.) One day, I said, we might say those simple words of Manning Clark.

In fact, at Manning's funeral there was a eulogy, given by another historian, Don Baker, and it was more than adequate. Again memories stirred. When Baker spoke of the savagery of the critics at the appearance of Volume One of the *History* in 1962, we knew he referred to Malcolm Ellis in *The Bulletin*. I thought of a telegram tucked into a copy of Volume Four at home. It had come the day my own review of the fourth volume appeared in *The Bulletin* in 1978: VERY PLEASING TO HAVE SYMPATHY AND UNDERSTANDING IN A PAPER WHICH ONCE BEHAVED TO MY WORK LIKE ALEXANDER THE COPPERSMITH. GREETINGS. MANNING CLARK. (cf. 2 Tim. 4:14)

I once wrote that in all his books Manning Clark addresses a single dominating question: what must one do to be saved? Uniquely in Australia, I said, he wrote salvation history. It wasn't the Bible bashers' individual salvation that engaged him; the whole polity must be caught up in it or it failed—in Joseph Furphy's words, *Aut Australia aut nihil*. It is always pleasing to be understood, he wrote to me, but especially by someone who is enthusiastic about what matters most. Two years earlier, when Volume Six had appeared to plaudits and instant bestseller status, 25 years after the publication of Volume One in 1962, he sent a card: 'I hope that since 1962 I have learned something about GRACE. Who knows?' Well, he knows now, I thought, standing in the Canberra sunshine and watching his well-loved family take him away. He knows now. ■

—Edmund Campion

Trusting the scorpion

Reflections on the Middle East

AFROG SAT ON THE BANK of the Nile. A scorpion approached him and said, 'Frog, please give me a ride across the river on your back.' 'Don't be absurd', replied the frog, 'You will sting me, it's in your nature.' 'Nonsense,' replied the scorpion, 'If I did that, we would both drown, and I wouldn't get to the other side, which is what I want to do.' The frog, won by the irreproachable logic, not to say self-interest of the scorpion, said 'Okay, hop on.'

They were about half way across, when the frog felt the scorpion sting him fatally. As they both sank beneath the surface, the frog said, 'O Scorpion, why have you done this foolish thing, which will destroy both of us?' The scorpion shrugged and replied, 'You must understand, my friend, this is the Middle East.'

This fable, told to me by a friend who had worked as a surgeon in a Middle Eastern country for three years, expresses well one sense of that region. Even self interest does not put a limit on serial betrayal. Such a view is, no doubt, a reprehensible act of intellectual despair, yet so extreme are the experiences, so baffling the shifts, that even the best observers fall into such a state. Thomas Friedman, who has attracted criticism from both Arab and Israeli with honourable equality, is not immune to it and eloquently re-lives moments of terror and disorientation which sit alongside his lucid analyses of the roots of the Beirut catastrophe.

Indeed, Friedman's book gains much of its considerable power from the refusal to adopt a self-effacing 'historical'

Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War. Robert Fisk, OUP paperback, 1990. ISBN 0 19 285235 3 RRP \$19.95. **From Beirut to Jerusalem.** Thomas Friedman, Fontana paperback, 1990. ISBN 0 00 637600 2 RRP \$14.99. **The Slopes of Lebanon.** Amos Oz, Vintage, 1991. ISBN 0 09 974750 2 RRP \$12.95. **Arab and Jew.** David K. Shipler, Penguin Books, 1987. ISBN 0 14 010376 7 RRP \$18.95.

approach on the one hand, or a relentlessly 'personal' narrative on the other. He has felt the grit and blood of Lebanon on his skin, but he has troubled himself with the past as well, and brings the immediacy and historical explanation together in a way which provides, in one reviewer's encomium: 'a lifeline to the sane'.

If Friedman provides one kind of exemplary model, Robert Fisk offers another. The focus in *From Beirut to Jerusalem* remains clearly on the explanation, by large scale historical and political means, of the baffling and unforgettably re-lived experiences of the author in the two cities of the title. Robert Fisk, on the other hand, offers

something a little closer to orthodox historical narrative of the Lebanon experience from 1976 to the late 1980s, with his own experiences providing the anchor. Fisk's account is tough and spares no-one, least of all Israel. This is not a review of these two large and complex books; it is, rather, one reader's reflections on the contribution they make to a perfect layman's understanding of these matters. They are books which should be read by anyone whose understanding of the Middle East is to progress beyond the arid stereotypes of political debate.

To take one example: it will be a long time before anyone who saw it could forget the sight of Palestinians cheering at the news of rocket attacks on Tel Aviv, and, so, it is said, inciting Baghdad to use its chemical weapons on that target. The hard question must be asked: are those people to be dismissed as crazed and wicked as readily as their behaviour suggests? If we wish to find the source of such desperate and barely comprehensible



Amos Oz (photo: © Sally Soames)

behaviour one answer is that it is to be found in the Palestinians' history, and, in large part, from the irruption of Israel into that history. If even a fraction of what is to be found in Fisk and Friedman is to be believed, Israel has acted far too often with quite unsupportable oppressiveness towards its neighbours and its own Arab population. These wrongs are not confined to the invasions of Lebanon, but go back to the very foundations of Israel.

This, however, is not to say for a moment that Israel has no right to exist, or even to give respectability to such a position, but it does involve attempting to understand that the dispossessed, who believe that the Israeli state was erected and still stands on the pulverised remains of their culture, have reasons, which seem good to them, for supposing that it does not.

Nonetheless, as Friedman points out, it is in the recognition by its Arab neighbours of the Israeli state's right to exist that the major key to peace is to be found. The dealings of Israel with Egypt demonstrate this irrefutably. It is the proper task of Israeli statecraft, and in the true long term interests of that state, to make that concession less and not more bitter for those to whom it owes its land. The possibility that such a policy, by which I mean a policy of justice, will be pursued, seems remote indeed, and the seeds of generations of despair are planted daily on the West Bank.

YET ISRAEL, small as it is, is intensely pluralistic. Some idea of the complexity of Arab-Israeli relationships within Israel itself is to be found in David Shipler's *Arab and Jew*. This important book delves into the fears, shibboleths, clichés and models by which ethnic and political relationships are governed in Israel as anywhere else. One of the most poignant stories is given in support of one witness's view that it is in the older generation of Zionists that a sense of betrayal of the original dream is principally to be found:

'I see my father, he is eighty-five. He is a broken man. He doesn't know what happened, what hit him. You see, he came here in 1991 from Greece. My mother came in 1921 from Lithuania. They say, "What happened to my dream?" They are both socialists. They



Photo: © James Nachtwey

came here to build a new society, a just society. They believed it shouldn't be at the expense of Arabs; they really believed that. And now when they see the turn, what is now the meaning of nationalism, and they can no longer reconcile it with humanistic values, they are broken. '(p.503)

Measured optimism can be derived from some writers and organisations. One of the former is Amos Oz the Israeli novelist and essayist, a number of whose works are now available in translation in Australia. In his essay 'Make Peace Not Love', Oz demonstrates a fine sense of realism and balance. The peace between Israel and the Palestinians must be based on the real interests of each people:

'The battle is not a 'defence' of the Palestinians or support of their cause. We should emphasise the necessity, the logic of the partition of the land between its two peoples, and the advantages it will bring. We must recognise that Israeli gut anger at Palestinian 'behaviour' is at least as understandable and legitimate as Palestinian anger at us. In short, we are talking about peacemaking, not a honeymoon: *Make Peace, Not Love ...*(p.226)

Frog and scorpion, determinism and evil: whilst we cannot offer, much less impose, solutions in these interlocking cultures, instinct as they are with a burning sense of ancient wrongs, we can tidy up our own levels of intellectual debate. Books like those I have mentioned, from both within and without Israel, profitably displace myths whether of the PLO or of Israeli state propaganda, even as they give body to the terrifying environment in which Israel finds itself, and to the instability of which it has so clearly contributed. It would be a tragedy should the great experiment of Israel sink into a Levantine Sparta, with a permanent Helot population.

I began these reflections with a fable, which expressed the incomprehensibility of the Middle East to many. Yet there are simple ways of comprehending violent and culturally dislocated behaviour. In Auden's dark true words: 'Those to whom evil is done, do evil in return'.

M.J. Crennan is a Melbourne barrister.

TIM WINTON PUTS A LOT OF FAITH IN kids. In one of his stories, 'A Blow, a Kiss', a boy is riding along in a truck on the way home from fishing with his father. They have seen a young man come off a motorbike, taken him into town and stood by mute while the rider's father attacks his injured son. Now the boy and his dad are lost in thought on their own sides of the truck cabin.

Eventually, the dad reaches across and touches the boy's cheek with his knuckles and the boy knows 'full to bursting that that was how God would touch someone.' It's as simple as that. Neither of them speaks and the truck keeps trundling on. Except for the kid, you'd be stranded between the brooding of one loving father and the violence of another. Neither of them finds words. The boy does.

The extent to which teenagers respond to this story in the classroom hardly surprises me. Nor does it surprise me that Tim Winton has tried his hand at stories for young readers. The hero of *Lockie Leonard*, *Human Torpedo* has just turned 13. The book has a wonderful eye for the smells and drama and breakfast chaos of a household in which that makes him the eldest kid. Nothing is ever good or bad—it is 'awesome' or 'mega-foul'. But Lockie Leonard stands his ground on surfing and friendships and his belief in God. The book moves a huge vote of confidence in his simple integrity.

I THINK THERE'S a clue here for getting under the skin of a book as sophisticated as Winton's new novel, *Cloudstreet*. The title comes from the address of a rambling and ramshackle house at No.1 Cloud Street in which two families, the Lambs and the Pickleses, rattle around for twenty years and four hundred pages. But the title also indicates the boarding up together of water and bitumen, heaven and earth, the sublime and the ridiculous.

On the one hand, *Cloudstreet* is cluttered with cars, boats, watermelons, Avery scales, tubas, motorbikes, and all kinds of other stuff besides. If ever they film this novel they will need a long, long list of props; such is the imagination that furnishes every

detail of the house. But there's more to this than variety and colour. There are nine children living in the house and each of them navigates a tricky course around life's accidents. They are cast into the deep end and, by and large, bring back a depth of understanding. A kid's journey of discovery is nothing if not scenic. In that respect *Cloudstreet* stands apart from David Ireland's *Bloodfather*. Ireland takes young David Blood on a journey of discovery like a monk in a bare cell where he unearths his creativity in going an endless, unbroken round of the bush, the family woodpile and his stack of drawing paper.

There is much more give and take between heaven and earth in *Cloudstreet*. The house imposes its personality on the people living there and vice versa. When the Lambs get going on setting up a shop in the front room of their half, and Sam Pickles, having lost the fingers off his working hand, looks on helplessly, then it's 'as though the place was an old stroke victim

paralysed down one side'. The house becomes synonymous with the life within it.

Cloudstreet is a book about families and extended families, relationships under pressure, relationships that you can't slip out of without sliding further in. In this case pressure comes not from a father and son being held between two sides of a truck, as in 'A Blow, a Kiss' until something, almost imperceptibly, starts to give. The pressure in *Cloudstreet* comes from nine kids and their wayward parents living between the walls of a talking house.

A HOUSE WITH MANY ROOMS is not an uncommon vessel for holding an unlikely team of characters together under pressure. You can think of Peter Carey filing his cast away at the end of *Illywhacker* into cages in a Pitt Street arcade-turned-cathedral-turned-meagerie. Or perhaps of the maze of relationships within a block of flats in George Perec's *Life: A User's Manual*.



Elizabeth Jolley tells the story the other way round in her novel, *Cabin Fever*, in which a single mother is isolated with her memories in a room on the 24th floor of a New York hotel. The heat of the room and the anonymous noises on every side build up a discomforting pressure on the woman; the only release valve is the unfussed voice of the front desk on the other end of the phone. But *Cloudstreet* is a more purposeful book than any of these because the pressure on the characters is neither a way of squeezing the plot into more and more strange turns and contortions nor a way of toying with the human mind until it can take no more. I suspect, on the contrary, that it is a way of imagining God.

LET ME EXPLAIN. Two of Winton's images of God come to mind. The first is of an old man in *In The Winter Dark*. This man has killed his wife and sworn a neighbour to secrecy. He calls himself Legion and sits on his verandah at night when 'the dark begins to open up like the car of God and I babble it all out'. The darkness does not respond; it is a wall through which he can't escape.

That Eye the Sky offers the converse image. A kid is growing up in a family that, in the face of sickness, is struggling to keep going on the dole. A stranger turns up, a messiah of sorts, who, 'having just dumped God all over us', finally walks out of the novel as nonchalantly as he walks in. But in the meantime he has taught the boy to find his place under the broad canvas of the sky rather than within the claustrophobic family. The kid picks up a new way of looking at things: 'Everything stinks of God, reeks of him'. Even if the boy never goes anywhere, it is still an escape story.

Cloudstreet is balanced between these two images. In due season the house offers unimaginably broad horizons as well as the problem of living always with your family and your past. It's a little different from David Malouf's latest novel in which the question is how much experience endured out there in *The Great World*, experience such as imprisonment in Changi, can come home comfortably to roost in a shop by a river. No.1 Cloudstreet is itself a shop by a river. It is also the great world.

People do try to get out of the house in Cloud street. Oriel Lamb for one. She is the mother of six, runs the shop downstairs and has a passion for order and control. On New Year's Day 1949 she moves out of the chaos and pitches a tent as a kind of a command post on the back lawn. The real reason for this move is a mystery to her but Oriel thinks the house is saying 'wait, wait'. Eventually she comes to accept the house, her family and her disabled son on their own impossibly open-ended terms. But to say more is to give the story away.

Quick Lamb, her son, also moves away. He has grown under a burden of guilt for the fact that a brother, Fish Lamb, once came to grief and has had

Cloudstreet. Tim Winton, McPhee Gribble Penguin Books Australia, 1991. ISBN 0 86914 224 0 RRP \$18.95
Other books mentioned: **Lockie Leonard, Human Torpedo** (McPhee Gribble) **Bloodfather** (Penguin) **Illywhacker** (QUP) **Life: A User's Manual** (Collins Harvill) **Cabin Fever** (Penguin) **In the Winter Dark** (McPhee Gribble) **That Eye the Sky** (Penguin) **Oceana Fine** (Allen & Unwin) **The Great World** (Picador) **Swallows** (Unwin paperback)

a 'strange brain' ever since. Quick finds his way onto the West Australian wheat fields which, in Winton's evocation, are as much a place of featureless violence as they are in Tom Flood's haunted novel, *Oceana Fine*. Three times an Aboriginal figure appears to him. Aboriginal messiahs are a commonplace in Australian writing, but this one has a pin-striped suit. Each time the figure sends him home, back to the Lambs, and in case you miss the allusion, one such appearance is accompanied by a miraculous draught of fish.

Malouf's *The Great World* creates in Jenny Keen, 'simple' sister of an ex-PoW, a closedness to the friends and experience that her brother brings back. She is, in the eyes of strangers, 'like a big fish that had just been hauled out of the river and stranded'. Her one area of competence is making scones. Fish Lamb, the silent hero of *Cloudstreet*, is, as his name suggests, also stranded. He actually drowned as

a child but was brought back to life by the determination of his mother, Oriel. He spends the rest of the novel 'stuck somewhere ... in another stuckness altogether. Like he's half in and half out'.

WINTON RESTS ALL HIS FAITH ON THE likes of Fish Lamb. In the death of a friend, Fish helps his brother, Quick Lamb, 'discover how quiet he was inside'. In some mysterious way, Fish is responsible for the end of World War II. Furthermore, Fish becomes associated with a particular room at the dead centre of the house, in 'no man's land' between the two families. The room has no windows, a piano and eyes in the walls where shelves used to hang. It was once a library but stays empty because it gives people the creeps. Fish Lamb goes off to this room when distressed and plays the piano. The place and the person together lament the changes that have taken place at No.1 Cloudstreet.

Winton puts his faith in the birth of a child to redeem the darkest corner of the house. Winton's writing often stands still for the birth of a child. In one story, 'Neighbours', a wary academic finds in the birth of his child that 'the 20th century novel had not prepared him for this'. Elsewhere, the two political activists who are driven out of town in the novel *Shallows* return in a later story with their child, Dot, whose life, we discover, has been the occasion of profound healing.

The demons of Cloudstreet are also overpowered by the birth of a child. When Quick Lamb finally returns from his travels, his wife, Rose Pickles from next door, has a baby in Fish's library. The birth exorcises the spirits from the walls of that room and opens up the next stage of Fish's journey: 'Life was something you didn't argue with because if you bartered for God or nothing at all, life was all there was. And death.'

This is typical of the cycle of old and new, freedom and guilt, pain and joy that is kept in motion between the walls of a house which is big enough for 'the shifty shadow of God' and 'Lady Luck' to happily share. There are not rooms in this house but mansions. ■

Michael McGirr is a student at Jesuit Theological College, Parkville, Vic.

Women, sex and sin

Peter Brown, biographer of Augustine and historian of the early church, visited Australia in April. K.E. Power examines Brown's work on the origin of Christian attitudes to asceticism and sexuality.

IT WOULD TAKE A PLODDING AUTHOR indeed to render a study of sexual symbolism, sexual renunciation and the body dreary reading. And Peter Brown is anything but dreary. He is a lucid and elegant scholar, whose metaphorical prose conveys the passionate concerns of men in antiquity. Isay 'men' advisedly, because although Brown has subtitled his book 'Men, women and sexual renunciation', we are, as he himself points out, dealing with evidence 'written exclusively by male authors ... it is a comfortable and dangerous illusion to assume that, in much of the evidence, the presence of women is even sensed by its male authors'.

Although, by virtue of the concern with sexual behaviour, it was hard for early Christian men to avoid the topic of women, we have very few sources that give a woman's perspective on this topic and some we do have, such as *The Life of St. Cyprian of Antioch* by Eudokia, are, regrettably, not mentioned by Brown at all, although he does touch briefly on the *Acts of Perpetua and Felicitas*. Therefore, it should not be assumed that the concerns and experiences related in the sources would stand unchallenged or unaltered by women's experience. Sometimes in Brown's writing he appears to lose sight of this and writes of women's experience as if we had it first hand (pp. 272-273).

Brown's principle concern in *The Body and Society* 'has been to make clear the notions of the human person and of society implied in such renunciations, and to follow in detail the reflection and controversy which these notions generated, among Christian

The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity. Peter Brown, Faber and Faber, London and Boston, 1990.

writers, on such topics as the nature of sexuality, the relation of men and women, and the structure and meaning of society'. Brown clearly defines sexual renunciation as 'continence, celibacy, lifelong virginity as opposed to observance of temporary periods of sexual abstinence', but he uses 'sexuality' more loosely to include 'human sexual feelings' (p. 352); 'sexual differences and the behaviour appropriate to them' (p. 383); and 'a facet of social relations' (p. 388).

THIS REFLECTS ONE of the difficulties in studying such a topic today. The term 'sexuality' has become so broadly used, it tends to be assumed that all usage is synonymous. This is a dangerous assumption. For some, sexuality simply indicates sex differentiation and the behaviour consequent upon this biological given. For others in the social sciences, it is a social construct as much as a biological given; it connotes the individual's experience and interpretation of being a sexed human being, within social structures which attach symbolic meaning to maleness and femaleness. Social scientists will use 'gender' and 'masculine and feminine' to speak of sexual differentiation, and stereotypical views of male and female behaviours, while some linguists and historians (including Brown) wish to reserve such terms for linguistic gender

alone.

While Brown never explicitly sets his study within cultural anthropological models such as that developed by Mary Douglas in *Natural Symbols*, his research clearly reveals the way in which cultural and religious systems attach profoundly symbolic meaning to the body, and use the body to express important concerns about marriage, procreation, friendship, especially friendships between men and women, and social boundaries. For example, in the early church of Hermas, Christian men and women would think nothing of bathing nude before slaves of either sex, because the social distance between them rendered the slave virtually a non-person.

Any response would have been totally inappropriate, although not unthinkable, as Hermas relates in *The Shepherd*. The rise of asceticism, and the emphasis on the commonality of sexual shame propounded by the Latin Fathers in late antiquity, would eventually bring about a consciousness of the nude body similar to that attributed to Adam and Eve after the fall. Recognising their nakedness, and self-conscious before their slaves, they would end mixed bathing and public nudity. By the early medieval period, the church, and not the ancient city, was the arbiter of the body (p. 437).

However, to think of attitudes to sexual renunciation developing along a simple continuum would be mis-



Venus detaining Adonis by Luca Cambiaso

leading. One of the achievements of Brown's work is that he makes clear the differing weight brought to bear upon the 'body', and the diverse meanings that sexual renunciation could carry. Each chapter begins with a brief synopsis of the history and theology of the writer or the theological tradition under discussion, and places them within a historical and geographical context. However, there is a sense in which his book reminded me of a painting, so crammed with detail and incidents, that a central focus for the eye is missing. In *The Body and Society*, timelines and narratives overlap, connections and dis-

junctions between theological stances are revealed, all needing concentration and reflection.

I found the timeline at the beginning of the book an invaluable aid for locating any particular stream of thought in relation to other authors or traditions, and to visually place and connect people, because although the book moves forward from the first century to the fourth of the Common Era, chapters move back and forth in time as specific traditions with overlapping timelines are examined. This is not to say that this is a difficult book. It is eminently readable and quite accessible to those who have no

prior knowledge of this topic. I found it illuminating and interesting to discover aspects of the ascetic movement that had not been part of my previous reading.

BROWN IS A HISTORIAN studying the history of a theological ideal, and herein, for me, lay a limitation. In his concern to evoke compassion for the early Christian ascetics, and believing that to enter into their perceptions and understanding is to make their stance fully comprehensible, he presents all approaches to renunciation as equally valid and acceptable. His imaginative prose can lull the critical faculties into accepting his representation of the ancient mindset.

Sometimes it seems as if Brown is bending so far backwards in order to be fair, that he minimises the darker aspects of sexual renunciation, and raises the question as to how far it is possible to stand in the shoes of people from 'a long-extinct and deeply reticent world' (p. xvii). For example, his argument that the desert fathers perceived the body positively 'as the discreet mentor of the proud soul' (p. 237) is not easily substantiated from his sources. At best a profound ambivalence about the body and its needs permeates the texts. Therefore, readers seeking a theological perspective will need to evaluate the traditions for themselves.

This is particularly important in the case of St Paul and Augustine, who stand at the beginning and end of the work: Paul as the basis for the two-tier structures which would develop in both Manichaean and Christian traditions, and Augustine who would weave Christian asceticism, attitudes to the body and to desire, and, thereby, relationships between men and women, into a complex theology of *concupiscentia carnis* and original sin.

Paul was extremely important for the advocates of sexual renunciation, partly because the later traditions that were heirs to the Pauline yearning for singleness of heart to be achieved through celibacy had lost sight of his historical and theological context, namely, the imminent *parousia* (the return of the Lord). Thus, in the earliest Christian writing were sown the seeds which flowered into an understanding

that to love sexually was not to love God in the other, but to be distracted from the love of God, to be the possessor of a divided heart.

PAUL'S DISTINCTION between the life of the flesh and the life of the spirit was also sometimes misunderstood by ascetic writers of a later age. In a world influenced by the philosophy of Plato and Plotinus, it was almost inevitable that Paul's distinction would be reduced to a dualistic opposition between body and soul. Interestingly, this was an error Augustine did not make. But, *pace* Brown, sexual desire was singled out by him as the most potent aspect of *concupiscentia carnis* (carnal desire). Basing his statement on *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 10.20.36, (c. 401) Brown asserts that 'sexual desire was no more tainted with this tragic faceless concupiscence than was any other form of human activity'.

In *The City of God*, 14.16 (c. 418), however, Augustine wrote, 'Although lust may have many objects, yet when no object is specified, the word lust usually suggests to the mind the lustful excitement of the organs of generation. And this lust not only takes possession of the whole body and outward members, but also makes itself felt within and moves the whole man with a passion in which emotion is mixed with bodily appetite, so that the pleasure which results is the greatest of all bodily pleasures. So possessing indeed is this pleasure that, at the moment of time in which it is consummated, all mental activity is suspended.'

A further aspect of Augustine's thought that has placed sexual behaviour at the heart of *concupiscentia carnis* is the sexual response of the body as the *poena reciproca* (reciprocal punishment) for sin. Augustine reasoned that the fact that the sexual response was uncontrolled by the mind and will, (and impotence is as significant as the unwilling erection), was a reciprocal punishment for the rebellion of Adam and Eve against God.

As they rebelled against God, so the body rebels against the will, reminding all people for all time of pri-

mal sin. The doctrine of original sin, whereby sin is passed from generation to generation via the sexual act, because the male seed has been vitiated or corrupted by original sin, further reinforces the connections between concupiscence and sexual desire. The Catholic tradition has carried the legacy of Augustine into our own era.

Brown, in depicting the subtle distinctions of the various ascetic traditions, where behaviours may seem



St Augustine, from Stephansdom, Vienna

identical, yet spring from very different interpretations of the virginal ideal, has necessarily had to focus on each school of thought as a discrete entity to achieve his stated aim. And in this, he has been most successful (subject to the caveats stated above).

An ascetic lifestyle that originates in the belief that after Jesus men and women can live as angels on earth, transcending the need for procreation and thus hastening the Parousia, feels very different from one which begins by seeing the body as intrinsically corrupt. Another important development that he points to is the interconnection between a celibate lifestyle, an elite Christian status, and ecclesiastical power. Hence when Jovinian is condemned as heretical for stating that all Christians are equal in Christ, married or celibate, Brown sees the heart of the matter to be the implicit challenge to celibate ecclesiastical

power.

This nexus of continence and power bears further study, because continence did not necessarily give women access to power in this period, even though they were perceived as 'virile' women. Rather, one of the issues in the fourth century was precisely why they should not have power, even when continent. This is in marked contrast to the second century ascetic tradition in the *Acts of Thecla*, which legitimated Christian female authority.

However, in studying the whole canvas of Brown's thought, I could not help but be struck also by the things that the ascetic tradition has in common: strong need for control, and a wrestling with the fact of human limit in our very bodiliness. In societies where certain men and women have very little autonomy, their bodies easily become the locus of control. Today, in our own culture, we see an aspect of this in the phenomenon of *anorexia nervosa*. I suspect that an anorexic young woman returned to the encratites of these early centuries would be hailed as a saint. And the question of 'how much control is "enough"?' is a vexed one. It is interesting that in this regard, Brown does not advert to Jerome's descriptions of the saintly Paula, whose wasted body had removed her from the constraints of sexuality.

THE OTHER POINT that struck me most forcibly, particularly with regard to Augustine, was how much male experience of sexual response has determined theological thinking. The concept of sexual desire as the *poena reciproca* for sin is based on the male experience of a penis uncontrolled by the will. Similarly men could 'use women to think with', as Brown puts it, because women were perceived as less defined and less securely 'bound' by social structures (p. 153). Also, the charged symbolism acquired by the virginal bodies of women specifically by the late fourth century seems to have been largely determined by male concerns; according to Brown, virginal women became 'prized by the

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Madness, asceticism and martyrdom

Paul Collins: *The historian E.R. Dodd says, 'Where did all this madness come from?' I suppose the first question that occurs: Is it madness? And then the second question is: Where did it all come from? But let's tackle that one. Where does the Christian notion of asceticism come from?*

Peter Brown: As an historian, one's much less interested in where things come from than what they mean once they are there. If you ask where does asceticism come from you are implicitly saying it doesn't belong here, it comes from somewhere else. It's like asking where do the weeds in your garden come from. My feeling is that in fact what a historian can say isn't where asceticism comes from but what it actually means.

Certainly by the time you reach St Paul's [first] Letter to the Corinthians, it seems to me that to give up marital relations is obviously to give up a notion of a physical future for the religious group. It's a way therefore of making time stand still. A religious group whose members or leaders do not marry—do not therefore have physical children—is obviously very different from a religious group whose members and leaders marry and have physical children.

Therefore the issue is not how much sex do you have. That is Jewish society—very insistent on marriage, very insistent on begetting of children, equally insistent on long periods of sexual abstinence. Much more, it is how do you look at time? How do you estimate the way in which society continues itself? Ultimately, are you so convinced, as in the case perhaps of Paul, of the coming of the Lord, that even to set about physical continuity—it's not simply that it is not worthwhile doing it, but that *not* doing it is a symbolic way, one might almost say a magical way, of bringing the end of time into your own time.

This is a society we must remember which has no banking system like our own, which has very few ways of talking about continuing society other

than through the physical reproduction through the family. So to ask an inhabitant of 1st century Palestine to forego sexual relations that would lead to children, is very like us asking people to forego interest-bearing savings accounts. It's a statement about what the future is like.

Does that indicate that Christianity was an extremely radical religion by ancient standards?

I think that by ancient standards certain areas of Christianity were much more radical than we sometimes like to think. There is always a tendency in invoking the early church, to read back our own, highly socialised notions of Christianity. With somebody like Paul for instance, if one reads the letter to the Corinthians carefully, we must realise that we only have half the correspondence.

Paul's Letter to the Corinthians is an answer to a letter from the Corinthians. Paul in some ways, particularly in 1 Corinthians 7 is answering a group that wishes to be more radical than he is. He is saying, in principle it might be a good idea to have no marriage, but on the other hand there are certain conditions in which you *can* have marriage. That is, we're dealing with two wings of a very radical movement arguing with each other.

One of the things that is characteristic of the early church is the whole business of martyrdom. Given that for the first two and a half centuries the Church was a persecuted minority, at least on and off, and then when the whole business of martyrdom ceases with Constantine, does 4th century asceticism become a replacement for that cult of martyrdom?

Well, we first of all have to define very carefully what martyrdom is. Martyrdom is above all, and this is very important, a public act. Seeing that the Romans had a particular zest for fully public executions, martyrdom was inevitably something somebody saw and was amazed by. That's impor-

tant. The element of pain in martyrdom is not nearly as important as the fact that it is a public act. As the persecutions were themselves very random and arbitrary, this in fact made the courage required for a person to endure martyrdom even more rare, that is, it required courage, or pigheadedness and very often ascetic commitment to even be in the firing line for martyrdom.

Therefore the shift from what in later Celtic terminology you call the red martyrdom of blood, to white martyrdom of sexual abstinence is perhaps rather more subtle than one thinks. Certainly by the middle of the 4th century, you would view the great ascetics of the desert like St Antony, later St Symeon Stylites in Syria, as heirs of the martyrs, not because they were suffering, (this is very important), not because they were on some masochistic trip but because they were also public signs of Christian heroism.

Death wasn't so important to martyrdom as conflict, and this conflict was very much seen to be with the invisible demonic power behind the persecution. Therefore a martyr facing death for the faith under a demonically inspired persecution is not seen as so very different from the living martyrdom of a hermit suffering from both the hostility of the desert and the imagined assaults of Satan.

And that's obviously why Satan appears so often in the life of St Antony and in the Desert Fathers.

Oh yes. Without any doubt. What I think we have to always remember is the extremely agonistic element of Christianity at this time. It is a religion pitched against invisible enemies. And in some ways you render the invisible enemy present and conquerable precisely by braving it. ■

Paul Collins is presenter of ABC Radio National's *Insights* program. This material is taken from interviews broadcast on *Insights*, and on *Books and Writing* with Robert Dessaix.

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members of a storm-tossed urban clergy' as a symbol of continuity in its most pure state, 'a wellshaft of deep certainty for which they themselves thirsted' (p. 271), and he acknowledges that the 'studied misogyny of much ascetic literature ... was mobilised as part of a wider strategy' to keep the 'world' and the 'desert' apart (p. 243).

The Body and Society is an important and timely study. Although Brown specifically limits himself to Christian traditions, his introductory chapters provide an excellent presentation of the Græco-Roman context of the early church, and illustrate well the elite attitudes to sexual behaviour created by philosophy, which provided fertile soil for the ascetic movement.

Scholars may well want to evaluate critically the more complex aspects of Brown's thought. Those interested in women's history may be rather disappointed that Brown usually takes for granted the 'soiled coin' of antique misogyny, without even mentioning the fourth century debate as to whether women were made in the image of God, a topic centrally connected to bodiliness and sex; at the core, the concerns about the body and sexual behaviour are concerns about what it means to be human, and how to live fully that humanity in relation to God and other people. ■

K.E. Power is a doctoral student in religious studies at La Trobe University.

Windows on eternity

Windows on Eternity: Icons at St Marys Cathedral Chapter Hall Museum, Sydney.
Exhibition open until October 30

The title is promising but the Chapter Hall exhibition does not shed light, argues
Joanna Mendelssohn

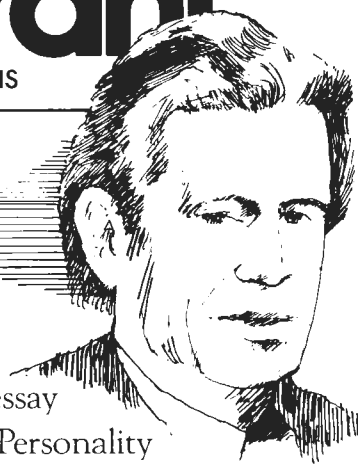
I ALWAYS FEEL A BIT UNCOMFORTABLE about the notion of cathedrals as museums. The two institutions do, it's true, have different functions. Or maybe not. After all, hordes of pilgrims religiously go to worship the relics of past civilisations in museums around the world, and many of the great churches of Europe are now common stopovers for camera-snapping tourists. In 1981, during a visit to the magnificent Gothic cathedral of Siena I stopped, of necessity, to breast-feed my baby, only to be besieged by a horde of Leica-toting German tourists who were beaten off only by the best protective efforts of my husband. These are multi-functional times it seems, so perhaps it is reasonable for St Marys to rename the old chapter house and start showing art exhibitions.

The last one was of recent paintings by Joe Felber, a younger generation artist recently returned from extensive European travel. Quality art with a vaguely religious subject matter. But now the subject is icons, and all my misgivings about the involvement of the church in museums returns. There are icons which are great works of art. Any visitor to Russia should spend

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some days just studying medieval icons in the Hermitage. They are overwhelming in their perfection: everything is balanced, just right. They are of course the best, the ultimate products of a society that understood faith as a visual and sensual experience. But despite a widely held belief to the contrary, the Russians are not silly and the best examples stay in the Soviet Union.

But not all the quality is locked up in Mother Russia. Some goodies left after the revolution, and some of these have even travelled to Australia. There are a few icons in the National Gallery of Victoria which repay long scrutiny, and some years ago the University of Melbourne art gallery held a small scholarly exhibition of icons within Australia. I was hoping that the Cathedral had followed this modest example, but it has chosen the alternative of chocolate box kitsch.

What the cathedral has produced in this exhibition of icons and other objects is a meeting of 19th century Irish devotional Catholicism with its Eastern European equivalent in what could be most accurately described as a 'festival of Mary'. Most Russian icons are not high art, or even quality decorative art for that matter. They were more the two dimensional version of the old plaster saints, made with as little consideration as those mass produced objects. There were icon factories churning out the authentic 'handmade' objects. Gorky worked in one and hardly relished the experience. Because the overwhelming majority of 19th century Russians were effectively illiterate, the visual image had an incredible importance: a bit like the value of stained glass and statues to medieval worshippers. Or plaster saints to Irish great-grandmothers.

So the visitor to the cathedral museum has to ask: why all the fuss? The overwhelming majority of the icons are from the totally unexciting 19th century mass production period. These used to be picked up with very little trouble in the street bazaars of Iran. It was a very cost-effective method for the Russians to buy hard currency. The street-bazaars-of-Iran theory is supported by the listing, in the acknowledgements, of one of the owners of the icons, Jacques Cadry. Cadry is a dealer in Islamic culture (particularly carpets), who collects

relics from a Christian culture. But although he supports the exhibition, and has for many years collected minor examples of icons, he is not the sole source for the actual exhibition nor its instigator.

The introduction to the catalogue describes 'Windows on Eternity' as an 'exhibition in celebration of 125 years of the Redemptorist Congregation making known the icon of the Mother of Perpetual Help.' This particular icon, a late 19th century version of a medieval, Cretan original, makes the old pink and blue plaster statues look models of good taste. The frame is rather more distinguished than the work. The display however gives it a truly ennobled status. It, alone in the exhibition, is hung in a shrine, surrounded by candles, and opposite it there is a prominent display of the actual robes worn by the Archbishop who was responsible for bringing it to the country.

To support the claim that this mediocre icon is a great work the organisers have shown a series of amateur watercolours showing the travels of different versions of the same image. Bearing in mind that one of the current debates in art theoretical circles is on the power of the original versus the reproduction, I look forward to the chance to flourish the Redemptorist versions at an Art Association conference.

THE AMATEUR NATURE of the exhibition is emphasised by the large collection of icons by Mr Michael Galovic, a maker of icons now living in Australia. His work makes the 19th century stuff look good. While art museums quite often have artists in residence, working on specific exhibitions, I found it a trifle disconcerting to read that 'Michael Galovic will accept commissions for the icon of your choice.' There are after all so many icons in the exhibition, and most of them are so mind-numbingly, drearily bad that surely no one would want to make more.

The story boards and catalogue accept without question the notion of the icon as a magical object. There is no sense of the context of time or place, archaic versions are confused with recent copies with a truly medieval innocence. The organisers appear to have assumed that the viewer shares

a faith that believes in daily miracles. It is fine to hold these beliefs but not to confuse them with aesthetic judgements. This is a besetting problem with all exhibitions dealing with sacred objects, whatever the tradition. This type of exhibition may have worked in St Marys 100 years ago. It is not an appropriate display technique for the last decade of the 20th century. The day I was there a group of convent girls were reduced to hysterical giggles by the high kitsch.

What really set them off was the strange apparition in the balcony above the exhibition. In what appears to be a souvenir from Mount Athos, there is a bearded shop model in full black monk's garb, down to the megaloschemos. It gives the viewer a sense of 'Big Brother is Watching You.' Or maybe he is the ghost of outraged Orthodoxy.

As well as the Cadry collection, the museum is showing some works from the Redemptorist Congregation in Rome. Some of these are quite old and battered, and their precious nature is emphasised by the way they are well secured under glass. However, the icon given pride of place in the security zone appears suspiciously smooth. As well it might. A viewer reading the fine print under the image will find that it is a coloured photograph. Not that this matters to most of the museum's visitors. Most view the collected icons as did the very charming old lady who said to me: 'It's good to see Our Lady getting such an airing.'

'Windows on Eternity' is a confused and confusing exhibition. It conflates complex issues of art history, aesthetic judgement, theology, devotional tradition and practice, raising questions but providing no satisfactory answers. ■

Joanna Mendelssohn is art critic for *The Bulletin*.



*Mother of God
Glykophilousa
Italo-Byzantine,
16th century.
(Redemptorist
Museum, Rome)*



CUTTING ROOM

Early warning

Long before Brian Burke strode the corridors of power he had a life treading the boards. A little known item in his past is his role as *The Odd Man* in Pinero's *The Playgoers*, a theatrical presentation put on during his last year at the Marist Brothers' College in Perth. These days, in that other great piece of theatre, the Australian Labor Party, his role might better be described as the *Odd Man Out*.

source: St Joseph's College speech night program, 1962

Broadside

Historian Patrick O'Farrell makes this observation about ecclesiastical image problems: 'The church's history is of small interest as a problematic or an intellectual challenge to the young. They fail to see the importance in the world of affairs of an institution which has, within a generation in Australia, reduced itself from a formidable power in the land, a profound cultural determinant, and a stern authority in the spirit, to a vague, confused and socially irrelevant assembly of the long-suffering, tormented by do-gooders and incompetent guitar-players. Whatever one thinks of that transformation, it does not attract those who see history as drama, or the story of events of social significance.'

source: Australasian Catholic Record

Contrite

President Lech Walesa of Poland, at the start of a four-day visit to Israel, asked forgiveness for the wrongs done to the Jews of Poland before and during the Second World War. Addressing a special sitting of the Knesset, Mr

Walesa departed from his prepared text to declare: 'I am a Christian and I may not use human scales to weigh 20 centuries of injustice. Here in Israel, in the cradle of our culture and the land of your renaissance, I ask for your forgiveness.'

source: The Tablet

Left behind

The emotion that greeted the arrival in Israel of 14,000 Ethiopian Jews, known as Falashas, was quickly overtaken by controversy concerning tens of thousands left behind because they had converted to Christianity. Some 3000 of those had gathered in Addis Ababa in the expectation of being included in the rescue operation, but the Jewish Agency, which had secretly planned the airlift and executed it with military precision, decided that the Jews turned Christian did not qualify under Israel's law of return, even though it is claimed that the conversions were made under duress.

source: The Tablet

Off track

The death of Bert Bryant in April took from us the most colorful race caller Australia has known. His wit also attracted wits. Bert used to host a panel of tipsters on *Turf Talk*. The program, broadcast on Saturday morning, was recorded on Friday afternoon, after long discussions over lunch in a pub near Melbourne radio station 3DB. All that was dry after lunch was the humour. One Friday,

the panellists returned to 3DB and began the program. Bert remarked that a leading jockey would be unavailable to ride the next day because he was off on a holiday to India. Bert's fellow commentator, Jack Ayling at once asked, 'Who's got the pub there?'

source: the horse's mouth, almost.

Facts of life

Peter McDonald, a deputy director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, reports that by 2031 the proportion of the Australian population who are below the age of 15 will have fallen from 21.9 per cent to 17.6 per cent, if present birth and immigration rates are maintained.

Other facts about Australia's children: Eighty-two per cent of children live with both their parents, six per cent in step-families and 12 per cent in single-parent families.

In 1988, about 360,000 (10 per cent) of Australian children were living in families with incomes below the poverty line.

In 1986, 26 per cent of children lived in rented accommodation.

One in five Australian children is born to parents who are not married.

One in five children can expect to experience the divorce of their parents before they reach majority.

If present birth rates are maintained, by 2031 13 per cent of children will have no siblings, 26 per cent will have one sibling and 61 per cent will have two or more. That is, almost two-thirds, of all children will come from families of three or more children.

source: AIFS



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| Friday | July 26th | "The Psychology of Spiritual Development" |

at St Mary's College, Melbourne University, Tin Alley \$10 per lecture 8.00 pm.

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Fr Groeschel teaches at Fordham University, Iona College and Major Seminaries.

He is the Founder of the New Franciscan Religious Group.

Director Trinity Retreat, a Centre for prayer, study and retreats for clergy.

Author of "Reform of the Reform".

His Book 'Spiritual Passages' won the 'Book-of-the-Year' Award.

He comes to Melbourne after conducting the Bishops' retreat in the Philippines, and he leaves Melbourne to give a Priests' retreat in Dublin.

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