EUREKA STREET .com.au
Discerning humanity.

17-October-2006 Volume: 16 Issue: 15

Eureka Street is published fortnightly online, a minimum of 24 times per year by Eureka Street Magazine Pty Ltd

Responsibility for editorial content is accepted by the publisher.

Requests for permission to reprint material from the website and this edition should be addressed to the Editor.

Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned.

PO Box 553
Richmond
VIC 3121
Australia

Tel +61 3 9427 7311
Fax +61 3 9428 4450
Eureka@eurekastreet.com.au

.

A vision for 20 million careful owners

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

Last week was definitely a bad news week. There was North Korea's nuclear weapons test, then the further meltdown of Australia's relations with the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. The record high October temperatures coincided with the release of the findings of the first stage of the national assessment of Australia's water resources. It's likely there will be further bad news on all of these fronts before there's good news.

Mistakes have been made in our dealings with these countries, and in our use and abuse of water and the environment in general. We can choose to make more mistakes, or fix those that have been made. Fixing mistakes, for us and future generations, will take considered management of what we have inherited. Moreover it is a state of mind.

We should not be too proud to learn from others, even our cousins from across the Tasman. The New Zealand Government has adopted its " 4 million careful owners " campaign, to encourage responsible water management. This reflects a stewardship mentality, rather than the "steady as she goes" approach that has caused our environmental degradation.

The international relations problems we have are more likely the result of perceived and actual strongarm actions that have caused resentment. This includes our close collaboration with the United States in its misguided attempts to bring so-called "rogue nations" into line, and our attempts to do the same thing with corrupt elements in governments in our own near neighbourhood. The lesson is that careful management, and not brute force, will avoid catastrophe and put us on the right track.

To this end, Dr Joe Camilleri of La Trobe University, argues in this issue of *Eureka Street* that the North Korean regime is "more likely to be loosened from its present grip on power by the slow but persistent attempts to change the economic and psychological landscape inside North Korea, than by the external application of brute force".

Politics and religion are not warring states

COLUMNS

Summa theologiae

Andrew Hamilton

Religion and politics are often treated as two nations separated by a demilitarised zone. Any sortie across the boundaries is best dealt with by an artillery barrage.

But both religion and politics are ultimately activities engaged in by human beings, often by the same person. When thinking about the relationship between religion and politics, it is helpful to ask whether people with religious convictions have a place in politics, and how they act appropriately there.

I am tempted to argue provocatively that there is no place in public life for people who are not religious. Of course, I refer to "religious people" in a special and a very broad sense. They are people who work out of considered views of what constitutes a good society and a good human life. They hold these views strongly enough to associate with others in realising them. They may ground these views in explicit or implicit philosophies, as well as in religious faiths in the more narrow sense of the word.

By this definition, non-religious people, for whom there is no place in public life, are those who have no views on what makes a good society, but who see public life and politics instrumentally. They see politics as the business of governing. For them, values, beliefs and truth are subordinated to securing and holding power, and to implementing whatever policies are willed by the government. In public life, they see religion as a commodity to be put to use.

I believe that public life in Australia has been corrupted by this instrumental view. I agree with those who have deplored the use of religion by politicians as a political counter. But on the same grounds, it is equally deplorable for religious people to use religion instrumentally. To promise support to political candidates on condition that they accept and vote for legislation that endorses a moral position supported by one's church, is also to make religion a commodity. It puts truth out to trade, and debases it.

If we begin with the more neutrally expressed axiom that politics is only for people of conviction about why human beings and society matter, we then face the complex question of how people with such convictions may properly act in Australian political life.

We should expect that people in public life will press actively, and through their community groups, to embody their vision of society. Churches and religious bodies have a responsibility to do so. They should criticise policies that in their view injure society.

We should also expect politicians to press their view of the good society and the conditions under which it can be embodied, when they argue for priorities in policy and about particular legislation. They should also be open about the grounds on which they base their argument. In this respect, at least, Mr Abbott seems exemplary. This openness will lead people to ask whether the view of society on which the politicians base their case is reasonable, and whether the priorities and the legislation that they propose will be conducive to a good society.

People of different views can share conversation and responsibility for society only if they respect clear rules of engagement. In democracies, these assume that elected politicians represent all their constituents and not simply those whose allegiances they share. They also seek the good of all Australians. This good includes centrally the freedom of people to recognise and to act on what they see as true. It follows that legislation that limits peoples' right to act in accordance with sincerely held views about a good human society will need to show that this behaviour damages society. It will also need to be supported by broad consensus. This means that the proponents of such legislation need to rely on persuasion, not on manipulation.

Finally, we should expect that people in public life will experience tension between their own convictions about what makes a good society, and what is prudently possible where their views are not supported by consensus. In democracies where the interaction between strongly defined political parties mediates public conversation, politicians will experience the same tension between their own moral judgment, and their respect for the effectiveness of their party. Politicians deserve respect for living with that tension; respect decreases if they never vote against their party on moral grounds.

ANZAC tradition now beyond satire

COLUMNS

By the way

Brian Matthews

The place was rotten with dead...

Bulged, clotted heads slept in the plastering slime.

And then the rain began—the jolly old rain!

— Siegfried Sassoon

Nearly 50 years ago, Alan Seymour submitted a play called *The One Day of the Year* to a drama competition. It was ostensibly a vigorous attack on the Anzac Day tradition in Australia—the reunions of old soldiers, many of whom would get very drunk, and whose behaviour seemed to demean and obscure the seriousness of the occasion and blur the truth of its history.

The play predictably provoked outrage and fury. It opened at the Adelaide Festival in 1960 under police protection, but was then banned. Its Sydney run closed because of a bomb threat, and it remained intermittently controversial for a decade.

A couple of years after the play's stormy debut—a play which, like most of my student peers, I found persuasive and an overdue critique of weary, received wisdoms—I had an opportunity to visit Gallipoli. At that time, such excursions were very difficult to accomplish. For one thing, in 1961, Gallipoli and its environs remained a military area and getting in there was like trying to enter the Eastern Bloc.

Interrogated under a bare light bulb by a chain-smoking, much bemedalled officer, whom my two mates and I privately christened "the Colonel", we eventually gained permission to enter the controlled area.

The next morning, in a bleak whippy wind beneath a thick gunmetal sky, we followed the Colonel in our stereotypically battered Kombi Van and parked near the beach at Anzac Cove.

Out in the bay, jagged shards and rusting, irregular crenellations of metal stuck out of the flat water, where some vessel had ended its active service. And, in the sand of the beach where we walked, metal everywhere: .303 shells; an Australian water bottle with a bullet hole right through it; metal in every random handful of sand—lumps and jags and slivers, legacies of the hard rain that had begun to fall across the peninsula on 25 April 46 years before, and left it nine months later lashed, shredded, shrapnelled, broken and silent. As we stood there, overwhelmed, the rhythmic *lap lap* of the quiet water did not break this silence, it simply became a part of it.

Looking at the steep rise of the embankment behind the beach, I decided to see what it felt like to run up it as far as I could. But the Colonel, quietly smoking with his three acolytes on the rocks at the end of the beach, intervened to stop me. "*A cause des serpents,*" he explained blandly (vestigial French was the only language bridge between us). Military secrets, perhaps. Certainly not snakes, though I would never know for certain.

The cold wind rifled through the scrub on those bone-heaped and blood-soaked hillsides, and the sea shifted endlessly on its rattling pebbles, but in the end it was the silence that invaded our imaginations. To speak seemed somehow out of order, anything approaching flippancy a gross misjudgment of the place and its memories.

The Colonel and his three sidekicks stayed at a respectful distance, talking very quietly, but we were never out of their view. However nondescript and apparently unused, this was a military area, and we were permitted visitors. They weren't showing us around, they were keeping tabs on us.

There were no signs, no paths; as far as we ever saw, no marked graves, although since 1919 work had been continuing on cemeteries at various points and there must have been graves somewhere nearby.

We were permitted to see only Anzac Cove—the grey, vacant water, the cold light, the muttering pebbles; no fishing boats anywhere in sight, no life on the shore. Like so many of the tragic and doomed soldiers who landed at dawn on 25 April 1915, we would get no further than the beach …|

Crowds of young Australians flock annually to the now manicured and doctored site of the ANZAC landing, and many of them get very drunk, and their behaviour seems to demean and obscure the seriousness of the occasion and blur the truth of its history. *Plus Ã§a change*. In our age, of continuous and ambiguously justified war, the commemoration has become highly politicised. Times have changed. WAR IS PEACE as Orwell tells us in 1984. Infiltrated by party politics and populist bravura, the one day of the year is now beyond satire.

…| The next day, sadder and wiser, my mates and I left the military area beneath darkening clouds. In a field on our left, a tractor stitched line after line into the thick brown earth; on our right, olive trees gave off their peculiar glistening light.

"And then the rain began, the jolly old rain."

3 card trick keeps media oligopoly firmly in place

COLUMNS

Capital letter

Jack Waterford

John Howard—or perhaps more accurately his Treasurer, Peter Costello—seem to have pulled off the three-card trick, on both the National Party and the public, with changes to the media laws. The trick is primarily concerned with distraction, and nothing could have distracted the Nationals more than the fear of local media monopolies in rural and regional areas, which, under the Bill, could have become even more concentrated.

After all of the necessary opportunity for a few National Party figures to grandstand about their concern about more diversity in the country, Peter Costello offered a compromise banning ownership, in a single non-metropolitan market, of more than two "old'' mediums, and then, almost as an afterthought, the same rule in the capital cities as well. The consequence was the quelling of National Party reservations, and the reservation of the Family First Senator, and the passage of the Bill through the Senate was assured.

The Government spin was that the concessions were small ones, well worth it in its efforts to "free up'' Australia's media, and to modernise the media industry to take account of new technology, synergies from cross-media ownership, and the abolition of the long outdated rules against foreign ownership.

The truth is that no such result has been obtained. The chief purpose of the legislation, now, as it was from the beginning, is to entrench the commercial television oligopoly held by the major television networks, and to protect them from various forms of competition, including new free-to-air channels or networks, and novel but hardly new technology allowing multi-channelling from new competitors.

The legislation permits — and attempts to regulate — some emerging "new media'', but any development in this regard will probably be soon overtaken by innovation. It has been the notion that the media industry is being revolutionised by new computer and communications technology. By this theory making old rules focused on the "old media"—newspapers, magazines, radio and television—are obsolete and restrictive, inhibiting investment, innovation and the development of that critical mass and efficiency which could take the industry to a new level.

Yet almost all of the legislation's focus is backwards—on the "old media'' and, even so far as new media is concerned, its focus is more on controlling the market than on liberating the industry to market forces. The immediate consequence, with or without the concessions to the National Party, will almost certainly be more market "rationalisation''— which is to say fewer owners and controllers of the media, and, by virtue of the efforts of the new combinations to cut costs, fewer sources of information, more infotainment and less in the way of news and views.

Where cross-media amalgamations occur, the impact of new requirements about local news and programming in rural areas is hardly likely to increase the range of material available, or its quality or quantity; it will be, as the National Party has feared, existing news recycled on to another medium. Rationalisation may well reduce the level and degree of the scrutiny of government.

The biggest beneficiary is the Packer empire, whether or not it seeks to expand its extensive television, magazine and digital and Internet interests into newspapers. That is because it is especially protected from market forces, as is Kerry Stokes, controller of the Seven Network, and the Ten Network. These have an especial benefit because of their continued protection during the transition from analogue to digital transmission as well as their insulation from new

competition in the interim.

Left relatively in the cold is Rupert Murdoch of News Ltd, with enormous local monopolies in newspapers as well as extensive Internet interests. He is now free either to expand into a television network, even if John Howard has effectively determined that he must pay a monopoly premium; the indications are that he will concentrate most of his efforts in new forms of media, beyond any capacity of Federal Government control.

There may well be a host of mergers among the second-tier players — ones that will probably not be greatly affected by the two-out-of-three rules.

The value of the privileged protections given to the main beneficiaries amounts to more than was distributed to the Australian community as a whole from this year's tax cuts. It is very hard to see any countervailing benefit to the public.

The test of it will not be seen merely from a series of transfers of ownership of existing media assets, nor, particularly, from continuing investment in new media.

It will be from whether the new and more concentrated big players are providing, from the sum of their operations, more voices, more news, views and services than the existing operations. It will be whether there is any real evidence that some minor loosening of regulation of cross-controls over old media in fact potentiates fresh investment and innovation in new media—investment and innovation that could not have happened before.

On the face of it, the public is entitled to be sceptical about whether this is what the Government expects, or even intends.

"Australian values" learned in Budapest uprising

CORRESPONDENCE

Michael Danby

This year, the people of Hungary will mark the 50th anniversary of their heroic but unsuccessful revolution against their former Soviet occupiers, and the communist system the USSR once imposed on them.

Few countries have had a more traumatic recent history than Hungary. In 1914 they were a proud and independent people, co-rulers with the Austrians of the enormous multi-ethnic Habsburg empire. But the shock of defeat in 1918 brought down the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, and allowed the communists led by Bela Kun to seize power.

In the 1930s the authoritarian Admiral Horthy ruled over a demoralised Hungary. The Hungarians joked that they were …œthe only landlocked country ever to be ruled by an admiral…• . Horthy made the fatal mistake of allying himself with Hitler, and joining in the invasion of the Soviet Union. Horthy tried to keep his distance from the worst German excesses, but in 1944 Hitler pushed him aside and installed the …œArrowcross…• Nazi, Ferenc Szalasi. Hitler's grim executioner Adolf Eichmann came to Budapest, and in six months 300,000 Hungarian Jews and Roma were sent to their deaths at Auschwitz. Most of the Hungarian Army was destroyed on the Eastern Front. More than 600,000 Hungarians were killed in the war.

The Red Army arrived in Hungary in 1945, and Marshal Voroshilov was installed as High Commissioner. Although the Hungarian Communist Party had very little support, the Soviets shamelessly rigged elections, persecuted and imprisoned anti-communist politicians, and even imprisoned the head of the Catholic Church, Cardinal Mindszenty. By 1948 the Communists were in full control. The Communist ruler, Matyas Rakosi, was the most ruthless of all Stalin's eastern European satraps.

Stalin's death in 1953 set off a chain of events that culminated in the uprising of 1956. Gradual de-Stalinisation was not acceptable to the Soviets. Hungarians hated the imposed communist rule. Demands for reform mounted. On 23 October 1956, Budapest students rebelled and issued a manifesto demanding free elections. The Soviets reacted ruthlessly, sending their army into the city. This triggered a general rising and the overthrow of the regime. A reformed communist, Imre Nagy, became Prime Minister. Nagy announced that Hungary would leave the Warsaw Pact and become a neutral state, that all political prisoners would be released and that free elections would be held.

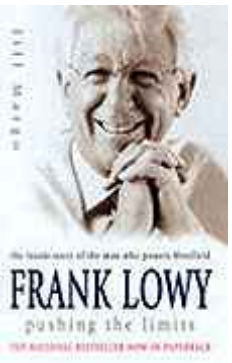
In Moscow, the Soviets viewed these events with horror. Their empire's legitimacy was at stake with the challenge to the Communist Party's monopoly of power in Hungary. On 3 November, the Soviets made a new attack on the rebel stronghold of Budapest, using tanks, air-strikes and artillery. Over 2,500 Hungarians were killed in the fighting. When the rebel government was crushed, 200,000 people fled abroad, of whom 14,000 eventually settled in Australia. Over a thousand people, including Imre Nagy, were executed by the vengeful Hungarian Communists. The crushing of Budapest became the model for communist regimes. As Tiananmen Square showed again, years later, only communists who are willing to use tanks to kill their own people, or similar extreme measures, can keep power for any decent period of time.

Here in Australia we saw an echo of these terrible events at the Melbourne Olympic Games, where the Soviet and Hungarian water polo teams met in the infamous …œblood in the water…• match, which had to be called off when fans rioted in the stands. Together with Khrushchev's …œsecret speech…• to the 20th Party Congress denouncing Stalin, Soviet brutalisation of Hungary was the final event that led most idealistic communists to leave western communist parties. Disgust with the Soviets over Hungary led many Australian communists to abandon the Party.


PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES
DRAFT HOUSE MINUTES
No. 131
MONDAY, 16 OCTOBER 2006

While Radio Free Europe urged the Hungarians to rise up, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles decided that it was not possible for the NATO forces based in West Germany to intervene. To do so would have been to provoke a war with the Soviets, something the U.S. was not ready to do in 1956—particularly since the western alliance was deeply split over the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt, which the U.S. strongly opposed. It is difficult for us today to sit in judgment on decisions made by western leaders 50 years ago, but the Hungarians felt deeply betrayed, and it is hard to blame them.

The Hungarian tragedy was part of the wider tragedy of post-war Europe. The western alliance with the Soviets was necessary to defeat Nazi Germany, but it had terrible consequences for the peoples of eastern and central Europe, who had to endure 45 years of incompetent and repressive governments before the Soviet system became so rotten that leaders such Ronald Reagan, Lech Walesa and Pope John Paul II were able to apply sufficient economic, political and moral pressure to topple it.



Today Hungary is a country as free as Australia. The Hungarian Ã©migrÃ©s who came to Australia, both after the war and in 1956, have made a great contribution to Australian life. Whether it is Frank Lowy, Judy Cassab, who twice won the Archibald Prize, or my dear family friends, the Selby, Erdi and Kertes families, Hungary's loss has been Australia's gain.

None of them, by the way, were required to take an English exam or subscribe to …œAustralian values…• —they learned plenty about the values of freedom and democracy in the streets of Budapest.

EUREKA STREET .com.au
Discerning humanity.
Volume 16 Issue: 15
17-October-2006

Slow progress with North Korea is better than no progress

INTERNATIONAL

Joseph Camilleri

The Korean crisis has once again captured the world's headlines. North Korea's announcement of a nuclear explosion on 9 October came after years of repeated claims by Pyongyang's rulers that it reserved the right to develop nuclear weapons, to counter Washington's hostile intent.

Several days after the explosion, one question remained unanswered—was the explosion in fact a failure, or even a fake? Within a few hours of the blast, Russia seemed convinced that a nuclear test had been carried out, and estimated its strength at between 5 and 15 kilotons. On the other hand, South Korea, France and the United States were more circumspect, suggesting that the explosion measured less than one kiloton, far smaller than the 12.5 kiloton bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima in August 1945.

Whatever the truth about the nature and scale of the test, one thing is clear. Pyongyang's motive for the explosion, as for so many of its past actions, is to pressure the United States to enter into direct negotiations. The North Korean regime is desperate to extract further economic and security concessions. In a word, it wants to ensure its survival.

North Korea has been described as a starving, friendless, isolated nation of 23 million people, and its "dear" leader, Kim Jong-il as vain, reclusive and paranoid. Yet behind the invective and periodic tantrums lies a consistent strategy, designed to prop up the regime in the face of immense economic difficulties at home and implacable hostility abroad.


Pax Christi Australia
International Christian Peace Movement
Nuclear Apartheid Spawns Proliferation

For its part, the United States, despite much bravado, appears to have limited options. North Korea has gone much further than before in its incremental attempts to acquire a nuclear arsenal. The response thus far does not amount to a great deal: a small and temporary reduction of South Korean aid, a stiff verbal rebuke from China, unilateral sanctions by Japan, and the U.S. threat of tough financial and other sanctions to be imposed by the UN Security Council, which Russia and China will substantially dilute. Hardly the apocalypse that some may have expected.

Yet the situation remains highly dangerous. Notwithstanding the constraints bearing upon both Pyongyang and Washington as they consider their next moves, it is not beyond the realm of the possible that one of them will seriously miscalculate and provoke the other into a pre-emptive or retaliatory military strike. Such a move would in all likelihood bring armed hostilities to the entire Northeast Asian region, and may over time provoke a regional nuclear arms race.

The simple truth is that the non-proliferation regime has been seriously if not fatally weakened. The actions of would-be proliferators, notably Iran and North Korea, have exposed the regime's weakness, namely the idea that non-nuclear weapons states can be indefinitely prevented from pursuing nuclear ambitions, while nuclear weapons states maintain and even strengthen their nuclear arsenals.

The policy of nuclear apartheid, fragile at the best of times, now lies in ruins. Indeed, a key lesson that several governments have drawn from the Iraq war—one that has perilous implications for regional and global security—is the opposite of what the United States intended. Saddam Hussein was removed from power, it is argued, because he didn't have nuclear weapons. Had he had them, Iraq would not have been invaded.

How, then, might the international community respond to the Korean crisis? Two responses, one short-term and the other long-term, suggest themselves. It is doubtful, to say the least, that sanctions will have the desired effect. Though they will inflict considerable pain on the already suffering people of North Korea, they are most unlikely to weaken the regime, or severely curtail its military plans. Indeed, they may stiffen the regime's resolve to acquire a full-fledged nuclear capability.

Despite periodic setbacks, the "sunshine" policy pursued by South Korea, the six-party talks, and especially the negotiating framework developed during the Clinton years, are suggestive of a more promising strategy for the future. The North Korean regime is more likely to be loosened from its present grip on power by the slow but persistent attempts to change the economic and psychological landscape inside North Korea, than by the external application of brute force. U.S. allies, not least Australia, may have an important role to play in keeping open lines of communication, and making the case for such a long-term strategy.

Bishop's vision for an Israel-Palestine confederation

INTERNATIONAL

Politics

Andrew West

The man who was the secret force behind the Oslo peace talks more than a decade ago is now promoting a 25-year plan to form an Israel-Palestine confederation, as a way to end Middle East strife. The Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem, Riah H. Abu El-Assal, says the two nations should work towards the establishment of a confederation with a common currency, open borders and even a shared head of state.

Bishop Riah, who recently toured Australia, met Foreign Minister Alexander Downer to argue his case that only closer cooperation between Arabs and Jews can resolve the 40-year conflict. …œBoth Arabs and Jews, Palestinians and Israelis, have more in common than people in the West believe,…• said Bishop Riah, who is one of the dwindling group of Palestinian Christians. …œWe are both Semites—the majority of us—we are both hard working and both groups are committed to their homelands.…•

Back in 1990, as a guest of Christian peace activists in Norway, he convinced the country's conservative foreign minister, Kjell Magne Bondevik, to host a private dinner with the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and some Israeli activists with links to the government. He was later present as Arafat and the later assassinated Israeli prime minister Yitzak Rabin toasted each other privately—Rabin with his Scotch, Arafat with his milk—before accepting their Nobel Prizes.

Bishop Riah has been advocating a confederation since 1984, when he was an Anglican priest in Nazareth. He now believes the impasse between the hardliners in the Israeli government and the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority makes his proposal more important than ever. …œThere is very little alternative to a peaceful outcome because neither people is going anywhere,…• he said while in Australia.

While a minority of Palestinians—and an even smaller minority of Israelis—advocate a single, bi-national state, Bishop Riah does not. …œIf I were a Jew, I would not support it because it would defeat the very cause for which I had fought for so long,…• he said. …œThey fear that demography is against them as the Arabs are having more children. Anyway it [a bi-national state] is not necessary.…•

He says that, just as the European Union has opened its borders, introduced a common currency, integrated its economies and elected a continent-wide form of government, so too could Israel and Palestine. …œAfter the state of Palestine has been officially established, the two parties should set up a high-level team to examine the possibility of a confederation 25 years down the track,…• he said.

He even believes the two states, while retaining separate governments with their own prime ministers, could share a head of state—a presidency that rotated between Israel and Palestine, much as the presidency of the EU is rotated at present.

On the fraught issue of who should govern the Old City of Jerusalem, with its sites holy to the Jew, Muslim and Christian, Bishop Riah says a municipal council, with representatives of the three monotheistic faiths, should be set up. …œIsrael does not have oil or gold or iron or coal,…• he argues. …œLike Palestine, it depends on tourism, and on the pilgrims of every faith. To make it easy for the pilgrims to come in the hundreds of thousands, free access to these holy places is a vital condition.…•

While the Israeli economy is relatively robust with its preponderance of new technology industries, the Palestinian economy is at present moribund, at least in part due to the severe travel restrictions placed on those traveling in and out of the West Bank and Gaza strip.

But Bishop Riah admits his design for a confederation of Israel and Palestine looks like a pipe dream while Israel continues to build the separation wall between the two territories. …œIt is a big stumbling block,…• he says. …œAnd in an age when people can buy rockets in the supermarkets and fire them into Israel, it is no guarantee of security, [a guarantee] that the Israeli people deserve.…•

If the two sides in this conflict can reach a negotiated settlement, and it stays in place, then the future of the Holy Land looks bright. At present though, there are many, many obstacles to this agreement being reached.

…œThe cement blocks used to build the wall may have to be used to build bridges between Israel and Palestine. If I sound like a visionary, you must excuse me because I am a churchman.…•

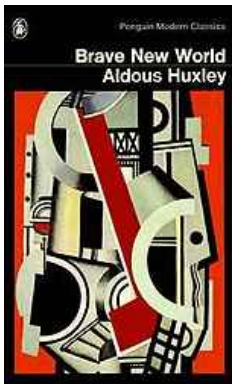
EUREKA STREET .com.au
Discerning humanity.
Volume 16 Issue: 15
17-October-2006

Middle East nuclear abolition dreaming

INTERNATIONAL

Politics

Bill Williams



In 1958, Aldous Huxley told a Californian university audience that the idea of human civilisation co-existing long-term with atom bombs was …œutopian…• . In the 21st century it is the vision of nuclear abolition which typically bears that label. Abolition? It'll never happen. Not in my lifetime. Generations away.

Was Huxley dreaming?

Recent events in the Middle East have brought this question into sharper focus. Western nations are tightening the noose around Iran's neck for its nuclear recalcitrance. How many centrifuges? How much Highly Enriched Uranium? How long will it take to build the Iranian bomb? Iran shelters under Article IV of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NNPT), which legally empowers it to develop a nuclear capability—on the understanding that it forswears military use of the dual technology.

Meanwhile, Israel lashes out at guerrilla forces embedded in civilian populations in Lebanon. Its leaders elect not to employ their most powerful unacknowledged weaponry—nukes—on this occasion, but it raises the question of their broader role in middle-eastern politics. Israel has no nuclear competitors in the region: its atomic arsenal means it can punch well above its weight. Even if the Iranians manage to get off the blocks in a regional nuclear arms race, they are a long way behind the leader.

This is not to argue for less scrutiny of Iran, but for more scrutiny of Israel's nuclear weapons project. Not just of the arsenal, but of the strategic doctrine on which it rests. While authoritative estimates put the number of Israeli nukes in the hundreds, nuclear strategy is utterly opaque due to Israel's refusal to acknowledge their existence.

But the nuclear sceptre dangling asymmetrically over the Middle East merely reflects the wider global imbalance, as demonstrated at last year's Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in New York. The NNPT is a bargain wherein the nuclear weapons states (NWS) agree to eliminate their nuclear arsenals, while the non-NWS relinquish the right to develop them. Despite having signed the treaty 36 years ago, none of the NWS look like concluding their side of the bargain any time soon. The stockpiles have been reduced, but they have also modernised their arsenals and/or updated their strategic doctrines for 21st century utility.

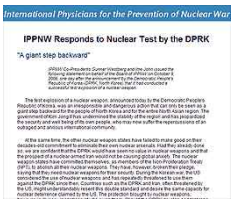
North Korea has created nuclear weapons from its …œpeaceful…• nuclear program, and has withdrawn from the treaty. Meanwhile, Iran has violated its Safeguards agreement by conducting certain experiments and engaging with the Khan Network, and its virtual nuclear supermarket.

There are 42 other countries that have a nuclear capability—reactors, enrichment facilities, expertise, fissile material—and not all of them seem content to accept NWS intransigence indefinitely: what gain is there for them in maintaining their side of a lopsided bargain? Political will alone stands between them and their own political nuclear weapons programs.

These are not abstract theoretical concepts. The small uranium bomb that obliterated the city of Hiroshima on 6 August 1945 killed around 70,000 people. Tens of thousands of them were children. The recent assessment by the Blix WMD Commission, "Weapons of Terror", calculates the current global arsenal at 27,000 nukes—over 95% of them U.S. or Russian.

Authoritative estimates of fatalities in a major modern nuclear exchange range in the hundreds of millions. Blix observes, however, that "a nuclear disarmament treaty is achievable and can be reached through careful, sensible and practical measures".

At its biennial congress in Helsinki this September, the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize recipient, International Physicians for Prevention of Nuclear Weapons (IPPNW), took up Blix's treaty challenge. Much of the groundwork is already done: a "model Nuclear Weapons Convention" (NWC) was drafted in the nineties and submitted to the UN General Assembly by Costa Rica in 1997.


International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War

IPPNW Responds to Nuclear Test by the DPRK

"A giant step backward"

Based on the Chemical Weapons Convention of 1993, the NWC is a detailed legal framework which sets out a phased program for the elimination of nukes. It languishes, due to a lack of political will.

The IPPNW is launching the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear weapons (ICAN), working with other NGOs to put nuclear disarmament back on the political agenda (the Australian link organisation is MAPW).

Blix concluded that: "So long as any such weapons remain in any state's arsenal, there is a high risk that they will one day be used, by design or by accident. Any such use would be catastrophic."

The aim of ICAN is to avert a nuclear catastrophe by the elimination of all nukes everywhere: rogue states possess nuclear weapons.

Utopian? Not in Huxley's eyes.

Economic boom's new generation poor

AUSTRALIA

Stuart Braun

As Australia gets richer, younger generations are failing to scale the ladder of opportunity.

A decade of economic growth has been good to many Australians. The property market has boomed. Wages have risen. Share markets continue to ride record highs. Ordinary Australians have grown rich. But others have missed out.

In 2004, Paul Keating described a worrying trend in Australia, the emergence of what he termed the "new poor". …œ[They're] a group who get along in the world without institutional loyalties,…• he said, …œwithout lifetime employment, who have to pay for education, who live life in nodules of employment, who are locked out of property, who are slated to rent often sub-standard accommodation, who are wary of marriage and financial obligation, who watched the wealthy get wealthier and …| rely more or less on the camaraderie of mutual friends in similar circumstances.…•

Two years on, the problem is deepening. A raft of statistics and reports indicate that home-ownership and job security, the twin pillars of the Australian dream, are no longer a reality for many 20 and 30-somethings. Amid a doubling and tripling of property prices, and the enculturation of casual, contract employment, an increasing segment of Generations X and Y have failed to share the gains of their asset-rich parents. They will likely never make up the lost ground.

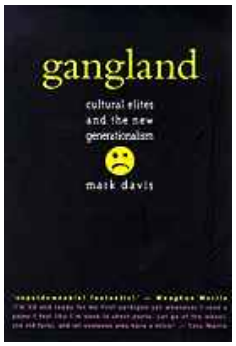
Much has been made of the rise in "grinding" poverty in Australia—an 18-month senate inquiry released in March concluded that over two million Australians are living on the poverty line. But another kind of poverty is eating at the foundation of Australia's once impregnable middle class.

…œAustralia isn't doing as well as we think,…• argues Mark Davis, whose book *Gangland: Cultural Elites and the New Generationalism* first articulated the discontents of these young people. Davis calls them …œslash kids…• , a reference to a culture of entrenched casual employment and declining long-term career prospects. …œNow they're getting older, they can't afford new priorities, and resentment is growing,…• Davis explains.

Australia's commodities-driven economic boom has shadowed the growing intergenerational wealth divide. A 2005 Dusseldorp Skills Forum report showed that nearly one quarter of Australians aged 20-25 are not in full-time work or education—up 15 per cent from a decade ago. On current trends, not much will have changed when this group reach 35.

By contrast, the media are touting a new upwardly mobile group of 25-39 year-olds, many university educated, with high disposable incomes, and massive consumer appetites. Dubbed the NEO, or New Economic Order, by Ross Honeywill and Verity Byth in their book *Neo Power*, this cashed up, brand-savvy demographic no doubt spend a lot of money on mp3 players and designer sneakers; but they are not—to the chagrin of the banks and the government—getting married, having kids and buying houses.

The difficulty, both for the NEOs and the slash kids, is their diminished access to property assets in a country where over half the wealth is held in housing. Bricks and mortar remain the economic lifeblood of the nation, the hallowed symbol of Australian egalitarianism. Owner-occupation levels have declined almost 30 per cent since their post-war peak. Investors have pushed the "battlers" out of the market en masse. In Sydney, a third of people are renting. Most will never own a home.



A 2004 report by Brand Management argued that the new poor—which it defines as 30-somethings with limited asset wealth—will buy property, if at all, ten years later than their baby boomer parents. Commissioned for an anxious financial services sector, the report called the new poor …œa ticking bomb…• whose …œcurrent lack of assets…• will …œpermanently stunt their wealth accumulation potential".

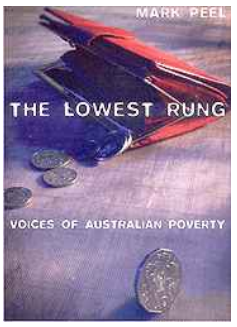
Governments refuse to acknowledge this looming generational malaise, one that will be exacerbated by an ageing population. Ironically, self-interested 15-25 year-olds who can't remember the 1990-91 recession also envisage boundless prosperity, says a Dusseldorp Skills Forum report, *Views of Gen Y*, to be published in October.

How long will the emerging "new poor" buy the myth of the Australian dream? Maybe they have different priorities. Maybe they are happy to rent. Daniel, 30, works for Parks Victoria for a bit more than the average wage ($50,000), and typically says a mortgage is the last thing on his mind. …œThe sacrifice is too great. You would do it if you could but I've got too many other priorities,…• he concedes on the issue of a $400,000 mortgage (the average house price in Melbourne).

Daniel rents a room in a share house in Melbourne's north. He says much of his potential savings are siphoned into a HECS debt. What's left over will go on travel. This attitude has the banks worried, as their baby boomer customer base will soon complete the mortgage cycle. But Daniel isn't interested in "buying". Instead, he's going to India.

Mark Carden, author of the Brand Management report, backed this sentiment, concluding on ABC Radio that …œwe're on the cusp of some significant social change, not just because people can't do things like buy the house where they want to, but also because the new poor are reassessing whether in fact they do want to own a house".

Mark Peel, associate professor in history at Monash University and author of *The Lowest Rung: Voices of Australian Poverty* (2003), says the new poor will soon feel …œthe tremendous impact…• of declining home ownership in a country where some pensioners spend their entire income on rent.



This impact has been exacerbated by the ongoing shift in intergenerational wealth. Older generations not only hold a bulk of Australian assets, but they're living longer, have recently cashed in their parent's inheritance, and are bent on spending their hard-earned superannuation. Retiring baby boomers opting for a sea change and a penthouse by the beach are now called SKINs (Spend your Kids Inheritance Now).

It's ironic that unprecedented economic growth in Australia may leave a generation without a home. More ironically, few seem to care. Neo-liberal reforms have delivered globalised, unregulated markets in Australia, the unfettered accumulation of assets for the new propertied classes, and yet have killed off the dream for younger generations. The new poor can consume, can provide cheap labour to fuel the boom, but most will fail to cash in. They have simply failed to compete. And so they will have to pay the price.

The union official as pastoral carer

AUSTRALIA

Brendan Byrne

Science is a collaborative enterprise, spanning the generations. When it permits us to see the far side of some new horizon, we remember those who went before us, seeing for them also.

— Carl Sagan, from the TV series, *Cosmos*)

Whenever I meet a young person who wants to work in the union movement, I am gratified, but wonder silently whether they really know what they're letting themselves in for.

This may seem surprising, coming from someone who has spent much of his adult life employed as a trade union official. But the truth is, my own desire to work for the union movement arose gradually, in response to a complex series of external and internal processes. I was not born into a "union" or "labour" family. When I first entered the workforce, I was largely ignorant of unions.

It is ironic how time changes things. Certainly, my attitudes were shaped (and hardened) by my experiences as an employee working in a major financial institution. The "pillar of the community" mask behind which many white collar corporations hide was, through a series of hard knocks, stripped away to reveal the callous reality beneath.

We all have moments of "awakening", uplifting or destructive. In my own case, it was both. Never being one to complain without doing something about it, I started getting involved in the union of which I had previously been a silent member. The realisation of hypocrisy and exploitation imbued me with a seething rage that threatened to colour my perceptions and cause me to unfairly cut all people from the same cloth.

Making assumptions about people is a luxury you cannot afford as a union official. The unpalatable truth is that, sometimes, employees tell lies or omit facts. You have to ask questions and check facts, to avoid disastrous consequences.

And "maintain the rage" is fine, but if you don't find a means of channelling that energy, of leeching out the destructiveness of anger and bending its ferment toward constructive ends, you will burn out very, very quickly. The union movement is littered with wrecked lives and relationships, the fallout from officials who didn't sufficiently protect themselves and their families from the stress and pressure that goes with the job.

Working for a union means you have to give of yourself, you have to sacrifice part of your being to enter into the troubles and hardships of others. But this also means you have to find a way to replenish your soul, to tap into some source of existential nourishment to ensure your own humanity isn't fatally diminished.

Ask any doctor or nurse or ambulance officer. In fact, when talking to keen young activists, I often ask them whether they would like to work in the trauma ward of a major hospital, because that's a bit what being a union official is about: we deal with human suffering. No-one rings a union to tell them everything's fine, that they're being treated well and paid decently. People only ring the union when they're in trouble. And usually, by the time they get around to doing so, they're in lots of trouble. Which means lots of stress, lots of angst, lots of human emotion and drama. It also means that I have to give that much more of myself, as well as somehow find a replacement for what I have given.

Union officials and ministers of religion have much in common, if only because both roles can be intensely pastoral. We often see human beings at their very worst, and our reward is that we sometimes see humans at their

very best. And it's the small victories, the apparently insignificant outcomes that mean so much to the recipients, as well as the glimpses of human spirit amid what would otherwise be a welter of misery, that sustains life and hope.

Unlike Carl Sagan, I don't know much about science. But I do know that I've not heard a better description of the trade union movement: a collaborative enterprise spanning the generations. The Howard Government's so-called "Workchoices" legislation poses a great threat to the intergenerational enterprise of trade unionism. But I have a sense of hope—no, an expectation—that the threat will be defeated. Not because of any dogmatic conviction; just the simple knowledge that young people are still prepared to plunge themselves into the trauma ward of industrial relations, so that they—or those who come after them—may see the far side of some new horizon.

Google pays the price to capture online video zeitgeist

MEDIA

The Net

James Massola

The take-over of YouTube by Google has profound implications for the online video market. It follows the announcement by Warner Music Group that they will be providing their entire library of music videos to YouTube, free to watch and download. The company will share the advertising revenue with YouTube.

The democratisation of video making, and sharing, that has been driven by the growth of YouTube is astounding. The primary users of the site—and they are providers of content as much as they are its consumers—are 12 to 17-year-olds, the younger half of "Gen Y".

The site has grown, on the back of this audience, to the point where more than a hundred million clips are watched on the site every day, and further, around 65,000 videos are added daily. The numbers are staggering. The proliferation of camera phones, cheap digital cameras, and broadband internet connections has facilitated this growth. Now everyone can be an auteur, and share their work with the world.

Other media organisations, such as the American TV network NBC, have also started seeding the site with promotional videos. The logic seems to be, if they can't stop the copyright infringements, they may as well make some money from it, and get some free promotion into the bargain. The decision marks a major shift in the way media organisations are thinking about content provision.

The deal that allowed Apple to provide video content on its fifth generation iPods was seen as revolutionary in itself—an opening of the flood gates for legal video online. The model was still user-pays, though; with YouTube, a new model is being used.

Online distribution of entertainment content will continue to grow. The moments in the sun enjoyed by Napster, then Kazaa, currently iTunes, and increasingly by YouTube, demonstrates that, as new technologies become more sophisticated and pervasive, people become accustomed to deciding how and when they consume.

The take-over has stirred particular interest as some analysts have warned that any take-over would be fraught with difficulty. The reason for this is clear. Many have warned that …œbig media organisations…• have been waiting for a company with deep pockets to take over YouTube, and once this purchase was completed, the lawsuits would begin.

YouTube operates on a client-server model, which places much responsibility on the shoulders of the owners of the site to vet copyrighted material, and leaves it vulnerable to such lawsuits.

The so-called "viral" nature of popular YouTube videos has also set marketing minds racing. Rather than achieving their popularity through advertising campaigns, videos that become popular on YouTube do so through "word of email", and users visiting, re-visiting, and rating videos.

One could argue that the harbingers of this shift have been there to see, for those willing to look hard enough. News Corporation's purchase of MySpace for $900 million seems a similar move to Google's. MySpace is an extremely popular online blogging and social meeting place. By outlaying such a large sum, News Corporation has claimed the dominant position in the market. It looks a shrewd investment, as Gen Ys interact online more and more.

The 12 to 17-year-olds of this world have more and more spending power and free time, and advertisers know it. For the young, the attraction is in the sharing of the minutiae of daily life, online. For the advertisers, it's about

traffic, hits, and market share.

When the famously litigious Microsoft introduced its Zune media player, one of the most surprising features announced was the facility to share, wirelessly, one's songs with one's friends. Not even hip-and-friendly Apple, the darling of new media, had allowed this facility in its iPods. The pressure from media companies to restrict the likelihood of copyright infringement has been too great.


CBCnews MONEY
Google buys video-sharing site YouTube for US$1.65 billion

The battle for the living rooms of 21st century consumers has begun, and all the big players are fighting for a piece. Google, with billions in the bank from its Initial Public Offering, has gambled on YouTube delivering market supremacy.

In a survey conducted by Hitwise.com, YouTube is estimated to have 42 per cent of the online video market, while Google Video has around seven per cent. Another survey of the UK by Hitwise put YouTube's marketshare as around 64 per cent in that market. When these figures are taken into account, the $2.2 billion in Google shares distributed to YouTube, in exchange for ownership, looks like good business.

Time will tell whether Google has guessed right. Some have predicted that new software, such as the elegantly named "Democracy", which runs on the decentralised peer-to-peer model, will supersede YouTube now that it has "sold out"—but for Google, the gamble is worth taking.

Guess right, and they stand to reap billions in the coming decades. Guess wrong, and 67 people from San Mateo, California are still happily sharing in a bonanza—and the chances are that Google will only make slightly fewer billions.

In the meantime, TV audiences continue to decline, youngsters flock to the site, to watch the Lonelygirl15s of this world and share their lives through their videos and personal journals. The shift towards a decentralised, globalised world continues apace.

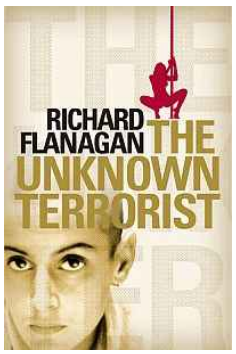
The Unknown Terrorist

BOOK REVIEW

Fiction

Michael Ashby

***The Unknown Terrorist,* by Richard Flanagan. Published by Picador, 2006. ISBN 0 330 42277 4 (hb)$45; 0 330 42280 (pb) $32.95.**



The author of *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* and *Gould's Book of Fish* has come up with a veritable novel "for our times". So much so that real recent events, that are more current affairs than history, have walk-on roles or close contextual significance. Here is a gripping tale of Australia (well, Sydney at least) in the midst of a terror campaign.

The hunt is on for those responsible for planting three unexploded bombs around the harbour city. Gina Davies, alias the "Doll", is an erotic pole-dancer who spends the night with a client (Tariq) of Middle Eastern origin and prime suspect, and is then caught with him on CCTV footage at his apartment entrance. From here onwards, she is at the centre of a police and media hunt, in which the true fragments known about her are threaded into a story that suits the needs of a society under threat.

Flanagan succeeds in creating an atmosphere of fear, together with the sadly almost inevitable reactions of societies under threat from terrorism. The paranoia and prejudice, the need of governments and their police forces for rapid results, and the role of the media in fuelling these and applying pressure to get them, are all vividly shown here in both character and plot. The Doll has shady underworld, media and police connections, and these all play a part in constructing her nightmare and its final and inescapably tragic end.

Anyone who has lived in places that experience a random terror campaign will know that it is very hard to maintain the decency, humanity and justice system of any country in these conditions. Those who lived through the mainland IRA bombing campaign in the UK of the '70s and '80s will be forever embarrassed to find that the main convictions, that made them feel a bit safer at the time, were later to be known as those disgraceful miscarriages of British justice, the Guildford Four and the Birmingham Six.

One of the main characters (Richard Coady) is a television journalist who makes a documentary about the Doll, and it provides a scary narrative of just how easy it is to add two and two to make five. That the unscrupulous journalist also becomes a victim is both poetic and ironic. There is a passage of Joycean litany against the way the media swings into unison when a story develops in a certain way, particularly the trail of a hunt.

At times in the book, there seems to be a real rivalry between terrorism and the media as the greatest villain of the piece. In fact, such is the rottenness of Sydney's underbelly, as portrayed by Flanagan, that rather like the devil having the best tunes in *Paradise Lost*, the hunted seem more virtuous than the hunters, although nobody comes out of this tale well.

In fact the author is so effective at bringing alive the sleaze, violence and misery of the Doll's world that it is hard not to be dejected and disgusted. This is not an uplifting tale. The problem is that Flanagan's Sydney is almost not worth saving either. Life on the margins of this society, and the final scenes of callous death and indifference, paint a bleak picture of what is being protected from terrorism.

The book is a broad polemic by a radical Tasmanian writer, who has been active and forthright in pointing out some of the major problems in Tasmania and nationally. The book has a dedication to David Hicks. Its introduction is a short philosophical essay, in which it is stated that love is not enough, and love alone cannot triumph. He compares and contrasts Christ and Nietzsche who both sacrifice themselves, like suicide bombers, for love (of his

fellow men for Jesus, and a horse for Nietzsche), although they have opposing views about what drives the world.

Reality, he writes, is not made by realists but by dreamers like Jesus and Nietzsche. Christians may find this portrayal and comparison uncomfortable. The Nietzschean view of the world being propelled along by evil seems to have won the day in this novel, but the obvious evil of random terror is given not so much a causus belli as an unexpectedly weakened and discredited opposition, that unravels further as it finds that the enemy is within. Bit by bit, the society damages all that it holds dear, and endangers whatever moral high ground it had in the first place. Maybe the first target of the book *is* that moral high ground, for which little justification can be found in this portrayal of contemporary Australia.

This work should make a good film, with Chopin's Nocturne No 7 prominent in the soundtrack, as this piece is the leitmotiv of the book. The nocturnes are usually seen as having sublime dream-like qualities that are somehow at odds with the mood of this book, but their imagery of endings and sleep, together with the underlying melancholy may explain the author's choice of theme tune: an anthem for a decaying and possibly dying society. At one stage a vagrant is being cruelly beaten by thugs in a Sydney street, in a place, he writes, "that had once been a community, in a country that had once been a society".

EUREKA STREET .com.au
Discerning humanity.

Volume 16 Issue: 15
17-October-2006

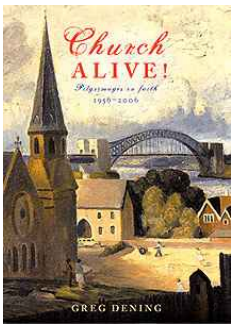
Catholics learning to love themselves (humbly)

BOOK REVIEW

Non-Fiction

Michael Mullins

Church Alive: Pilgrimages in Faith 1956-2006, by Greg Dening. Published by UNSW Press, Sydney, 2006. ISBN 0868408433. RRP $44.95. website



This book is a history of the Catholic and Jesuit Parish of St Mary's North Sydney, published to mark its sesquicentenary year. Despite the title and subject matter, it's no ordinary parish history. The book is written by one of Australia's most creative and eminent historians, as an "ethnographic history of the prophetic imagination among ordinary believers in times of great religious change".

One-time Jesuit Greg Dening is Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Melbourne. Many of his previous works, which include *Islands and Beaches* and *Mr Bligh's Bad Language*, deal with culture conflict in the Pacific. When published, they broke new ground in the field of ethnographic history. As he did many years ago with his school history, *Xavier: A Centenary Portrait*, Dening has used ethnographic techniques in an area mainly charted by conventional and amateur historians.

One such amateur historian was Fr Henry A. Johnston SJ, who wrote the first history of North Sydney Parish, on the occasion of its centenary in 1956. Dening uses the fact that Johnston covered the first 100 years as a licence to focus on the last 50 years. This allows him to dwell on an era marked by unprecedented change, in both the Church itself and the Jesuits.

Dening writes that the change was inspired by two '60s prophets: John XXIII and Pedro Arrupe SJ—the pilgrim Pope who called Vatican II, and the prayerful and fearless Superior General who shook the Jesuits. He characterises the turnaround in Catholics of the period as a shift from a disposition in which it is "easier than one thinks to hate oneself", to one of "learning to love oneself humbly". He argues that the trauma of *Humanae Vitae*—Pope Paul VI's 1968 encyclical banning contraception—was not the beginning of an exodus from the Church, as is generally assumed.

The exodus was from a Catholicism defined by Sunday mass attendance, obedience to formalistic Church rules, and an acceptance of papal infallibility where it did not reach. Humanae Vitae *freed Catholics to love themselves humbly by delivering their most personal decisions to their own conscience.*

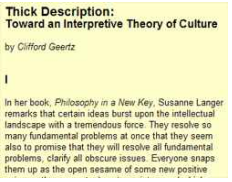
He contends that *Humanae Vitae* occasioned a boom in the number of Catholics going to communion, and a desertion of the confessional. To back up his argument, he borrows from the practice of conventional historians, and points out that the number of communions at St Mary's, which numbered 102,000 in 1968, rose to 150,000 in 1971.

These were heady days in the life of the Church. But the book's emphasis is on the ordinariness that lies in the midst of the big events. Indeed there is a lot that is ordinary about parish life, and Dening recognises this as a strength. Ordinary becomes extraordinary when imbued with cognisance of the culture it belongs to. Dening intently describes actions the parishioners and priests perform and witness every Sunday.

As Father Smith raises the bread and then the cup, these young, slight children at his side raise their arms and stand on the tips of their toes.

He then describes what he observes once he puts on his culturally-aware glasses.

This is the catharsis, the moment of enlightenment when we proclaim the presence of the Lord in the breaking of the bread.


Thick Description:
Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture

by Clifford Geertz

I

In her book, *Philosophy in a New Key*, Susanne Langer remarks that certain ideas burst upon the intellectual landscape with a tremendous force. They resolve so many fundamental problems at once that they seem also to promise that they will resolve all fundamental problems, clarify all obscure issues. Everyone snaps them up as the open sesame of some new positive

If there is a standout characteristic in this book, it is Dening's powers of observation, and the practice of what the ethnographic historians call " thick description ". This is relating bare bones actions with an overlay derived from an understanding of the prevailing culture, which is, in this case, the congregation's particular way of thinking, feeling and believing.

It follows that Dening's focus on the ordinary makes his book accessible to the ordinary reader. There are yarns, including an account of "after-the-fact democrat" but much-loved parish priest Peter Quin, who was forced to rethink his idea of reorienting the pews in the Lavender Bay church from east-west to north-south. Cynics among the parishioners believed the semi-circular result would deprive brides of an aisle to walk down, and the parish of funds that weddings bring.

Dening's parishioners jump out of their stereotypical skins. The women are not easily defined, but instead "postmodern, though it is not a word they would use". They can say "I feel free now" without feeling frustrated that women will never be ordained in their lifetime. Their Church is not the bishops, nor even the parish priest, but their "journeying selves". A "just-do-it" approach to daily life goes hand in hand with loving themselves humbly.

The elusive ideal of a "normal" family

FILM REVIEW

Drama
Sebastien de Robillard

***Little Miss Sunshine*, Rated M. Directors: Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris, Starring: Greg Kinnear, Toni Collette, Steve Carrell. Website .**

The opening scenes of this film are reminiscent of previous quirky films such as *Magnolia* and *The Royal Tenenbaums*. The device of a small introduction for each character is neither fresh nor original, though it is engaging.

It does not take long, though, for *Little Miss Sunshine* to find its own identity and personality. Co-directors Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris' take full advantage of a great script to play with the audience as much as they can, which makes for a hilarious, feel-good, road trip film.

The performances across the ensemble cast of *Little Miss Sunshine* are outstanding. Kinnear plays Richard, the father and a failing motivational speaker. Uncle Frank, played by a believable Steve Carrell, is the "formerly most eminent Proust scholar in the United States"; his attempted suicide leaves him in the care of his sister, Sheryl (Collette), the archetypal worrying, loving mother.

Other family members include the 15-year-old Nietzche-reading son Dwayne, and the young, beauty queen wannabe Olive. Then, there's the crotchety Grandpa character with a twist; Alan Arkin plays an amorous, heroin-snorting, angry old man.

The most interesting character in this oddly assembled film is Richard, the failing motivational speaker. He constantly employs his rhetoric and catchphrases when speaking to his family—but an unsuccessful motivational speaker cannot be a person that instills great confidence in anyone. Kinnear is very funny in this role, if slightly predictable. It is Collette who truly shines in her role as Sheryl.

Collette's performance reveals very little about Sheryl's character, other than that she is concerned with fulfilling the "mother figure" role. Sheryl does not seem to have any personal quirks or habits that make her stand out from any other "mother" characters in film.

What is striking about the character is the very ordinariness of Sheryl, in comparison with other members of the family. Sheryl is the locus of normality for the family, the calm heart at the storm of conflict and mayhem that the other members embody. She grounds and guides the other members of the family. Sheryl does not enjoy her own epiphanies, like others in her family, but rather enjoys their shared resolutions. Her happiness is found in reflection from her family.

The characters in *Little Miss Sunshine* run the gamut of extreme behaviour. For all that, though, they are a sympathetic bunch, and directors Dayton and Faris seem at pains to highlight that though this family is not run of the mill, few families truly are "normal".

So why should you see this film? Sure, it's well-written and made, but the most wonderful thing about *Little Miss Sunshine* is its ability to not take itself too seriously. The film is not broken up with the occasional funny moment, it is filled with them.

Ten short poems

POETRY

Published *16-Oct-2006*

1.

Crow in Car Park

From a power pole set in black bitumen,
His jagged bleating reminds me,

Of parched paddocks.

What better place to deliver his dark eulogy,

Than from the cross-beamed comfort,

Of his suburban strainer post.

Tim Edwards

2.

The Japanese Lunch

The Japanese lunch

Has taken over,

For who can argue

With culinary grace

While the rude

Patron contrasts so

Deliciously with the food.

B. W. Shearer

Click here to listen an MP3 audio file of this poem, as read by B.W. Shearer.

3.

Vignette of the Shoalhaven

On dry sand

the old boatshed

leans on its shadow.

Mark Miller

4.

Enclosure

Seeking

the

big picture

he
instead

fell into a smaller frame

and

ever since has been

unable to break out of

it

unable or

unwilling

Will Fraser

5.

Prelude for the Damned

He is like a man who

has lost a sense of himself

driven by moment-hunger

thud of blood

twist of bone

he cannot see the future
or remember what has gone.

D. C. Hastie

6.

Convertia

They say after the storm

you should check the tide pools

for fallen stars.

Look beyond your reflection

for the spits of ore

and green charcoal.

Rake your fingers through

the sand, for the silver debris

of whole galaxies.

Even ask the starfish, lift it
carefully from the pool

place it in your palm

feel the tubefeet,

miniature hydraulics

and whisper your intent.

Andrew Slattery

7.

Letter (II)

The answering machine holds the ghost of you.

Your half-choked breathing.

The words you couldn't say.

The ground is fire-ground.

The bed, too vast to cross.

(I cannot play Leander any longer)

Kate Middleton

8.

Conceit

In an empty field

I found a metaphor.

It was dying,

no longer connected to its roots.

Recognising it from my childhood,

against my better judgment,

I tried to revive it.

Cameron Fuller

9.

December (Eschaton)

At the last day

the students leave the gates and exit into Summer.

They ramble out in packs, together,

but wander from each other;

Drift off on roads alone

looking for home.

Matthew Arkapaw

Click here to listen an MP3 audio file of this poem, as read by Mark Arkapaw.

10.

Bat

There's a bat

in my sink

abseiling the frypan.

A soggy myopic

misery.

It wall-hugs the shadows
like some bespectacled spinster/

before I release it to the night

with wishes for improved navigation

and encounters only

with those gentle to wallflowers.

Susanne Kennedy