EUREKA STREET

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Nationalism's New Fervour

Stuart Macintyre & John Hirst

The Movement: Fifty Years On

Robert Murray, Val Noone and Michael Hogan

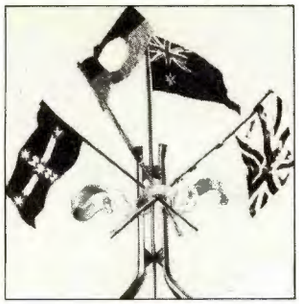
Allan Patience on green politics

THEOLOGY: WHY BOTHER?

Korean War veteran by the banks of the Yarra

Photo: Bill Thomas

(See Budget story 'Money, money, money' p.40)



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MORAG FRASER

School for scoundrels

THERE ARE ENOUGH EXAMPLES of rancid patriotism abroad at the moment to make Dr Johnson's brittle aphorism seem more and more congenial. Yet even if we switch terms and talk of nationalism instead of patriotism, the scoundrels will still be there taking refuge under the banner. Events in Yugoslavia, in the disintegrating Soviet republics, in the Middle East, in Africa, demonstate how rapidly national fervour and national loyalties can degenerate into nationalist violence.

Along with the scoundrels and megalomaniacs who use nationalism for their own ends, there will be any number of ordinary people caught up in the new or the residual strife. In some countries a whole generation of young men and women have grown familiar with the militant aspect of their national identity before they have learned to understand their culture—or what is left of it. Nationalism, in some of its manifestations, makes for a tough school, or a school for toughs.

So it does seem an awkward, and compromised time in which to be talking about nationalism in Australia. And not just nationalism, but republicanism. You might say the times are not right. Certainly the omens are bad. One of our regular contributors, who is a declared republican, although English by birth, recently wrote an editorial for a South Australian country newpaper, in which she put a strong case for republicanism. It was a brave, or foolhardy thing to do in a small country town. And the next day, covering a civic reception for the Governor, Dame Roma Mitchell, she was almost brained when a portrait of her Majesty the Queen fell off the wall and smashed down on her head.

Other proponents of Australian republicanism have not seen such swift retribution. But certainly they have stirred discussion, and it may be that the value of the republican exercise will lie in those very processes of national self-scutiny, discussion and definition which we will go through in preparation for the centenary of Federation. Certainly it would be refreshing to see some expansion in the terms of civic and national debate, and a re-integration of the economics agenda into the country's broader aspirations.

Stuart Macintyre, in this month's **Eureka Street** Forum, (see p. 27) speaks about the possibility of building a nationalism which is 'not shrill'. It seems characteristically Australian to be dealing in negatives—so much of our definition of ourselves derives from a strong sense of what we are not. But there are also strong positives there. A continuity with our past is written into Macintyre's notion, plus a shrewd caution about the dangerous and strident forms nationalism can and does take.

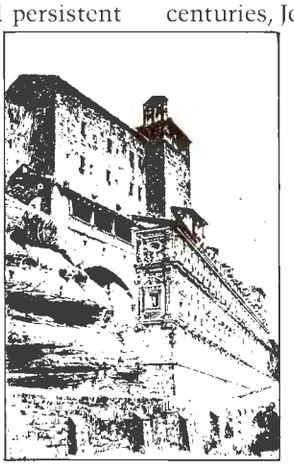
One crucial part of our national life which is not at all shrill at the time of writing is the ABC. Internal troubles and external pressures have rendered it mute or surrendered it to the BBC World Service. In the September issue we will take an inside look at the real threats to one of our most important and unifying national institutions: Radio National. ■

PETER L'ESTRANGE

Radical pilgrim

WESLEY WROTE IN HIS JOURNAL in 1742 after reading a biography of Ignatius of Loyola that he was 'surely one of the greatest men that ever was engaged in the support of so bad a cause'. The Ignatian Year 1990-91, which concluded on 31 July, marked the 500th anniversary of the birth of Ignatius in 1491 and the 450th anniversary of the founding of the Society of Jesus in 1540.

Despite all that has been written, both good and bad, about Ignatius of Loyola, named from his place of origin in the Basque country, he remains a man who reveals himself only after a profound and persistent search. The understanding of him has undergone a transformation in recent decades. Rediscovered sources have altered the popular image, an image which had persisted since the close of the sixteenth century when the first official biographies, shaped by the preoccupations of their own time and place, were written. Despite his own writings—his *Autobiography* and his thousands of letters, his *Spiritual Exercises* and his *Constitutions*—our knowledge of Ignatius is quite limited and based largely on the evidence of the few contemporaries who subsequently wrote about him.



For someone who did not want to stress any program or special way of being a Christian, Ignatius has had a profound and distinctive impact. Among modern theologians, Karl Rahner, for one, has stated that Ignatius was the most decisive influence on his life, and Rahner believed that Ignatius' greatest influence still lay in the future. Ignatius' central conviction was that he had encountered God directly, and he longed to communicate that vivid experience to others. He wanted the companions who gathered around him to be (as he expressed it) 'of help to souls'. There can be no doubt about Ignatius' own flexible and liberal cast of mind concerning the means by which this might be achieved: there was latitude for different approaches and understandings, as circumstances dictated.

It is still difficult to appreciate how radical was Ignatius' break with the traditional forms of religious life. For fifteen years after his 'conversion' from his early career (the sinfulness of which he may, in retrospect, have exaggerated) Ignatius remained a layman, outside the established clerical structures of the Church. In the beginning, and during the first decade of the Society, Jesuits were the itinerant preachers of the gospels and of the early church, ready to go wherever there was a need. They had a special place for those whom the ordinary ministry of the church might not reach—the neglected, the outcasts and prostitutes as well as heretics, schismatics and infidels. The Jesuits' life was not to be one of monastic stability, nor the care of the local community of the faithful with its rhythm of liturgical and sacramental life. They were to choose those tasks which achieved the more universal good, which were urgent and which would otherwise be neglected. Ignatius prized mobility, especially mobility of imagination and enterprise.

The Society which Ignatius founded gave to modern languages—as Thomas Carlyle noted—a new word, by which they were known: the Jesuits. Whether they flourished or failed or suffered vicissitudes over the centuries, Jesuits have provoked strong reactions, positive and negative. The charges against them, sometimes from powerful enemies, have been extensive, if repetitive: it is enough to recall the accusation that they shortened the decalogue and lengthened the creed. Lord Acton believed, for example, that it was a combination of their good and evil qualities which made the Jesuits 'so odious to touch and so curious to study'.

The Jesuit general, Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, warned recently that tradition could be a weight paralyzing the Society, or at least taking its breath away. He wanted this anniversary to be an occasion, for Jesuits and the many who find Ignatian spirituality attractive, to assimilate the experience of Ignatius and to reproduce his passion for the service of the church. This service has had some marks over the years: the belief that God could be found in history, that religion and secular culture interpenetrated and were reconcilable, that there needed to be a balance between reason and affection in our lives, that God could permeate our understanding and affectivity. These themes were argued in books, from pulpits on street corners, in university lecture halls, in conversation. The need to restate them is as acute today.

It has often been noted that Ignatius achieved a marriage between whole-hearted, self-sacrificing religious enthusiasm, and a self-controlled, calculating prudence. Pedro de Ribadeneira, Ignatius' first official biographer, attributed to him some words which he claimed accurately reflected Ignatius' mind: 'In the things of God, those who are over-prudent will hardly ever achieve anything really great. For those who are always thinking about difficulties and who are constantly brooding and vacillating because they fear the possible outcomes which they foresee, will never turn their hearts towards things of real beauty.'

Ignatius' own preferred name was 'the pilgrim'. Other pilgrims might find these words a spur to their travels, or a comfort along the way. ■

Fr Peter L'Estrange SJ is rector of Newman College.

Thou art Peter's

Leningrad: this 276-year-old city has two names, maiden and alias, and by and large its inhabitants tend to use neither. When it comes to their mail or identity papers, they certainly write 'Leningrad', but in normal conversation they would rather call it simply 'Peter'. Peter the Great had a vision of the city, and of more than the city: he saw Russia with her face turned to the world. In the context of his time, this meant to the West, and the city was destined to become—in the words of a European visitor who visited Russia then—a window on Europe. Actually Peter wanted a gate, and he wanted it ajar. Unlike both his predecessors and successors on the Russian throne, this six-and-a-half-foot-tall monarch didn't suffer from the traditional Russian malaise—an inferiority complex towards Europe. He didn't want to imitate Europe: he wanted Russia to *be* Europe.

When a visionary happens to be an emperor, he acts ruthlessly. The methods to which Peter I resorted, to carry out his project, could be at best defined as conscription. This city really rests on the bones of its builders as much as on the wooden piles that they drove into the ground. So does, to a degree, nearly any other place in the Old World; but then history takes good care of unpleasant memories.
(Source: Joseph Brodsky, 'A Guide to a Renamed City', *Selected Essays.)*

Your ignorance is refreshing, sir

Eighty-two years old and still a working journalist, Alistair Cooke reports a problem when young reporters arrive to interview him: 'I am at the state where I ask, "Does the name Adolph Hitler mean anything to you?"'
(Source: *Compass*, Toronto July 1991)

Splendour too far away

The key to understanding the cardinals' debate on the 'defense of human life' at the consistory held in Rome during April is that there have been protests about the projected encyclical on moral principles. In October 1990, the whisper was it was already written. Rumour even gave its Latin

Eureka Street *'Find the Ball' competition: The winner,* ***Kevin Greenhatch****, receives a free subscription to* Eureka Street *plus two tickets to the AFL grand final. A consolation prize for the choice furthest from the mark goes to* ***Andrew McGrath****. Mr McGrath, whose ball was last seen burrowing through the fence into the outer, receives a copy of* Triumph through Failure, *by John Navone SJ.*

title—*Splendor veritatis* (The Splendour of Truth).
Now the encyclical will not appear in that form. The main, or at least the effective, protests came from German bishops who are Cardinal Ratzinger's equals as theologians, especially Karl Lehmann, Archbishop of Mainz, and Walter Kasper, Bishop of Rottenburg-Stuttgart. They have to be heeded and cannot be ignored. They have sent the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith back to the drawing board.
(Source: Peter Hebblethwaite, *National Catholic Reporter*, April 19, 1991)

No big deal

Bulent Semiler, chief adviser to Turkish Prime Minister Turgut Ozal: 'In this country, we have a group of people [the Kurds] who want their own homeland. They kill us. We kill them. It's no different from Northern Ireland or the Basque country.'
(Source: *Compass*, Toronto, January, 1990)

Goodbye beef, hello spinach

As part of their normal digestive process, the world's 1.3 billion cattle annually release 70 million tonnes of methane gas. One study cites the gas as a cause for as much as one fifth of the greenhouse gases released in the atmosphere.
(Source: *Compass*, Toronto, July 1991)

Cover-up

Thai security officials may be quietly planning to construct a sophisticated screen over a terminal at the Thai navy base of Sattahip to avoid satellite surveillance, according to intelligence sources in Bangkok. The navy base, on the gulf of Thailand to the south-east of Bangkok, is known to be a major staging post for Chinese arms supplies to Cambodian resistance factions fighting the pro-Vietnamese regime of Prime Minister Hun Sen in Phnom Penh. Peking claims it stopped sending supplies since the drafting of a peace plan for Cambodia by the UN Security Council Permanent Five in August 1990, but intelligence sources say there has been at least one major shipment since then.
(Source: *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 27, 1991—See Cambodia interviews, p.26.)

Number crunching

August 6 is Census Day (and night). The last national census (1986) revealed that nearly 75 per cent of Australians recorded themselves as Christians. It showed that about 13 per cent of the population reported having no religion while only 2 per cent said they followed a non-Christian religion.

Religion in Australia, a report from the 1986 census, details the strong association between the religion and the birthplaces of Australians or their ancestors. It also includes information on where people of different religions lived in Australia at the time of the census, their age, sex and marital status as well as education and employment characteristics.

The census results showed that Catholics were the largest religious group, with more than 4 million adherents or 26 per cent of the Australian population. Almost 1 million Catholics had been born overseas, 24 per cent in Italy. Of the 3.7 million Anglicans, 3.1 million were Australian-born, with 75 per cent reporting English or Australian ancestry.

Pentecostalism was the fastest growing Christian denomination having increased more than 2.5 times between 1976 and 1986. The number of Muslims in Australia more than doubled in the same period to nearly 110,000 at the 1986 census. Most were in NSW and Victoria.

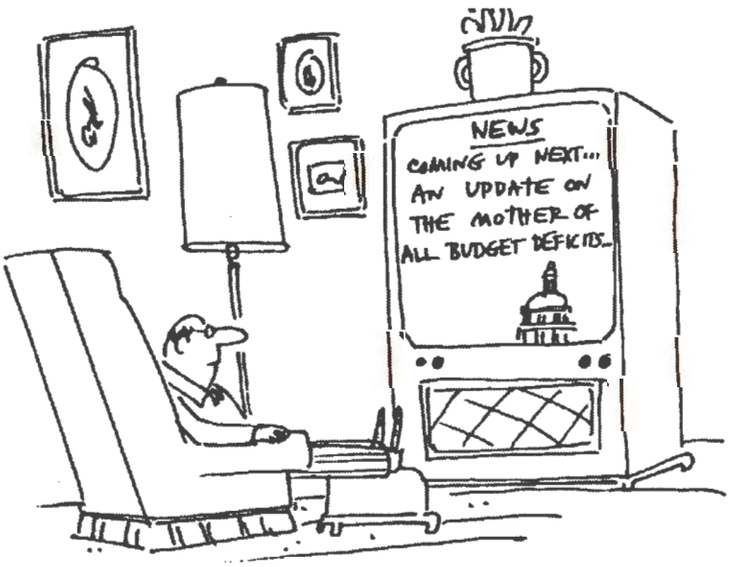
Almost a third of Lutherans lived in South Australia. More than half of Australian-born adherents to non-Christian religions and over 25 per cent of Australian-born Christians were under 15.
(Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics news release).

Image problem

Whenever two Jesuits come together, the Devil makes three (French proverb).

Hang a Jesuit and he'll steal the rope! (Spanish proverb).

Let us hope the order may never be left untroubled by the hostility of the world for very long (St Ignatius Loyola).
(Source: *Compass*, Toronto, July, 1991)



August in Canberra is April in Washington (Commonweal)

Hume presumes

'Celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude and the whole train of monkish virtues—for what reason are they everywhere rejected by men of sense but because they serve no manner of purpose; neither advance a man's fortune in the world, nor render him a more valuable member of society; neither qualify him for the entertainment of company, nor increase his power of self-enjoyment? We justly, therefore, transfer them to the opposite column and place them in the catalogue of vices ... A gloomy, hare-brained enthusiast, after his death, may have a place in the calendar, but will be scarcely ever be admitted when alive into intimacy and society, except by those as delirious and dismal as himself.'
(Source: David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*).

Bon mot

'Canned laughter is the lowest form of fascism.' (Paul Krassner, *The Realist*).

ALLAN PATIENCE

An Australian shade of green

The environmentalist movement made a marriage of convenience with Labor, but the Democrats offer a more tempting liaison.

ENVIRONMENTALISTS have drifted from the periphery of Australian politics, where they were seen as cranks and eccentrics, to a legitimate place in contemporary political debates and organisations. In this sense, Australian environmentalists have been politically more successful than their counterparts in Europe and the United States. Green politics in Australia are more diverse than they are elsewhere, and there are links between environmentalists and other interest groups that have a capacity to mobilise support in the political system.

For example, a lot of environmentalists focus sharply on opposition to mining, especially the mining and export of uranium ore. The link between uranium exports and nuclear weapons means that many opponents of the former can mobilise members of the peace movement, who are opposed to the arms race and militarism in global politics. At the same time, anti-mining advocates frequently overlap with advocates of Aboriginal land rights. The political profile of the lead singer in the rock group Midnight Oil, Peter Garrett, is based largely on his ability to straddle all these contentious public issues.

Another example of the links between environmentalists and other groups in Australia revolves around the issue of immigration. There is a strong segment of the environmentalist movement that discerns a direct relationship between population size and damage to the environment. Increasing population densities in our cities result in overcrowding, pollution (e.g. waste disposal problems), urban sprawl and pressure on the finite physical resources available to feed and house people. Those who hold this view find that their interests converge with the interests of those who criticise forms of immigration that are seen as beyond reasonable levels of control—e.g. family reunions, business immigration and refugee intakes.

The links between green politics and other causes mean that alliances are formed across the political spectrum, resulting in a higher degree of legitimacy for environmental issues. This aspect of green politics in Australia became especially obvious during the last federal election. The Hawke government—influenced largely by the then Environment Minister, Senator Richardson—closely aligned itself with a variety of environmentalist causes. These included opposition to the development of woodchipping and logging in rainforests in NSW and Queensland, and a strong commitment to maintaining federal constraints on the mining and export of uranium. The re-election of the government was attributed by many commentators to Richardson's strategy of aligning the ALP with the environmentalist movement.

Some political scientists even saw this as a move by the ALP to absorb the environmentalist movement, and described the election as the 'greening of Australian politics'. According to this theory, Australian environmentalism has now entered mainstream politics and is in the process of being institutionalised into ALP policy. But this assessment ignores the enormous ideological shift that has occurred in the mainstream political parties over the past decade and a half. Further, it seriously underestimates the role that the Australian Democrats might yet play by making a determined bid for the environmentalist vote.

SINCE THE LATE 1970s, Australian politics have been enthralled by the ideological seductions of the new right. Attacks by economic rationalists on the role of government, especially in the areas of welfare spending and taxation, have achieved high levels of support among a confused and disillusioned electorate. This phenomenon is not unique to Australia; it is part of an international trend in politics that resulted in Thatcherism in Britain, Reaganomics in the US and Rogernomics in New Zealand. Arguably, it also underpins much of Boris Yeltsin's bizarre cobbling together of an economic policy for the Soviet republics. In Australia, as in other parts of

the world, it has resulted in a massive lurch to the right by the mainstream political parties. The leadership of the Liberal Party has been well and truly captured by the apostles of new-right fundamentalism, the so-called 'dries'. Liberal policies have become, perhaps for the first time in what has hitherto been a very pragmatic policy process, deeply ideological and even doctrinaire. The ALP has been similarly drawn to the right in the wake of the Liberal Party's embracing of economic rationalism.

This remarkable rightward shift in Australian politics has resulted in the Hawke government adopting a style of policy formulation that can be usefully described as pragmatic opportunism. Principles are espoused temporarily. More than might be expected from a Labor government, Hawke has been able to jettison policies that are seen as a threat to electoral success. An example is the 'quasi-privatisation' of Qantas, Australian Airlines and the Commonwealth Bank, in the face of earlier reassurances that successful public enterprises would not be sold to the private sector. Under Hawke, the public sector has been reduced from just below a third of gross domestic product to about 20 per cent—an extraordinary move by a Labor government. Simultaneously, deregulation of the financial sector—a policy crafted by Paul Keating—has reached unprecedented levels in the Australian economy with some disastrous consequences.

A particularly vivid illustration of the pragmatic opportunism of the Hawke government is its retreat from environmental issues. Although it is true that the government blocked mining at Coronation Hill, and that a watering-down of Labor's uranium mining policy was resisted at the party conference in Hobart, since the last federal election the government has been signalling that it is ready to revise its commitment to environmentalist causes. The decisions relating to Coronation Hill and uranium were entwined with an opportunistic response to leadership and electoral concerns within the ALP. The former was a result of Bob Hawke's determination to impress his will on the Cabinet and caucus to shore up his leadership. And the uranium issue, despite Hawke's desire for a new policy, was left unchanged at Hobart to preserve a facade of factional unity for electoral purposes.

REVISION OF LABOR'S COMMITMENT to environmentalism is certainly on the agenda. This will occur because big business, on the one hand, and trade union rank and file pressure on the other are combining to force it. Large mining corporations and their commercial affiliates are anxious to see issues like the mining of Coronation Hill and the opening up of uranium mining decided on narrowly defined economic criteria. And unions with a substantial membership in the mining or logging industries are principally concerned with protecting jobs for their members. Given these political realities, it is not surprising that the Hawke government is moving away from its brief flirtation with the environmentalist movement. We can now see the political cynicism that was at the heart of Senator Richardon's 'conversion' to green politics immediately prior to the last general election. Only the most innocent of voters would seriously imagine that the ALP and the environmentalist movement could ever be long-term bedfellows.

Nor does the environmentalist movement find any comfort in the Liberal Party. The Liberals remain firmly in the grip of the economic rationalists, who see little that is attractive in environmentalist causes. Indeed, the forms of government regulation and intervention that are implicit in a great deal of green politics are anathema to the deregulatory demands of the new right. And

what is a decided preference for the Liberals becomes sheer intransigence for the National Party, which has been cultivating a close relationship with the mining industry for nearly three decades.

Jilted by the Hawke government, unloved by the Liberals and Nationals, what are the environmentalists to do? One solution would be to follow some of the European models and seek to create a green political party. But single-issue parties have a very poor record in Australian political history. In part this is because of the stability of the Australian political system. The vast majority of voters are habitually aligned with one or other of the mainstream parties. There have been some interesting shifts in electoral alignments in recent years, but they have overwhelmingly benefited the mainstream parties.

It is especially difficult for small parties with a limited social base and narrow policy appeal to sustain a place in the political system. The Democratic Labor Party, for example, died because it was incapable of extending its appeal much beyond the Catholic *petite bourgeoisie*. And, even after a decade of intense political work at the federal level, the Democrats have failed to secure a seat in the all-important House of Representatives. In short, it is unimaginable that a narrowly focused green party could achieve anything more than a token place in Australian politics.

BUT IF WE EXAMINE the social composition of the environmentalist movement, we can find some clues to a future for green politics in Australia. Environmentalists in this country are rarely drawn from the commercial classes or the working class. Their level of education is above average, and they often espouse issues on anti-instrumentalist grounds. So they do not have a base, such as the labour movement or business connections, from which they could launch a successful political party, and they are faced with the fact that a single-issue party is unlikely to have electoral success. That path leads to political oblivion.

In social and economic terms Australia's greenies have much in common with the membership of the Democrats. Since their emergence as a minor political party, the Democrats have championed a number of environmental issues. However, they have so far failed to attract the undivided support of environmentalists, mainly because they have not been able to establish a clear distinction between their policies on the environment and those of the ALP. The Hawke government has now done this for them by demonstrating its sheer political cynicism (or, more politely, its pragmatic opportunism) towards the environmentalist movement.

Those espousing green politics in Australia have obstinately refused to broaden their political appeal and become an influential part of the political system. They have a potential to do so, because of their links with other interest groups. Inevitably this will mean compromises. But a firmer alliance between the environmentalists and the Democrats could mean the difference between both groups withering away, or their becoming a united, innovative influence in Australian politics.

If such an alliance is to grow, a number of obstacles would have to be overcome. First, the Democrats would need to reaffirm that environmental issues are high on their agenda. This would be at the cost of narrowing the party's focus. Second, the environmentalist movement would need to become a more disciplined political entity, and be open to more than simply green politics. Both of these developments are possible, because the mainstream political parties have all but abandoned green politics.

The ALP's pragmatic opportunism, based on its commitment to economic restructuring and its alliance with trade unions that are concerned with protecting jobs, has had its brief liaison with the greenies. The Liberal and National parties remain infatuated with economic rationalism and are simply not interested in the environmentalist cause. And single-issue parties don't work in Australia. The greenies have nowhere else to go but the Democrats. ■

Allan Patience teaches in the cultural studies unit of the department of humanities at Victoria University of Technology.

MARGARET SIMONS

Cross country

IT HAD BEEN RAINING for three days and I felt like a caged beast. For 70 hours I had heard only the drum of rain on the iron roof and the din of water filling up the rainwater tanks. I missed my daily walks and blue skies and sun. When at last I gave up waiting for the weather to clear and drove into town, I was struck by how happy everybody looked. There was the comradeship and tacit celebration that normally accompanies only festivals or catastrophes. In the baker's shop, the woman clasped her hands together and looked out of the streaming window. 'Isn't the rain just great!' she said.

As a city-bred person, I had not appreciated the wonderfulness of the long-awaited rain. Nor had I expected how the whole district would suddenly spring to life: tractors began ploughing the land, the wheat went in and now, a few weeks later, the red sandhills are dusted with green. Some are not. These belong to the farmers who cannot afford seed to sow this year's crop.

We are accustomed to thinking of Australian society as a monoculture, because we do not speak in dialects or have other obvious signs of dissimilarity. Yet the city is foreign to the country, and the distrust and misunderstandings between rural and city dwellers sometimes seem as great as those between the diverse peoples of Europe.

Having recently moved to the country, I feel as though I live in a foreign place. I have now been asked to write on various aspects of 'the country' (country life, the rural crisis, septic tanks and so on) by the editors of five publications. I am the only journalist they know who does not live in a city. I have become a supposed expert not only on my own town but on everything 'out there': everything that is not on the wet edges of the continent, where most Australians, especially journalists and politicians, live. I am a foreign correspondent.

Conversations that would be commonplace in the city are not appropriate in the country. No one here ever asks me if I am married or about my personal life. In the city, rain is grumbled about, not celebrated, and the misfortunes of one's acquaintances are often quietly gloated over. City life is threaded with competition.

There are also language differences, in both big and little matters. A local character, let's call him Twicker, is notorious for scavenging at the town dump. His back yard is full of old fridges, trailers, sheets of iron and bales of wire. And among the local schoolchildren, 'twicker' means 'derro' or 'scruffy'. A woman told me that when she took her child to visit relatives in the city, he was stunned that they did not understand this word.

City people think of country people as conservative, and this is partly true, as anyone examining a map of electoral boundaries and safe seats can see. Yet in the country, the word 'conservative' means something subtly different to what it means in the city. Country people are slower to accept change and far more suspicious of it, because in Australia they are rarely able to influence the changes that control their lives. It can be frustrating to be governed by foreigners, and that is the position country people are in. Having Simon Crean as Minister for Primary Industry is regarded in much the same way that city people would regard having Slim Dusty as Treasurer.

I did some work for the local newspaper, and was asked to report on the expected closure of the local office of the electricity trust. This closure would mean the loss of 30 jobs—a catastrophe for the local economy. The mayor was protesting loudly. I telephoned the spokesman for the electricity trust in Adelaide and asked when local councils would be consulted about the proposal. He was amazed at the question. 'Why should we consult local councils?' he said. 'This is purely an internal, trust move.'

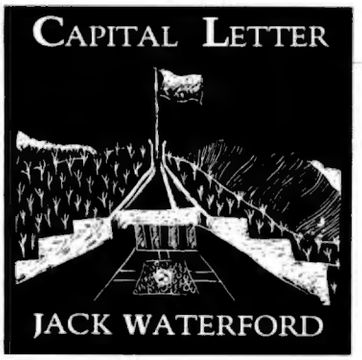
'The rural crisis' has become something of a catch phrase. There are plenty of sob stories about people going broke and living on thin air. Alcoholism and domestic violence are on the rise. It is whispered about in the baker's. Here, terrorised wives cannot even run to a neighbour. But one of the striking things about this crisis is the way that city-bred language gets turned on its head in the country. Although agriculture still carries the country, economic debate is conducted in terms that make no sense outside cities and factories.

In the city, the solution to the country's problems is said to be greater productivity. But farmers have been becoming radically more productive for years. Machines now mean that far more land can be farmed with far less labour than was needed only a few years ago. Yet this means that towns become so depopulated that it is hard for the support services to survive.

I am fond of telling people here to vote Labor—not because country people have much to thank that party (or any other) for, but because, if they do, the safe seats might become marginal, and the residents would gain more power over their lives. Once, after I had argued this line to a group of locals, one of them looked at me and said: 'You're probably right, but that would be dishonest. It would be dishonest politics.'

He was right of course. But then, we play different games in the city. ■

Margaret Simons writes regularly for *Eureka Street*. She lives in Waikerie, South Australia.



Going nowhere fast

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP on a sheep station in western NSW in the 1950s, Aboriginal Australians were very much a part of the local economy. A family lived on my father's station: the husband was a station hand and his wife helped my mother with the children. As cockies, we were not big hirers of seasonal labour but there was extra work to be had at shearing time. We hired it from the mission at a village nearby. One did not have to go far into the village to be aware of the frank disadvantage in which Aborigines lived—the shanties made from flattened-out kerosene tins, the poor water supply, the poverty and the grind.

In 1963 things started to change. It was not, at least in our area, the winning of the basic wage for Aborigines. Market forces had brought that anyway. It was drought—a long one—and the beginning of an era of low wool prices. Labour by hirelings disappeared. When I go back to the region today, I see men in their 50s who have not had work in the 30-odd years since. They are mostly sitting around drinking, often fighting. They have sons in their 30s who have never worked. In the Bourkes, the Brewarrinas, the Walgetts and the Coonambles of the country where I grew up there are now some Aboriginal enterprises and organisations—medical services, legal services and so on—which provide some employment, but the rural economy provides hardly any at all. Nor, on the whole, do the businesses in the towns. There is no work. And dare one be so Eurocentric as to say that while there is no work there is not much dignity?

There is little point in saying to those who want more work and dignity that they should go to where the work is. Not a few have moved to the Sydneys of this world. But there is no work there for unskilled people either, and even more social problems. Nor—again dare one say it—is the problem one of failing to listen to Aborigines and failing to do what they want. I do not know what the answer is and, though I am not an Aboriginal, I have spent as much time thinking about it as most people I know. And I have been to more Aboriginal communities around Australia than any but a score of white people. The question of finding ways of helping Aborigines to control their own lives still fails to find an answer from the best brains and the best hearts in Australia. It ought to be no great surprise that individuals, families or communities cannot immediately answer the question, 'What do you really want?'.

Twenty years ago a new Aboriginal Affairs bureaucracy began to develop in Canberra, imbued with the notion that the attempt at assimilation was a social and moral disaster, and had to be replaced by policies which acknowledged that Aborigines were masters of their own fate. An era of student liberalism combined with the emergence of bright young Aboriginal activists, who brought the conditions under which Aborigines were living to public notice. Appalling living conditions, high infant mortality rates, and the paternalist attitudes of Country Party Aboriginal Affairs ministers shocked a lot of middle-class Australians, not least in the Labor Party. Aborigines framed their first, and in some respects most disastrous, slogan—a demand for land rights. Whitlam came to power and was determined to do something. The slogan of the second era was self-determination. The remaining legal discriminations against Aborigines were dropped and resources poured into Aboriginal Affairs, focusing on improving living conditions, health and education.

By the time this era ended—it did so sometime before Whitlam got his marching orders—there was widespread dissatisfaction on the part of both Aborigines and non-Aborigines at a failure to achieve quick results. Words like waste, mismanagement and incompetence were used, and the focus shifted from self-determination to self-management, to Aboriginalising services delivered to Aborigines. The problems of consultation began to be stressed: many ideas and services were failing because the supposed recipients had not been asked what they wanted and were failing to make good use of it. Although this era, which ended with the fall of Fraser, is remembered primarily for dashed hopes over issues such as Noonkanbah, Aurukun and Mornington Island, it deserves more credit for progress in the delivery of goods and services.

During this period Labor persuaded itself that the reason for the failure of dollars to achieve solutions lay in the fact that programs were not designed and run by Aborigines themselves. That was part of the problem but the main fault, then as now, was in effective service delivery. Labor also developed the habit of going for the single big solution, usually encapsulated in a relatively meaningless slogan. For Clyde Holding it was land rights. For Gerry Hand it was the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). And for Bob Tickner it is his idea of national reconciliation.

The fourth phase came with Labor back in government. Much of the slow but deliberate material progress came to a halt because politicians were fixed on their big solutions. For several years Clyde Holding did virtually nothing to actually manage the department and its ordinary programs: he was too busy trying, and ultimately failing, to get together a national land rights agreement. No one knew just how such an agreement could ever have been achieved, when the nature of the claims to land was bound to differ significantly from area to area. In some places it was based on tradition and spiritual ties, in others on need and recent association. In urban areas land, at least as an occupiable thing, was quite out of the question.

Aborigines had adopted the land rights slogan but were often vague, and sometimes unconvincing, when asked to spell out what they meant. Many were naive in failing to stress that land settlement did not lessen the need for ordinary goods and services, such as health, housing and employment. But it was white politicians, particularly Labor ones, who deserved most of the blame. By themselves adopting the slogan as a panacea, they built up hopes among Aborigines that were destined to be dashed.

It was during this period that much local political organisation began to collapse. It has been a fairly well kept secret in the Aboriginal Affairs industry, but the idea that Aborigines are planning, controlling and actually delivering the services they need has become a hollow joke. More than ever, Aborigines are the sullen recipients of services conceived and largely carried out by outsiders. The idealism and talents of many white advisers are devoted to writing submissions that perpetrate the myths. Liars they might be, but they still perform a service—without the myths, the money would not come in and some people would probably starve.

Gerry Hand also did nothing to administer routine programs while he imposed his bright idea for giving Aborigines the formal machinery for making policy and priority choices themselves. ATSIC is elected by Aborigines, with a complicated local, regional and national structure. It is a system of collegiate government of which Stalin would have been proud. And it faces substantial obstacles. There is no more cake to share around, and Aborigines will have to squabble among themselves for what crumbs they can get. Aborigines are scarcely organised at community level—the idea that 'representative' Aborigines can negotiate an agreement under which area A might have to suffer so that area B can prosper will take some selling. Twenty years of the best and brightest Aboriginal idealism and talent have yet to produce a truly effective regional organisation of their own. ATSIC is not their own, and the murmurs are already starting.

ATSIC addresses only one problem—that of involving Aborigines themselves in designing and organising better services. It does not address, and may even be an obstacle to, the more fundamental problem, the actual delivery of services. The bureaucracy delivering services is simply the renamed Department of Aboriginal Affairs—the same people as before. If failure in the past was primarily their fault, though I am far from sure this is so, their performance is unlikely to improve with even more chaotic political direction. The base level of services in most Aboriginal communities is still appalling. If it is better than it was 20 years ago, it is in many cases worse than it was five years ago. And when it comes to doing something about it, an ounce of technical or business skill is worth a tonne of tender concern for feelings. Don't ask an ideologue, ask a woman whose tap doesn't run or whose toilet is blocked, or who wants a bus service to pick up the kids for school.

The present minister, Bob Tickner, has embraced a new idea: national reconciliation. He wants Aboriginal Australians and non-Aboriginal Australians to understand and behave decently to each other by the year 2000. At heart, it is a public relations campaign. Maybe it will lead to a treaty, but that will be another empty slogan, since it will not involve a concession of sovereignty. Desperate to get bipartisan support for the idea of national reconciliation, Tickner has already promised the opposition that it commits them to nothing but fine phrases. It could be the silliest development yet, if only for the energy that it wastes.

Some of the most talented Aboriginal leaders believe that what Aborigines have is a PR problem. In other words, if only non-Aboriginal Australians understood what a beastly situation Aborigines found themselves in, all would change and the moral and political will would exist to address the real problems. It ain't like that. Aborigines are not disadvantaged only because decent non-Aboriginal Australians are unaware of their plight. There are forces within white society and within Aboriginal society that have created the problems, and changing them affects people's interests.

So where does that leave the Aborigines? Search me. The older I get the less sure I am of all the old prescriptions. Maybe something will emerge one day. But while we are waiting, let's get some hot and cold running water into a few more houses and a few more kids into school. We're spending so much time resolving the big problem that we are providing fewer services than we were in 1980. ■

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

Sorting out the sound and fury

B.A.Santamaria's Catholic Social Studies Movement was at the centre of the ALP split in the 1950s, and became a focus of deep divisions within the church itself. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Movement (though the date, like the date of the founding of the ALP, is in dispute).What was the Movement's contribution to Australian public life? ***Bob Murray****,* ***Val Noone*** *and* ***Michael Hogan*** *give their views.*

THE TUMULT AND SHOUTING have been deafening for decades, but now that both have died down we can more calmly pose the question, 'What has been the effect of the Movement and National Civic Council on the labour movement?' The embarrassing answer seems to be 'not much'.

True, the Movement was a big factor in the ALP split of 1955 and helped keep Labor out of office, especially in 1961. However, some points should be made about this. First, there was an element of accident, including the bizarre behaviour, during the Split, of the Labor leader, Dr Evatt. Secondly, even without the Split there was no guarantee that there would have been an Evatt Government at any stage in the '50s or a Calwell Government in the '60s. Third, even if the Movement and the Democratic Labor Party did deprive us of one or both of these as Prime Minister, it would be hard to argue that they deprived Australia of a golden age.

In other words, Labor did not get there because it was not very impressive in the Menzies era. The Split made it worse, but even without it the party still had a long way to go to be good government material. The problem then, and until recently, was its fondness for big government and extravagant promises to the electorate which, if implemented, would have resulted in severe inflation. This problem became endemic after J.B. Chifley died in 1951 and was, though partly redressed, the main weakness of the Whitlam Government.

The Movement and the DLP impinged little either way on this situation. Indeed, one of its worst manifestations was Evatt's promise in 1954 to abolish the means test on pensions, which probably lost him many more votes than Petrov ever did. This came at the time when the Movement was at the peak of such influence as it had in the labour movement.

The inescapable point here is the irrelevance of most of the Movement's social policies to what was happening in the country, and also its ability to wield influence with policies that did affect day-to-day issues, for example its policy of a productivity index for wage fixing. There may or may not have been something in this in the '50s, and again now, but it is and was unsaleable in an organisation based on trade unions paid by their members to raise wages.

The Movement's foreign affairs ideas look no better in retrospect. The 'threat from the north' fear, though so far shown by posterity to be unfounded, was as good as any other contemporary analysis of Australia's foreign relations challenges. However, the arrogant, extravagant way in which it was put and the head-on conflict with Labor's isolationist instincts of the '50s and '60s discredited the anticommunist ideology in foreign affairs, long before events began to disprove it.

Much the same applies to the 'small is beautiful' and 'back to the land' ideas. There may or may not have been a point in them, but they were arrogantly conceived, poorly thought out and even more poorly placed in the market of ideas. The Communists, who had even more absurd policies, marketed themselves better.

ON THE CREDIT SIDE, the Movement no doubt did a good job in working with the ALP industrial groups to check the Communist tide in the trade unions. It might not have been an Earth-shattering disaster if the Communists had won control of a few more unions and the ACTU, but we were much better off with the result that the Movement helped achieve, of a good kick in the pants for the 'comms'.

The Movement and NCC have also contributed to the common good by producing some dedicated union officials, but they have been relatively few in number, have usually sought (without much success) to conceal their affilation to the NCC and have rarely even pretended to promote NCC social policies. Even the DLP officials of the '50s and '60s used to cringe away from the 'positive policies' many in their ranks wanted to advocate, believing them to be electoral poison.

BELOW: The ALP leader, H.V. 'Doc' Evatt, speaks to Melbourne watersiders in the year of the Split, 1955. A year earlier Evatt had asked Santamaria (opposite) to write his campaign speech. The offer was declined. (Photos courtesy of The Age.*)*

Mr Santamaria's role as one of Australia's better, and certainly more prolific, social commentators has, whether you agree with him or not, been another useful development from the Movement exercise. But his influence as a pundit has mainly been on the non-Labor side of politics, where he has been a force for leavening a rather stolid conservative lump.

Why has the result of so much effort over so long been so meagre? It has long seemed to me that the Movement's substantial failure lay in its trying to cover too much ground over too many years. Now that even the Kremlin is anticommunist, few in the unions can object to Mr Santamaria's anticommunist organisation and, in fact, few did even before the Split—except, of course, the Communists and their allies.

One must distinguish here between noise and real opposition. The far left stirred up a lot of hostility towards people they feared might beat them in union and party elections, and the left, like the NCC, is good at identifying enemies and mobilising against them. The divisions on day-to-day issues of industrial relations, however, have never amounted to much, nor have they fitted neatly into real policy divisions in the ALP. There were real differences on foreign policy, but over the years ALP factions have agreed to disagree on many more pressing questions.

The lesson the bishops learned from the Movement, and then the Justice and Peace Commission, was the need for clericalist structures. They can welcome the laity participating as troops, but not as leaders. How can we get them to unlearn that lesson?

Why, then, have things worked out so poorly for the Movement and NCC? Partly it was the semi-accident of the Split, but there were underlying causes that would have made for sterility anyway:

• Whether or not secrecy was unavoidable in the early days, it was certain to rebound sooner or later. The moves towards openness by the Movement and the NCC were too little, too late, and it would probably have been better for the Movement to have gone out of business in 1955, acknowledging that the secrecy was a public-relations disaster. Educative, debating-type organisations that are completely open have a better record in Australian politics than those which seek to manipulate and coerce. Catholic social policies, to the limited extent that they diverge from the main body of political ideas, would have fared better in such an environment.

• Mr Santamaria and some of his friends simply weren't 'Labor men'. It takes a particular kind of stubborn adherence to Labor Party tradition to be successful in Labor politics. Some Movement and NCC people have been in this mould, but Mr Santamaria and others have not been. The Labor mind has sorted out the real opinions of thousands of people over the past 100 years; it isn't as if Mr Santamaria was unique in trying to change it. He now seems to sit easily enough on the non-Labor side of politics, and might have been more successful if he had bowed to the inevitable far earlier.

• The emergence in the '60s of a body of ideas that might loosely be labelled 'trendyism' has made life more difficult for traditionalists of any kind, anywhere. ■

Robert Murray, author of *The Split*, is a freelance journalist and historian.

DURING THE MELBOURNE Catholic Centenary celebrations of 1948, I went with my father to the men's night rally at the Exhibition Building, to hear Cardinal Francis Spellman and Bishop Fulton Sheen speak about the dangers of communism. At the age of eight I could feel that it was an important occasion. Many of the men there that night were working to beat the communists, who were called 'commos' or 'comms', through a secret Catholic organisation called the Movement. My father, a shop steward in the Vehicle Builders' Union, belonged to one of its cells.

When my 10-year-old sister died in 1952, the two nuns who visited my mother to offer condolences advised her that she should be relieved that her daughter had died, because death had saved my sister from the terrible sufferings and persecution that Catholics in Australia were going to bear in the next year or two when the commos took over.

The nuns' views, the Movement, Spellman and Sheen, loyalty to Archbishop Mannix, devotion to Our Lady of Fatima and prayers for the conversion of Russia were, for my generation, blended into a worldview that was reinforced at school, at Mass and in the Catholic press.

Later in life my father regretted that all the Movement work his group had done amounted to opposing 'commos' and selected ALP people in union elections, without gaining benefits for members. He said that in the postwar boom, wages had gone up but that members had gained almost nothing on sick pay and superannuation. In the same years the comparable union in the United States, the United Auto Workers, had been as anti-communist as any, but made important gains in those two areas. My father felt that the Movement had been too negative.

Although, as Arthur Calwell said, many of the newly affluent Movement backers were trying to serve God and mammon by supporting the Menzies-ruled status quo, Movement trade unionists like my father were still concerned with wages, pensions, health and welfare. And in their admiration for prisoners such as Cardinal Mindszenty and Father Phillip Crosbie lay real concerns about totalitarianism.

Moreover, within the Movement framework but in tension with it, some Irish rebel sentiments survived. We grew up to be sympathetic to the diggers at Eureka

Evatt with his deputy, Arthur Calwell, and the ALP machine politician, Pat Kennelly (right). Kennelly, like Calwell, was a Catholic who remained in the party after the Split. (Photo: courtesy of The Age*)*

and to Ned Kelly. No one doubted the right of the Irish to rebel against British imperialism, and we were proud that an earlier generation had helped defeat the referendums on conscription during World War I.

Many factors led the children of Movement families to this other side of our inheritance. They included the contradiction between the Movement's support for Menzies and its claim to be for the workers, efforts by Catholic opponents of the Movement such as Arthur Calwell and the *Catholic Worker* group, and the alternative views offered by the YCW, the Newman Society and priests such as Frank Lombard, Jerry Golden, John Kelly and Con Reis. These were aided by the Vatican ruling in 1957 that withdrew church endorsement from the Movement, the tolerant line taken by Archbishop Justin Simonds, the liturgical and catechetical revival, the influence of Pope John XXIII, and the break-up of monolithic Stalinist communism.

But for many people I knew, the clincher in their break with the Movement was the Vietnam War. Evidence mounted up that the American Goliath was prepared to bomb civilians, destroy crops and homes, risk nuclear war, prevent free elections, sacrifice innocent lives, all in an attempt to tell the Vietnamese how to run their country. The Movement leadership, despite talking about Australian self-reliance, supported all that and conscription for it too.

We learned that Cardinal Spellman helped get America into the war but that Bishop Sheen had come to oppose it. *News Weekly*, the newspaper of the Movement—by then renamed the National Civic Council—did not report Sheen's change of mind. By 1970 a fair number of Catholics with Movement backgrounds had joined the mass demonstrations for peace called moratoriums. A few risked jail by becoming conscientious objectors. In 1972 many Catholics deserted the DLP and voted for Gough Whitlam.

Those who feel despair about the possibilities of social change in the face of our planet's widespread hunger, and nuclear and environmental threats, can find hidden in the story of the Movement's rise and fall some small signs of hope. If children raised in that closed system can change, then so can others. ■

Val Noone is writing a book about Melbourne Catholics and the Vietnam War.

For many Catholics who lived through the period of the Movement, the lesson learned has been an alienating one: avoid political involvement, keep your head down, consign it all to nostalgia for the time before you were an 'ex-Catholic'. In a recent column in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (4/6/91), Peter Smark recalled how the passions of the Split hardened a resolve not to get involved in political parties but to pursue the onlooker's role of a journalist. The wounds are still there.

For the Australian bishops, and the authority structure of the church, there certainly was a period of alienation from political involvement during the 1950s. Along with the split in the Labor Party there was a public split in the hierarchy and that ultimate admission of

their failure to control their own affairs, intervention from Rome. The direct result of Rome's decision was the winding up of the Movement as an official church agency, but another consequence was the resolve of the hierarchy not to let such a conflict divide them again.

Nevertheless, alienation from politics was not a permanent condition for the bishops. It was only a short-term lesson from the Movement experience. In the 1960s, while bishops were commuting to and from Rome for the Second Vatican Council, the politics of State Aid dragged them back into the bear pit. Again, as in the case of the Movement, the bishops disagreed publicly over tactics, but not nearly so seriously as in the 1950s. By the late 1960s and early 1970s they were back into full participatory mode over the whole package of 'permissiveness'—abortion, divorce, contraception, censorship, and the threat of a godless Australia posed by Senator Murphy's attempt to legislate a bill of rights.

AFTER VATICAN II there was clearly a new agenda of social concern in the institutional church, an agenda spelled out in the encyclicals of John XXIII and Paul VI and in the council document *Gaudium et Spes*. One can almost hear the bishops agonising about how to address the new agenda, given the bad experiences of Catholic Action and the Movement in the earlier period. The problem can be stated fairly simply: how to say something with a cutting edge that does not cut into the bishops themselves. The solution was to set up a separate organisation that could distance the hierarchy from the details of political controversy. Thus was born the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace. The decision was initially an enlightened one because it was also in accord with the spirit of the council that there should be an increased lay participation in church affairs.

The experience of the commission was not a pleasant one for the bishops. Its concern for the welfare of Aborigines was shared by many bishops, but the official church had difficulty facing up to the consequences of political support for Aboriginal causes and to the rebukes of Aboriginal leaders for their caution. When the mining industry attacked the commission, the bishops were clearly embarrassed by some of the commission's propaganda. On other matters, such as the peace agenda, they were, to say the least, happy about the distance they had put between themselves and the commission.

Nevertheless, as much as the Australian bishops have learned to be wary of public division in their ranks, and have tried to avoid taking sides in political controversies, these were not the primary reasons for their decision to close down the Commission for Justice and Peace. Nor were they the main lessons they learned from the Movement years. The main issue is control rather than public controversy.

Gerard Henderson points out in *Mr Santamaria and the Bishops* (p.101) that '... between 1945 and 1954, the Catholic Social Studies Movement functioned as if it were independent of hierarchical control on questions of policy.' Eventually, the Movement was repudiated by the Sydney caucus of bishops because it was not subject to their control. Rome agreed with them that the style of organisation which left control in the hands of laypeople, yet operated as an official arm of the church, was not acceptable. It was a victory for the clericalist vision. The Sydney bishops operated on the same assumption when they tried to maintain control over negotiations with governments about State Aid—by freezing out the lay pressure groups—in the 1960s.

If you ask almost any Australian bishop—even supporters of many of the commission's causes—the answer will be: 'It was a mistake to let the commission out of our control'. This helps explain why the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, which replaced the commission, has continued many of the social justice concerns of the earlier body. The lesson the bishops learned from the Movement, and then relearned with the commission, was the need for authoritarian and clericalist structures. Yes, they can welcome the laity participating as troops, but not as leaders. Both the Movement and the Commission for Justice and Peace, from their perspective, were 'out of control'. Of course, the reinforcing of clericalism involves another defeat for the devolutionist theology of Vatican II. Now how can we get them to unlearn that lesson? ■

Michael Hogan is associate professor of government at the University of Sydney. He is the author of *The Sectarian Strand*.

The old order passes out: in 1970 Melbourne University conferred an honorary doctorate of laws on Arthur Calwell. The ceremony was presided over by the then chancellor of the university, and one of the beneficiaries of the Split, Sir Robert Menzies. (Photo: The Age*).*

From both sides now

The DLP has often been seen as a halfway house through which upwardly mobile Catholics gradually transferred their allegiance from Labor to the conservative parties. But that is not the whole story, argues ***John Warhurst****.*

DURING THE 1980s Catholics began to emerge in the Liberal and National parties. Once they were a rarity. Even in the 1970s Phillip Lynch, Malcolm Fraser's deputy, seemed out of place as a Catholic in the higher reaches of that party. Now Catholics seem to be everywhere. The best known are probably the two who have recently led state non-Labor governments, Mike Ahern for the Nationals in Queensland, and Nick Greiner for the Liberals in New South Wales.

There are many more. They not only include MPs in all states but significant workers within the Liberal Party organisation. Among them are Trish Worth from South Australia, who is a former president of the Federal Women's Council, and Michael L'Estrange from Sydney, one of several Catholics on the staff of the federal Liberal leader, John Hewson. Other names come to mind on the fringes of Liberal politics. They include Bevan Lawrence, whose pressure group People for Fair and Open Government has been strongly critical of the Labor government led by his sister, Carmen Lawrence, in Western Australia, and John McDermott, who heads the Civic Reform ticket for the Sydney City Council.

Such developments do not seem strange today, but 30 or 40 years ago they would have been remarkable. Between the two great splits in the ALP, over conscription during World War I and over the Communist issue in the mid-1950s, about half of Labor MPs were Catholic. This predominance has been generally put down to the working-class composition of the Catholic community. With a little push from the episcopal

leadership, Catholics gravitated easily through trade union politics into the ALP.

The Catholic influence was a moderating one; its opponents within the party would have said it was a conservative force. During the 1940s and 1950s—and certainly earlier—Catholics felt uncomfortable in the non-Labor ranks, and some who tried to take part complained of anti-Catholic bias. There were few links between the Catholic hierarchy and the Menzies government, whereas Labor politicians had strong contacts among the bishops. These were exemplified by the ties between Cardinal Gilroy and Catholic premiers such as J.J. Cahill in New South Wales, and between Archbishop Duhig and Vince Gair in Queensland.

The Split in the 1950s put an end to this influence in most states. Those who left the ALP were largely Catholic and the new Democratic Labor Party was predominantly made up of Catholics, many of them members of B.A. Santamaria's National Civic Council. The immediate consequence of the Split, especially in Victoria and Queensland, where it was largest, was to weaken considerably the influence of Catholics within the Labor Party. Those who remained, including leading figures such as Arthur Calwell, were not only fewer in number but often regarded with suspicion.

Analysts for whom class is the most important variable in explaining political behaviour have interpreted the emergence of the DLP as a social mechanism that enabled Catholics to transfer their loyalty from the party of the working class to the party of the middle class, just as their own economic position in the community was changing. These analysts saw the DLP as very much a transitional party, which in time would disappear, but not before the distribution of Catholic support for political parties had changed. Whereas, it was said, the Labor Party once received disproportionate support from Catholics because of their working-class background, when Catholics became upwardly mobile they would support the Liberals and Nationals in greater and greater numbers.

This was an attractively neat theory which turned out in the short run to be only partially true at best. Examination of voting trends in the 1970s, about the time the DLP effectively died, showed that Catholics had returned in droves to supporting the Labor Party. Gough Whitlam in the 1970s and Bob Hawke and John Cain in the 1980s did well in Victoria, the heartland of the DLP. While some former DLP members, such as Senator John Martyr in Western Australia, emerged in the Liberal Party, there were others such as John Mildren, Labor state MP for Ballarat in the 1980s, who joined the ALP.

Furthermore, there were striking regional variations which challenged the validity of the social-class theory. For example, in NSW where the split was a weak one, the ALP remained a 'Catholic' party. Catholics predominate in the NSW right of the ALP. Many of the 'mates' are Catholics, including Paul Keating, Leo McLeay and Laurie Brereton. In Western Australia, there have been many Catholics in the ministry, including Brian Burke. Yet Catholics are no less upwardly mobile in those two states than they are elsewhere in Australia.

Why have the new Catholic Liberals emerged and where have they come from? Certainly the changing socio-economic character of the Catholic community is one factor. Political parties draw on the wider society for their leaders and organisers: business, trade unions, the professions, the public service. There have always been plenty of Catholics in trade unions and the public service, and the Labor Party drew on this pool. Now there are many more Catholics in business and in the professions such as law and medicine. From this base they are moving into the Liberal Party.

However, there is more to it than that. There has always been a small Catholic strand in the old Liberal establishment—Kathryn Greiner, daughter of Sir Bede Callaghan, comes from an establishment background. Further, the Liberal Party itself has become more welcoming to Catholics. Many of the features of the old establishment have gone, including its slightly 'Orange' tinge. And migration from Europe has introduced a new Catholic strand, different from the old Irish-Catholic community, into the Liberal Party. Nick Greiner, who was born in Hungary, is part of this injection of new blood.

Finally, this new Liberal Party may have made Catholics more welcome than the Labor Party has in some places. There was some animosity towards Catholics within the Labor Party in the aftermath of the Split. The changing Labor Party has been less sympathetic to traditional Irish-Catholic values, and Catholics in the party have been regarded as conservative on many social issues. The abortion question has not been an easy one for many Catholics in the ALP, and the 'conscience vote' on abortion has come under challenge. The opinions of the so-called 'Catholic mother of 10' are anathema to many feminists in the Labor Party, and some Catholics may have felt uncomfortable in this environment.

None of this is to say that the pendulum has swung completely. There are still many Catholic Labor voters and many Catholics in the Labor Party, and the numbers may still be disproportionately large. But Catholic no longer simply means Labor. Catholics are increasingly comfortable within the Liberal Party and, if the 1990s turn out to be a Liberal decade, many Catholics will contribute to the party's victories and share in its spoils. Catholics are now spread much more evenly across the political spectrum. ■

John Warhurst is professor of politics at the University of New England.

The year in review

With little more than half of 1991 behind us, the world is faced with the tragic human price of natural and man-made disasters of unprecedented levels.

Sri Lankan civil war • 1 million refugees
Bougainville conflict • threatened epidemic
Sudan/Eritrea famine • 12 million starving
Bangladesh cyclone • 10 million homeless
Kurdish refugees • 20,000 homeless and hungry
Somali refugees • 10,000 sheltering in Kenya

Phew!

With your help, ACR has already directed $327,000 to the victims of these emergencies.

And yet, the task ahead is daunting. Together with other aid agencies around the world, Australian Catholic Relief is stretching every available resource to bring what aid it can to those who are now suffering so terribly.

There is more to be done than the mind can comprehend and the needs of desperately ill, cold, hungry and homeless people seem endless.

But try we will. For we know that every ounce of effort, every grain of rice and every cent that you donate may help relieve the suffering of another human in distress or save a tiny life.

Australian Catholic Relief
19 MacKenzie Street North Sydney 2060

☐ I'd like to help and enclose my donation $ _____

☐ Please debit my Bankcard ☐ Please debit my Visa ☐ Please debit my MasterCard

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with the amount of $ _____ Expiry date of card /

Signed _____

Mr/Mrs/Miss _____
(BLOCK letters please)

Address _____

_____ Postcode _____

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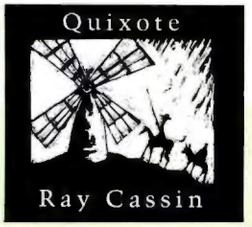

Alice's supermarket

THE GREAT DON was usually a solo operator. Of course, he was helped in many ways by his squire, the esteemed Sancho, but in the hard work of knight errantry the Don had to go it alone. It was simply a matter of charging away at the enemy of the moment. But today individual combat, whether real or metaphorical, is a luxury. We must deliberate in caucuses and committees, express our solidarity in marches and rallies, and sign endless petitions and form letters in support of prisoners of conscience.

My distinguished ancestor would have been somewhat perplexed by these developments. A simple soul, if asked to help prisoners of conscience, he would probably have replied that no honest person could be a prisoner of *conscience*, only of dungeons and chains and suchlike. But then his record in the matter of freeing prisoners was never very good. He once freed a gang of cut-throats from the galleys in the mistaken belief that they were Christians enslaved by the Moors.

It must not be said, however, that joining the great Don on the quest means resisting the realities of modern life completely. As I explain in my forthcoming self-help manual, *Quixotry: a User's Guide*, the trick lies in adopting just enough of the other guy's weapons to make him think you're fighting the same battle.

Allow me to cite an example. I have for some time been an opponent of that most un-Quixotic form of merchandising, the supermarket. Yes, I know that the mass distribution of goods means that they can be sold more cheaply, and that being able to choose from a vast range of soap powders and breakfast cereals is undoubtedly an advance in civilisation. But the military precision required to be a successful supermarket shopper is intolerable. In the Don's time, one could go into any one of a number of small shops to ask for what one needed after a day's jousting: e.g. 'A large jar of horse liniment, please.' But now the very places in which we shop have taken on the characteristics of the joust. In order to buy horse liniment, or anything else, we have to charge up and down the aisles of a supermarket, pushing a wire-mesh trolley. And the danger lies not just in being rammed by another trolley pusher, but in close-quarter combat with a shopper who is determined to grab the last jar of discounted liniment before we can reach it.

It is all an unwelcome extension of violent preoccupations into ordinary life. Forget the present obsession with films about cannibals and novels about American psychos; the real savagery is in the supermarket. But, as I have suggested above, we are not powerless. By combining with other shoppers and suppressing our Quixotic taste for single combat, we can beat the supermarket system. Indeed, some associates of mine and I have done it. Well, almost.

You start by forming a buying collective. Not a wholesale buying collective, the kind that orders horse liniment by the barrel load and then distributes it among the members. This is a *retail* collective, which aims to undermine the supermarketeers by beating them at their own game. You go to the supermarket together, select your trolleys and line them up. Then you advance steadily down the aisles, giving no quarter and asking none, until you have possession of the field.

We were a great team. We met in a supermarket snarl, the kind of traffic jam that occurs when forlorn trolley pushers emerge from intersecting aisles and find that they have nowhere left to go. There was an elderly widow, another woman with several children in tow, a punk couple and myself. After engaging in ritualised aggression for long enough to satisfy not only honour but the sociobiologists as well, we got around to complaining about the supermarket itself. And then to complaining about all supermarkets, everywhere. And that is how the collective was born.

We met each week in the supermarket car park, practising manoeuvres with abandoned trolleys until we were ready for the assault. It began even more smoothly than we had imagined. Stormin' Norman's tanks may have made more noise as they rolled into Kuwait, but their movements could not have been more precise. We swung into the first aisle, driving the dispirited rabble of ordinary shoppers before us. Cans of pet food, cartons of milk and bottles of household disinfectant were seized from the shelves and passed along our invincible line. Jars of Vegemite lobbed through the air, making a terrifying whine as they plunged towards our waiting trolleys. Frozen pizzas landed with a soft thud, their cardboard contents impervious even to our manhandling. The shelves revealed the worst they had to offer, and we showed that we could take it.

Of course, five people cannot keep the forces of repression at bay indefinitely. Whistles sounded and blue uniforms appeared at the end of each aisle. The supermarketeers had called in the law, and the law won. The trolleys were confiscated, despite our protests that we had always intended to pay for their overflowing contents. And amid the jeers and taunts of those we had driven from the aisles, we were led out to the waiting police van.

The case comes up next month. If you wish to help, proceeds from the sale of *Quixotry: a User's Guide* will help subsidise our legal costs. But, more importantly, remember that what five people almost did, 50 people could certainly do. Go form your own collectives. ■

Ray Cassin is production editor of *Eureka Street*.

DAMIEN SIMONIS

Così fan tutti

'Così fan tutti'—they're all like that. Italy is notorious for a political system in which governments change frequently while little else does. But the system may not survive changes elsewhere in Europe; Italians, like Australians, fear being left behind in their region.

'UNCLE ANGELO' WATCHED CONTENTEDLY as voters in the city of Catania turned up at polling booths for Sicily's regional elections on 16 June. Six days later he and more than 40 politicians, Mafiosi and, as the Milan morning daily *Il Giornale* put it, 'beautiful women', were under arrest, accused of electoral fraud. A week before the Sicilian poll—equivalent to an Australian state election—Italians had voted overwhelmingly in a referendum for the abolition of the very electoral system the Mafia's 'Uncle Angelo' and the others were said to have abused. Their case is unusual only in that they were caught and arrests were made. Sicilian statutes do not provide for a new election under these circumstances.

Politics in Italy is a noisy affair and, with 50 national governments since the republic was established after World War II, it has often appeared highly unstable. A simple change of government, however, does not make for instability. The dominant party throughout Italy's postwar history has been the right-wing Christian Democrats ('DC'—*Democrazia Cristiana*), which has never been out of the various combinations of ruling parties and now heads a four-party coalition. The changes are akin to a game of musical chairs, in which personalities shift around without really altering the distribution of power. What greater testament to stability than the 72-year-old Prime Minister, Giulio Andreotti, who is leading his seventh government and was a member of the Constituent Assembly in 1945?

But calls for an overhaul of the system are multiplying. Party interests are seen to be strangling the state's capacity to govern and in the referendum of 9 June on abolishing the present preferential voting system, Italians appeared to manifest a will for change. Overturning a tradition of not voting in sufficient numbers on referenda—at least 50 per cent participation is required—more than 60 per cent turned out, with an absolute majority voting to end the practice of nominating four preferred candidates in elections.

When the result of the referendum passes into law, probably by the end of the year, voters will be able to select only one candidate by writing his or her name. Until now, voters have been called on first to select a party list, then given the option of selecting four candidates, either by writing their names or choosing the appropriate numbers on voting lists. The idea was to give electors some say in the eventual choice of their representatives, as the final decision on who goes into parliament falls largely to the party apparatus.

In the north, fewer than 10 per cent of voters have exercised this option, preferring to vote for party platforms than personalities. In the south, particularly in regions like Sicily, Campania and Calabria—where organised crime is rife in the form of the Mafia, the Camorra and 'nDraghetta respectively—more than a third have usually made use of it, helping to create a flourishing market in votes.

POLITICIANS OF ALL PARTIES trade votes among themselves and with outside groups. According to Dr Bob Leonardi, a lecturer in Italian politics at the London School of Economics, the Mafia alone has 500,000 votes at its disposal, to confer on whomever it pleases. In return for securing sufficient votes, the politicians' benefactors can expect building licences, subsidies for public works—which rarely reach completion—and other favours. The magazine *L'Espresso* described an example of horse-trading between politicians in Sicily: 'Four candidates of a major party who each had a 'packet' of 15,000 votes exchanged preferences among themselves and thus were each elected with 60,000 votes. Another candidate of the same party who managed to garner 58,000 votes by himself didn't make it and stayed home.'

Not only are voters subjected to pressure or bribed, the interested parties can check on whether or not they actually vote as instructed. Every electoral district is broken down into neighbourhoods, blocks and even buildings, to which *galoppini* (political cadres) are assigned, with recommendations on which numbers are to be selected by voters. Only a certain combination is possible in the small area covered by each polling booth.

This issue, however, is but a drop in the ocean of institutional difficulty in which Italy finds itself. As Europe's states draw closer together, the shortcomings of the system have been thrown into sharper relief. Increasingly unfavourable comparisons are drawn with the systems of other Western countries and, with an

eye to the Fifth Republic in France, in which the president has considerable powers independent of parliament, cries for a Second Republic in Italy have grown. At present the president fulfils little more than a ceremonial role and the constitution stipulates that no act of the president is valid without the countersignature of the prime minister.

THE MOST VOCAL campaigner for a presidential republic has been Bettino Craxi, the 57-year-old general secretary of the Socialists (PSI), the second-biggest party in the ruling coalition. Craxi, who was prime minister from 1983 to 1987, wants a president *alla francese* to be elected directly, and to have powers that would set the office above the party structure which most people see as the source of Italy's woes. This is hardly surprising, for although the PSI wields enormous power as the DC's partner in the coalition, it can still only count on about 15 per cent of the vote. Craxi sees himself as a likely candidate for the job of president, if elected directly. His insistence is such that Italian cartoonists have taken to depicting him as Mussolini.

If Craxi's agenda is transparent, that of the incumbent president, Francesco Cossiga, is not. Little more than a year ago Cossiga was considered the model figurehead, but he too has called for a presidential republic, clashing head-on with his own party, the DC, which opposes the idea. Indeed, Cossiga, who warned last year that he was going to start speaking his mind—'I've got some stones in my shoe'—seems to have acquired a taste for conflict. He regularly lashes the press, including the DC's *La Repubblica*, criticises the *Consiglio Superiore della Magistratura* (Italy's high court, of which he is the titular head), and castigates Prime Minister Andreotti and the DC party chief, Arnaldo Forlani. Cossiga's outbursts have mystified analysts, who seek explanations in personal problems or hidden political pressure.

Other suggestions for reform include replacing the proportional representation system with the vote *alla inglese*, i.e. first-past-the-post voting. Italy's version of proportional representation does not provide a threshold for entry into parliament. (In Germany, which also uses proportional representation, a party must gain at least 5 per cent of the vote before it win seats in parliament.) Whether tinkering with the institutions can effect real change is a moot point. The target of reforms is the *partitocrazia*—the omnipresence of the parties. The national parliament is considered incapable of making decisions, such as those required to deal with the burgeoning public debt, because of the number of parties.

It is, however, not so much their number that has paralysed government, but the *clientelismo*, or patronage, by which they survive. According to Dr Leonardi, the public debt 'is there for a reason. It's not

that they can't do anything about it—they created it'. The parties have built their power-base on public funding. 'They can't afford not to be in the government,' said Dr Leonardi. Confirming that the DC was 'heavily corrupted', he reserved special scepticism for the PSI. 'They have made the most spectacular electoral gains in recent years—a decade ago they languished at around 10 per cent—and also the most spectacular deals.'

Members of political parties dominate Italy's costly and unwieldy public administration. The DC, the PSI and the Party of the Democratic Left ('PDS', the renamed communists) each control one of the three state television stations. Adherence to a party is an important career decision. But if Italians used to be complacent about the situation, they are becoming less so. Fears are growing that the public deficit and inefficient public services will put Italy at a disadvantage after European economic integration next year. Brussels has warned Rome to cut the debt but, according to Dr Leonardi, Italy's leaders are waiting for Brussels to force their hand, thus shifting responsibility for any apparent assault on the patronage system.

FOR ITALIANS, POLITICS is a spectator sport and the more teams the better. Frustration with Rome's lethargy has given rise in the northern regions to the *Lega Lombarda* (Lombard League). The league would like to see Italy divided into three autonomous zones—north, centre and south—the idea being to free the dynamic north from the sluggish, crime-ridden south. Dr Leonardi believes the league is being manipulated by Craxi, who hopes it will woo left-wing voters away from the declining PDS and towards his Socialists.

Few believe there will be rapid change, as the *partitocrazia* is too deeply entrenched in Italian life, a conclusion that the rhetoric and manoeuvring of the parties only tends to confirm. Dr Leonardi goes further: 'The state structure of the nation has expanded and corrupted itself to such an extent that it has imploded—the role of the national government in determining social and economic outcomes has become unclear.'

That vacuum, Dr Leonardi says, has been filled by the regions. The total incapacity of the national government to act has permitted the northern regions to make the economic running: 'among the top 25 regional entities in Western Europe (of a total 170), eight are Italian. Twenty years ago, there were none.' The south, however, remains bogged down in a miasma of corruption, nourished by a constant stream of aid from Rome. Dr Leonardi suggests Brussels has a solution in mind: 'They have found that the southern regions doing best are those receiving the least aid. The word is, Brussels will order the aid be cut.' With national elections due by June next year, an unwillingness to take unpalatable decisions is likely to characterise the activity, if not the rhetoric, of the parties in the coming months. ■

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

The centre cannot hold

ARCHIMEDES, IN PROPOSITION NINE of his work known as *The Method*, describes a way of pinpointing what he calls τα κεντρα των βαρεων or 'the centre of gravity' of an object. Aristotle had earlier argued that objects had tendencies to move upwards or downwards in vertical lines according to whether their nature was heavy or light. Earth, the point to which all heavy objects fell, had to be at the centre of the universe. Aristotle also discussed circular motion, which more perfect objects, such as stars, displayed in their movement around the earth. Copernicus, in the *De Revolutionibus Orbium Caelestium* of 1543, suggested that gravity had been invented by the Creator so as to unite objects together in perfect accord, but this also gave him grounds for putting the sun at the centre of the universe instead of the earth.

When Isaac Newton formulated his theory of gravity about 1666, he concluded that the rate of falling bodies to the *surface* of the earth could only be calculated by assuming that their attraction was to the *centre* of the earth. By his theory of gravity he was thus able to explain the (almost) circular motion of the planets and the linear motion of falling apples at the same time. Exit Aristotle. Though Newton offered a brilliant mathematical *description* of gravity, he could never successfully *explain* it. This annoyed him, for it thus seemed that gravity was a hidden or occult property of matter, functioning rather like the Aristotelian theory of natural tendencies to move up or down, a theory that Newton's age so strongly rejected.

Today we set out in search of gravity waves. Einstein's general theory of relativity implied that clocks run slower in gravitational fields and that large gravitational objects can bend electromagnetic radiation; these effects have been observed experimentally. Relativity theory also raises the possibility of the emission of gravitational waves. Just as a moving electric charge emits electromagnetic radiation, so also a moving heavy body may emit gravity waves; but none have yet been detected.

What is particularly curious is that, according to the mathematical theory, gravitational energy turns out to be non-local. Says theoretical physicist Roger Penrose in *The Emperor's New Mind*: 'We seem to be driven to deduce that if this mass-energy is to be located at all, it must be in this *flat empty space*—a region completely free of matter or fields of any kind. In these curious circumstances, our 'quantity of matter' is now either *there*, in the emptiest of empty regions, or it is nowhere at all!' The theory of gravity once pinpointed our centres and told us precisely our distances from each other. The new theory of gravitational waves may suggest we are also parts of a whole and without individual centres. What would Archimedes make of that? ■

— John Honner SJ

Cambodia update: *in June Prince Norodom Sihanouk announced what he called a breakthrough in negotiations between Cambodia's warring factions.* ***Michael Kelly*** *spoke about developments in Cambodia with William Shawcross, author of* Sideshow, *and François Ponchaud, author of* Cambodge Année Zéro.

Shawcross

How do you see the present situation in Cambodia?

The situation seems to me to be rather gloomy. If nothing new happens, the Khmer Rouge will eventually become strong enough to take power again. Alternatively, there can be efforts to find some settlement which involves the Khmer Rouge in government. It's a question of choosing between the lesser of these two evils. A third possibility, which some people in Australia seem to be keen on, is to recognise Hun Sen. But it seems to me that the amount of help that recognising Hun Sen would give to Cambodia is minimal, and not enough to stop the march of the Khmer Rouge. No solution can be found that is going to be of any use to the Cambodians unless it has the support of both the Vietnamese and the Chinese. And the Chinese will not accept a policy of just recognising Hun Sen.

Could the way things have gone over the past decade continue indefinitely?

No, I'm not saying that. I think the Gareth Evans plan, which was then developed into the United Nations plan, is something that should be pursued. The alternative to that is to do nothing and leave Hun Sen in power. He will get weaker rather than stronger. The Khmer Rouge will get stronger rather than weaker. And they will eventually be able to dictate terms. A better alternative would be if Sihanouk and Hun Sen can pursue the rapprochement that has developed between them in the last month. They can then come to a deal that their respective patrons, China and Vietnam, will endorse. That might be the way of keeping the Khmer Rouge out of this new coalition envisaged by the UN.

Is that a gradual process, or is there hope for a resolution by one decisive move?

We can't afford to have a slow process because of the growth of the Khmer Rouge. I would like to see the UN plan implemented but it's very hard to see how, given the logistical and technical difficulties. For instance, the UN has about 70 electoral commissioners who did the election in Namibia. They did it very well, but one of the reasons it went well is that everyone wanted it to go well. And this might not be true of Cambodia. Anyone can sabotage an election: just bomb one polling booth and the whole election will collapse. And the other thing is that in Namibia there's a very good infrastructure and there's the English language. In Cambodia there's none of these things.

Ponchaud

How would you characterise the Cambodian situation during the past two decades?

They have been the victims of America, of China and of the Soviet Union. The Americans toppled Prince Sihanouk. In order to fight the Vietcong, they brought the war to Cambodia. I believe that Kissinger is the chief killer of the Cambodian people, even more than Pol Pot. The Americans were consistently bombing Cambodia, so the Khmer Rouge found a base among the people who were suffering this devastation. The Americans brought disaster on all the countries of Indochina, but especially on Cambodia.

The Cambodians are also victims of China. Pol Pot, the Khmer Rouge leader, went to China in 1967 and learnt from Mao Zedong the methods and purposes of the Cultural Revolution. Even though the Cultural Revolution was an extraordinary failure, and after Mao's death the Chinese themselves repudiated it, they were not able to dissuade Pol Pot from his enthusiasm for it. The Chinese remain supporters of Pol Pot because the Vietnamese are supported by the Soviet Union, so the Chinese support him and are prepared to overlook a great deal of his record.

Thirdly, the Cambodians are the victims of the Soviet Union. Their interest in Cambodia is purely instrumental: it is simply how far Cambodia will maintain the Soviet interest in the Pacific and that, of course, is why they have been prepared to support Vietnam for as long as they can. Finally, it also has to be said that the Cambodians have contributed to their own downfall, particularly in the person of Prince Sihanouk. His behaviour over the years has often exacerbated the sufferings of the Khmer people.

You spend most of your time working among Catholic Cambodians. What have you learnt in this experience?

It is very difficult to be a Cambodian and a Catholic, because the Catholic Church, unfortunately, is not catholic enough. I say this because when Cambodians have gone to America, France or Canada and have become Catholics, they have been expected to become American, French or Canadian Catholics. Happily, I have found it to be rather different in Australia. ■

Fr Michael Kelly SJ is publisher of *Eureka Street*.

What's in a nation?

Forum

This month's forum is taken from a discussion on nationalism and multiculturalism which took place at Newman College, Melbourne. Eureka Street *invited* **Stuart Macintyre**, *professor of history at Melbourne University, to open the forum. Others taking part were:* **Tom Duggan**, *editor of* Airways *magazine;* **John Hirst**, *historian, La Trobe University;* **John Masanauskas**, *ethnic affairs correspondent,* The Age; **Maruta Rodan**, *executive with the Business Law Education Centre;* **Morag Fraser**, **Michael Kelly** *and* **Ray Cassin**, *from* Eureka Street. *The convenor was* **Peter L'Estrange**.

Stuart Macintyre: This year I began teaching a course which has the rather grandiose title, 'Movements for social change in 20th century Australia'. Briefly, it starts off with the labour movement, the first-wave women's movement and the nationalist movement at the turn of the century, and then works its way through the unemployed movement in the Depression and the peace movement in the '30s and afterwards. We also looked at the Cold War—I'm not quite sure whether we regard that as a movement for social change or not—multiculturalism, movements of sexual identity, the Aboriginal movement, and environmentalism.

THE COURSE DREW A LOT OF STUDENTS—a fact which says little about its design but which does tell you what students are interested in. You can't interest them in matters political or economic, not even if you pay them. But talk about aspects of social history, particularly social movements, and they find that very interesting. Most of them were struck, as I was, by the contrast between what is sometimes called the old social movements and the new social movements. We tended to think of the old movements as ones that work in terms of a public/private sphere distinction, seeking change through mobilisation in the public sphere, and usually by strategies that involve the state.

The new social movements, with which the students were much more familiar, don't have the same clear social definitions as the old ones; they are not based simply on a class or a condition or a gender. They tend to be coalitions—think of the environmental movement. They certainly no longer look to the state or even to formal politics as a path for change, and they no longer maintain the distinction between the public and the private spheres.

Now, one of the things that struck me was that the students found alien many of the assumptions that I still had from the older social movements. They found some of them heroic but quite impenetrably strange. For instance, I had to explain to them that in the early 1930s there was an unemployed workers movement which was in fact a front organisation for the Communist Party, and that its tactics were premised on the notion of overthrowing capitalism and replacing it with a new order. Their eyes glazed over. I might as well have been talking about the other side of the world. And the notion which the older social movements have—that you could define and resolve the great contradictions embedded in society, and overcome

Our common identity at its best is tolerant, is republican, has a strong egalitarian element ... but we need to avoid the illusion that that particular sort of Australianness is fixed and permanent and can or ought to be defended from change. —MACINTYRE

Farmers' wives meeting at the Australian Natives' Association in Melbourne at the time of Federation

the discontent of the members of that movement—they found that fairly strange too. They are much less optimistic than that.

And when they talk about the Australian past, my students commit many of the errors that John Hirst has deprecated in his essay on multiculturalism. ['Australia's Absurd History', *Quadrant*, March 1991]. They talk about it as a patriarchal monoculture, exploitative and authoritarian. They see the history of the past 50 years as the breaking up of that oppressive monoculturism into some sort of pluralism, and undoubtedly they welcome it. It is an Old Testament/New Testament division for them. If they were here rather than me then they might say to John that Australia didn't have a particular record of tolerance. Rather it was following out the logic of postmodernity. They don't credit Australians of one generation or two generations ago with particular generosity, tolerance or much else. I think to some extent they're myopic, and that's an aspect of John's critique. And I think it is also true to say that this is a problem in the educational curriculum generally. If students had a richer appreciation of the rest of the world, then I think their evaluation of things Australian would be less melodramatic.

John also refers in that essay to a notion common throughout much of 19th century Australian history and into the 20th century, whereby Australia was seen as a country that had escaped the evils of the old world and could therefore achieve forms of progress or freedom not available to the members of old world societies. For many, that belief is fatally punctured by the great Depression and the strikes of 1890s. This is where someone like Brian Fitzpatrick sees the great shift. But what we did, I think, was see Australia, from that point on, as fashioning institutions and policies and patterns of public life that would recognise and contain those problems and those differences, particularly of class and religious faith.

Now I suppose that for Brian Fitzpatrick that process is fatally determined by its circumstances: it can never be 'glad, confident morning' again. But the result of those endeavours, I believe, is a distinctly Australian civic culture, and it is something that I value. But I do see it as something that's been in decline since somewhere around the middle of this century and its decline continues. I don't see multiculturalism as a cause, or even central to the decline. Multiculturalism, along with other forms of difference—recognition of gender, and sexuality and Aboriginal identity for instance—is in some ways an extension of the sort of civic pluralism that we were creating around the turn of the century. Like the arbitration system, it is recognising difference in order to contain and control it.

So I DON'T SEE MULTICULTURALISM so much as abandoning an earlier way of being Australian, as giving it a further twist. The real problem, I suppose, is how pluralist can you get? What is the whole basis of the collectivity that these different groups represent, or perhaps don't represent anymore? What is the common purpose? What remains of a nation?

I am also conscious of the way in which democratic nation states have a sacral element. I think the notion that you can have a purely secular nation state, even in the late 20th century, is largely illusory. There's a book by Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, which explores the meaning of modern nationalism. Anderson begins, interestingly I think, with an important symbol of the modern nation state—the tomb of the unknown warrior. In the past these sorts of icons were created for individuals, but in the 20th century it's the unknown warrior who in a sense has some sort of democratic representativeness.

Anderson says that although we can imagine a tomb of an unknown warrior, we can't imagine the tomb of the unknown Marxist. That tells us something about the pull of nationalism as compared with a more secular doctrine. Like Anderson, I see nations as fictions, realised fictions, founded on the myth of a community, a shared identity among a number of people who are never going to meet. That identity is based on a common idealised national core which somehow expresses their highest interests and is meant to command their highest loyalties. Nationalism is clearly a fairly magical thing because it manages to pull that off. In some ways I think that John's understanding of the old Australia is an example of that myth in operation—that it's a fiction of a common identity. But it's a

common identity which I think has to be constructed, and indeed is constructed historically through the 19th and early 20th century. And I share many of its values. I think of it as something that, at its best, is tolerant, is republican, has a strong egalitarian element, at least as far as equality of opportunity and esteem go. But we need to avoid the illusion that that particular sort of Australianness is fixed and permanent and can or ought to be defended from change.

WHAT STRIKES ME MOST FORCIBLY, I think, in the late 20th century, is that we have lost the language of citizenship within which we can talk about Australian nationalism now. In a sense it seems to be far more important to re-establish citizenship than it is to redefine the nation. One is a first-order problem and the second will follow from the first. If we do manage to re-establish some sort of language and forms of citizenship, then I think the sort of nationalism we have will not be a shrill nationalism, which is the form nationalism commonly takes in the late 20th century. It won't have to be shrill because you won't have to keep asserting it. You won't be so fearful about its existence or the threats to it. I think that it will still have some of the core values that John discerns in the older nationalism, but it will be one that can accommodate change.

There is a hard-headed view of multiculturalism—that it is the clever way to assimilation. This was Barry Jones' argument for giving aid to Catholic schools: if you don't give them aid, the Catholics will remain a ghetto. If you give them aid they won't be Catholics eventually. —HIRST

John Hirst: I would have reversed your order, Stuart. I'm hoping to write a piece soon on the conservative case for an Australian republic, in which I'll put the argument that it will only be with the achievement of republicanism and the final break with Britain that you can revivify notions of citizenship. I think any effort to do it in the present climate runs up against the multicultural barrier, because any account of the Australian state still has that English dimension to it. People who fear republicanism equally fear multiculturalism. I want to show them that a republican Australian would be a new source of identity and a way of re-establishing some sense of citizenship, as against the pluralism which seems to have run riot in some formulations of multiculturalism. But we'd be allies on that.

Macintyre: As republicans, yes, most certainly. I haven't quite reached the stage of monarchism yet.

Hirst: Or reached the position where it's not important. Lots of people who aren't monarchists nonetheless feel that republicanism is an irrelevance.

Macintyre: I attach some importance to republicanism, but not as much as I once would have. I think it would have been far more liberating for the English to become a republic than it would for the Australians. Because our monarchy is so light, formal republicanism is an important statement about who we are. But I don't see it as transformative.

Hirst: Just one more comment about distinctions between the two reform movements. You said the 'new' ones are characterised by a lack of interest in the state, but I think that the Australian state is very responsive and perhaps is still the focus of activity in a way that you were downplaying. In a way, multiculturalism is something that can only be constituted by the state. It's not an idea that will come to Greeks, for instance. The problem for Greeks is 'Are we Greek or are we Australian?' They're unlikely to formulate the notion that Turks should go on being Turks as well. That is usually going to be something that comes from outside. It's like Governor Bourke in NSW in 1836, when he gave aid to all the three divisions of Christianity, to Catholics, Presbyterians and Anglicans—he was doing what only an outsider could do. None of the churches would have agreed that aid should go to the others, as was very evident when Bourke took the next step and said,'I want you all to combine and have a single school system.' They wouldn't wear that.

So in a way, I'm agreeing with you on multiculturalism. It's constituted from outside, and probably by the state and outside the groups themselves. I suppose my beef about it comes from my being upset by some of the more separatist notions of multiculturalism: the notion that identity must forever be attached to your ethnic origin, which I see as a form of oppression. If an Italian boy decides that Italian village life is crude and narrow and wants something else, then somehow it is [supposed to be] a loss to Australia if he makes that transition. Multiculturalism speaks of organic growth, of something new, but on the other hand sometimes it seems to want to freeze culture. And that seems to me to be puzzling. But really I'm upset by the view it gives of Australia's past, which is very similar to Stuart's students' view. But perhaps what the past was like is no longer relevant for discourse in this or any other society.

I think it would have been far more liberating for the English to become a republic than it would for the Australians. Because our monarchy is so light, formal republicanism is an important statement about who we are. But I don't see it as transformative. —MACINTYRE

Maruta Rodan: Can I take up that point? When we are talking about the past and the present, and what young people make of history, doesn't it really depend now, not just in Australia but every other country in the world, on the influence of the media and international telecommunications? So that when you're looking at nationalism, what kind of society we're going to end up with may be fashioned by things that are happening in other countries. It will be nationalism, but with an international influence.

Macintyre: I certainly agree with you about the international nature of the cultural influences. But I think that again there's a process of fragmentation that these social movements inhabit and make use of—if you think, for instance, of the more recent feminist movement,where it has been able to generate its own literature, its own social customs. And a number of aspects of the modern electronic media suggest that this process of fragmentation is going to continue too. I suppose an equally symbolic thing would be the establishment of the Aboriginal television station in central Australia.

Rodan: But at the same time what's happening is a sort of synthesis of contradictory things. You mention the Aboriginal television station and the feminist movement: with all of these things, which can be expressions of separateness, the fact that they are accepted means that they have been neutralised. They're not spontaneous anymore. They've got official endorsement, and therefore the spontaneity has been officially channelled, which I think is a very interesting way of directing what's acceptable and what's not.

Macintyre: I think you're absolutely right on that latter thing, and that's one reason why, I think, my students found unintelligible the idea of revolution.

Michael Kelly: Several things concern me: Australia is in a dreadful economic condition at the moment, and if you look at the successful economies and societies around the world, their success boils down not just to economic performance indicators but to the ways in which particular peoples go about resolving conflicts, set about achieving goals, working together—not exactly national characteristics, but something to do with that notion. Japan and Germany would be the salient instances. So one of the fundamental questions about economic recovery in Australia is who the hell are we and what can we do?

Macintyre: Well, economic historians place considerable emphasis, don't they, on that national element, and at the moment it looks suspiciously as if the anglophone countries have embedded in them a particular notion of property rights and individualism that is poorly suited to the demands of a modern industrial or post-industrial economy. And that's embedded in our legal system, in our political system.

One of the things that strikes me is that when regimes begin to collapse, then there are a whole series of malfunctions. Yet we seem to be incapable of conducting any sort of inquiry. We've developed the royal commission into an art form. But it has reached the point of absolute stasis, where every conceivably interested party is represented by a QC and is able to cross-examine any witness, and it's inconceivable that a royal commission can finish in less than a year, or produce any recommendations that are actually going to lead to action. I think there are real problems about the sort of cultural features that we tend to assume in our public life and about their viability for the future.

Tom Duggan: How would you describe citizenship then, Stuart? What do you mean by it?

Macintyre: It is that status of belonging to a political organisation which is said to embody the interests of the group as a whole. And by development of that notion, there is the belief that it is through civic rights and civic obligations that someone can fulfil themselves in a public sense. The civic rights are well looked after under the present system of judicial enquiries. The civic obligations are difficult to see.

Morag Fraser: I wondered about your students, Stuart, and their notion of citizenship. What sort of future as citizens do you see for them if, as you say, they reject totally the notion of the political?

Macintyre: I'm not sure about that, because, you see, my role in the subject was that of the dinosaur—the person whose assumptions were still those formed by the first, the older social movements. And that whole attempt to find commonality of interests in social movements is precisely what my students find least convincing.

Duggan: Do you have any idea why they are this way? What is the basis of their disillusionment?

Macintyre: I suppose they have gone one step further from us, who have low expectations of politics but think it might be made better with sufficient passion and commitment, to just not seeing that as the way in which they want to realise their objectives.

Duggan: Do they say anything that indicates disenchantment, even disgust with the way politics is conducted in Australia, with the way, for instance, it might be now the province of articulate pressure groups or unions?

Macintyre: They do, but they don't follow it very closely, you see. I'm still riveted to it. I find politics intensely interesting but at the same time repellent. But they don't give it great attention. Far more important would be the way in which a film or book expresses their interests.

John Masanauskas: Can I pick you up on multiculturalism and nationalism again? You mention shrill nationalism. I think I have encountered a shrill multiculturalism. I am of Lithuanian background. People assume that I am Lithuanian and that is all that matters, whereas I consider myself an Australian with a certain background. So certain aspects of multiculturalism I regard as authoritarian, and that seems to be what the state is pushing at the moment. How do you see the state promulgating nationalism, and can multiculturalism be accommodated within that?

Macintyre: I am fairly critical of multiculturalism, but nonetheless I think that the effect of government policy on ethnic or cultural or national consciousness in this area is fairly slight. I don't deny that they absorb the energies of people and that they enable, for instance, multicultural literature to circulate in ways in which it probably wouldn't circulate otherwise—but the long term effect is, I think, pretty peripheral.

Hirst: There is a hard-headed view of multiculturalism—that it is the clever way to assimilation. This was Barry Jones' argument for giving aid to Catholic schools: if you don't give them aid, the Catholics will remain a ghetto. If you give them aid—and I think perhaps that his prediction is coming true—they won't be Catholics eventually. And so perhaps if we have an official Italian culture the real Italian culture will disappear more rapidly, or if you give it some public recognition then it won't be a banner around which Italians will feel they have to rally. And I think that process is perhaps happening, to some extent. The only time I really panic is over Muslims. I think that is a group that cannot be readily assimilated because unlike all the others it has a different religion to sustain its different culture. But people tell me that suburban Australia will eat away at that faith as it has eaten away all others in this country and that really the continuity in multiculturalism is the Australian fair go, which is tolerance but on the assumption that what you believe doesn't matter.

Ray Cassin: On that point, John: in the 19th century a lot of people were afraid of the Chinese in Australia, not just because they were physically different—although that was often the pretext for attacking them—but because they represented another culture. Yet I think it has been shown that not only has that culture been able to coexist with the European culture around it, but that aspects of Confucian assumptions about the world fit very well into a western, market society. Why, then, should the mere fact of not coming from a Christian, European culture be likely to make Muslims, any more than the Chinese, unable to fit into the wider society?

Hirst: I think there are some attitudes which, if they persist, will go on being a problem for Australian society. I have had primary school teachers say to me that Muslim parents have complained that their son has been asked to do what they regard as menial work around the school. The gender distinction, which in mainstream society we are now at pains to get rid of, they are still very comitted to. The argument is put that this isn't inherent in the faith, but my feeling is that some proponents of multiculturalism do seem to have a huge faith in the ability of society to work even with great differences in values.

Cassin: Perhaps the Muslims seem to be a special case because during the past decade and a half—since the Iranian revolution, the Gaddafi incidents, etc—we have all been made aware of the international strength of Islam. But you could compare this with earlier phases in Australian nationalism, when the troubles in Ireland heightened the awareness of conflict between the British and the Irish in Australia. So, if the present phase of Islamic activism subsides overseas, perhaps there would be less tension here.

It will only be with the achievement of republicanism and the final break with Britain that you can revivify notions of citizenship. I think any effort to do it in the present climate runs up against the multicultural barrier, because any account of the Australian state still has that English dimension to it. —HIRST

Australian Muslims at prayer

ROBERT EGAN

The long and winding road

Two theologians, one American, the other Australian, talk about why theology is hard to read—and why you should do it anyway.

AN OLD FRIEND OF MINE complained that although she used to be an avid reader of theology, she no longer reads it much at all. She has not lost her faith or her intellectual curiosity, but she no longer enjoys curling up on a cold winter's night with a new theology book. She asked me to explain this.

My friend is not alone in her neglect. Not many of my Catholic friends read much theology. Their desire to understand their lives continues to be nourished by poetry and anthropology, biography and history, psychology and social theory, and an endless flow of serious little journals and daily newspapers. But it rarely includes books and articles by theologians. Why is this?

As a serious discipline, theology has become more pluralistic, and also more specialised and technical. There is no general agreement about how to identify its tasks and methods, how to determine its subdivisions, how to teach it, or how to relate it to philosophy, comparative religion and allied investigations. Further, it is difficult to relate this sprawling, complicated and disorganised enterprise to our experience of life.

The most obvious difficulty is that contemporary theology is often not enjoyable to read. Theologians are accustomed to addressing captive audiences, especially students for the ministry. Few theologians aspire to the standards of 'a good book': their texts are often long, unshapely, and badly in need of a good editor. They are often written in a graceless, benumbing prose, under the unhappy influence of German or, more recently, French academic writing, a strange mix of ordinary language and several technical languages at once.

This problem is not peculiar to theology, of course. Hundreds of tirades and satires have been written on the prose styles of contemporary academics. Academic life disposes people to produce texts mainly for their colleagues' admiration, and this inevitably affects theologians too. There is an irony in this. Most progressive theologians would want to support those movements in the church which insist that 'the whole community is the church', yet their writing style leaves most non-specialists out in the cold.

It is somewhat consoling to put this in some historical perspective. Jesus' disciples complained that they couldn't catch the drift of what he was saying; and the Second Letter of Peter complains that the theology of St Paul is 'hard to understand' (2 Peter 3:15-16). This is not surprising; the subject matter of theology has to do with the ultimate mysteries of existence.

THERE HAVE ALSO BEEN worries about the dangers to faith and virtue posed by the arguments of theologians. In the same letter of Peter, we hear complaints of 'cleverly devised myths', 'false teachers', 'destructive heresies', 'waterless springs' and 'mists driven by storms' and people both 'ignorant and unstable' who 'twist' those hard-to-understand teachings of St Paul to suit their own purposes. This is bad enough, but since at least the time of Plato, and especially since the Enlightenment, ways of interpreting religion have been available to intellectuals that have the effect of distancing them from the religious imagination of ordinary people, and calling into question the reasonableness and coherence of popular religion itself. These ideas create assumptions and impressions that may create further difficulties for a heartfelt faith and devotion.

There are limitations imposed by the fact that, in most western countries, theology is taught almost entirely in academic institutions. Within the academy, theology is a vast, disorganised, and complicated field, incorporating biblical studies, church history, fundamental and philosophical theology, systematic or doctrinal theology, moral theology and pastoral theology. Then there are various entanglements with philosophy of religion, the sociology and psychology of religion, the history of religions and various theological excursions into literature, the social sciences, and many other things.

Besides the issue of style, the possible dangers to faith, the personal failings of theologians and the limits imposed by academic institutions, there are still several other reasons why reading contemporary theology is hard. A further reason has to do with the intellectual frameworks it employs. Catholic theology is mediated by both philosophy and history—

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ANDREW HAMILTON

Getting your bearings

IF YOU WOULD LIKE to read theology, where should you begin? I assume that you, like me, will be looking not simply for clarity, but for reading which will stimulate and provoke you both to further reflection and to prayer. This list includes some of my favorite books, and others that friends have found particularly helpful.

For a good short summary of faith, Roderick Strange, *The Catholic Faith* (OUP), is complete and judicious. It also has that splendid Oxford insouciance which enables Strange to glide effortlessly through all the passions and pathos that attend discussion of doctrine. It is written for a serious, lay audience.

Good books on scripture abound. Antony Campbell's *The Study Companion to Old Testament Literature* (Glazier) is both lively and comprehensive in its treatment, and draws you back to read the text with a fresh eye. Another Australian scholar, Michael Fallon, has written an excellent commentary on the Gospels: *The Four Gospels: An Introductory Commentary* (Catholic Adult Centre, Sydney) which will be particularly useful for study groups. If you wish to pursue the questions raised by scripture, Raymond Brown's *Responses to 101 Questions on the Bible* (Paulist) gives succinct and well-argued answers.

For those with a taste for history, the last decade has been a delight. A variety of early texts have become available in attractive translations and with helpful introductions. The *Classics of Western Spirituality* series, published by Paulist Press, is a model of translation and presentation. The early church, too, has been well served by Peter Brown, whose *The Body and Society* (Faber and Faber), was reviewed in *Eureka Street* (July 1991). This is only one of many of Brown's books that lie as easily by the bedside as on the desk. He is incomparable in his ability to conjure a whole world out of apparently dead texts.

Many books attempt to place the life and work of Jesus Christ in its context. Two of the most engaging of such attempts are *The Shadow of the Galilean* (SCM), by Gerd Theissen, and *Jesus, A New Vision* (Harper and Row), by Marcus Borg. Attempts to reconstruct the life and social world of Jesus are always speculative, but are necessary if faith is to feed our imagination.

More comprehensive accounts of Jesus Christ are Gerald O'Collins, *Interpreting Jesus* (Paulist), and Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ, Liberator* (SPCK). Both treat their subject systematically, O'Collins from a more detached standpoint, and Boff from the perspective of the oppressed in Latin American society.

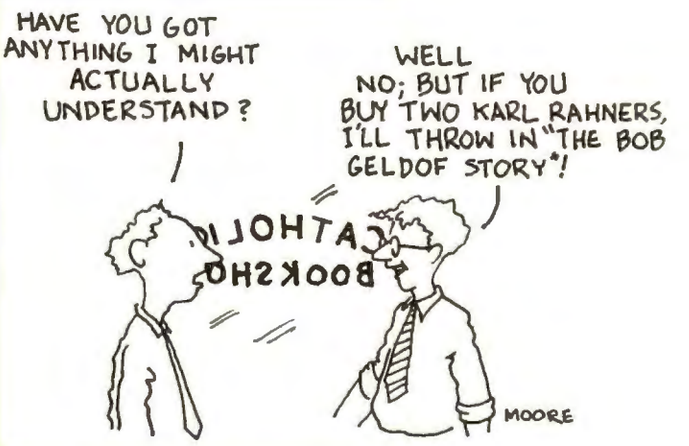
I can refer to other aspects of theology only very briefly. To understand the church and the contemporary conflicts about what the church should be, Avery Dulles' *Models of the Church* (Gill and Macmillan) is indispensable reading. This is the best of Dulles—well-informed, clear, and designed to lead you methodically beyond your present state of reflection.

A short, popular and lively introduction to the sacraments is Tad Guzie, *The Book of Sacramental Basics* (Paulist). Again, Leonardo Boff has written a most attractive and challenging book about grace. His *Liberating Grace* (Orbis) is written clearly and with passion. Boff is one of my favorite theologians, for in his positive writing, he consistently moves the heart as well as persuades the head.

One of the seminal works in feminist theology is Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (SCM). It is not easy reading, but it is the indispensable background to much later discussion. A book by an Australian theologian worthy of note is Brendan Byrne's *Paul and the Christian Woman* (St Paul).

It is worth reading good theologians on any subject. One of the greatest of our century is Germany's Karl Rahner. A collection of his writings is found in *The Practice of Faith: A Handbook of Contemporary Spirituality* (Crossroad). His brother Hugo once promised to translate Karl's work into German, so impenetrable did it seem. This is Rahner in pastoral vein, and therefore at his most lucid. But he never writes down to his audience, and his thought here is penetrating and will suggest further lines of reflection.

Closer to home: one of the most stimulating and original of Asian theologians is Aloysius Pieris, who has published two collections of his articles. They are *Love meets Wisdom* (Orbis) and *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Orbis), which reflect respectively his interest in the relationship between Christianity and other religions and his concern to build a more just society. The place of other religions within Christian thought will be the most sensitive theological issue of the 1990s, and Michael Barnes' *Religions in Conversation* (SPCK) is an excellent introduction to the contemporary questions and theories.



Finally, an Australian publishing venture worth supporting: E.J. Dwyer has introduced a series of books on contemporary theology and spirituality. The quality of the first books in the series, Neil Ormerod's *Introducing Contemporary Theologies* and Frank Wallace's book on prayer, *Encounter not Performance*, makes them worth reading, and the series itself makes a substantial contribution to Australian cultural life. ■

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sometimes more by one, sometimes more by the other. In either case, it always depends in some ways on developments in both philosophical analysis and historical scholarship. To come upon a discussion among contemporary theologians, then, is to walk in off the street into the middle of an argument—about Plato and Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas, Kant and Hegel, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and Heidegger and, more recently, Gadamer and Habermas, Foucault and Derrida, Macintyre and Taylor.

Although unquestionably stimulating, all of this is far removed from the comfortable neighbourhoods of anybody's common sense. These arguments require from us a disciplined investigation of what we mean or think we mean by God or self, by truth or history, by being certain or being free, or by the true end of our hearts' desire, which is asking rather a lot on any ordinary weekend.

As well as this arduous philosophical conversation, there is the constantly growing body of specialised literature explaining and interpreting the New Testament. In the past it was possible for systematic theologians to quote their favourite biblical passages and leave the technical work to other scholars; but now it would be hard to do systematic theology without gaining some competence in New Testament research. Reading theology requires making responsible judgments about the meaning of these texts. And there is church history: the reception, practice, and transmission of Christianity according to the perspectives of cultural and institutional history.

For all these reasons, reading theology is difficult. Added all together they are very impressive indeed, but there is one more factor that makes the needed effort seem futile. For my friend, theology does not seem related to real life. It seems cut off from daily concerns and worries, from the stories and images that shape real experience.

The bigger problem, I would argue, is that religion itself does not seem related to 'real life'. Our lives go on as they must, organised in the public categories and images of everyday thought and action, which in turn help shape the habits of our imaginations, while we are in some way 'prescinding from our religious beliefs', which are thought to be in the private sphere.

THE VERY RANGE and vitality of the secular culture creates an aura of implausibility around any expression of religious seriousness. This tendency in the popular culture becomes an object of faith among many intellectuals; in fact, there is a strong prejudice among some of our elites that no intelligent person can be both religious and sincere. In many circles these days it would require some nerve to acknowledge that one took religion seriously, much less that one actually believed in God. And if religion is marginalised, then theology is crowded to the very edge.

None of this is an adequate reason for educated Catholics to bow to prevailing attitudes and excuse themselves from a responsibility to read theology. Theology is serious thinking about the religion we ourselves are practising; we cannot simply leave it to the clergy or to professionals. Consciously or unconsciously, we are always practising one theology or another. We are praying to some power, sacrificing at some altar, offering ourselves in the service of some god, interpreting our lives in some way.

We are used to treating theology as a series of virtuoso performances by individuals. But it is a social process. If theology is serious thinking about our lives with each other, then we all need to be in on the conversation. And theology is a fully public conversation. It is not just what we wish or imagine it to be; it is going on whether we are paying attention or not. We can choose only to be knowledgeable about it or to be ignorant.

In a pluralistic, historically conscious, politically active and ecologically threatened world, a world of too much suffering and too much poverty, theology continues to speak of faith and forgiveness, of God and more abundant life, of reason and love, of community and human solidarity, of the importance of worship and the symbolic imagination, of the demands of justice, and of hope for victims of oppression, even of hope for the dead. Such speaking is bread of life for all of us, food for our souls. ■

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RAY CASSIN

Cutting against the grain

The Crooked Timber of Humanity. Chapters in the History of Ideas
by Isaiah Berlin. John Murray, London, 1990. ISBN 0 7195 4789 X RRP $49.95

HUMANISM IS IN RETREAT. Fashionable social theory regards 'man' as an invention of the Enlightenment, and charges the human sciences with making him both a subject of study and a subject of the state. It is claimed that the human sciences do not describe what it is to be human but define it.

Through their practice we have come to treat mental and physical health, crime and conformity to social mores as aspects of our supposed real selves, repudiating as alien our diseases and delinquencies. Psychology and psychiatry, sociology and criminology, have laid down not only the norms of human behaviour but, by implication, the range of deviance from it. And in doing so they have given psychiatrists, physicians and social workers enormous power to regulate our lives.

This anti-humanism comes most often with a French accent, packaged under the slippery label of postmodernism. Indeed, the previous paragraphs are a pastiche of the views of Michel Foucault, and if their summary tone does scant justice to that subtle and complex thinker, they are, however, what Foucault begins to sound like after he has been sieved through the postgraduate seminar room.

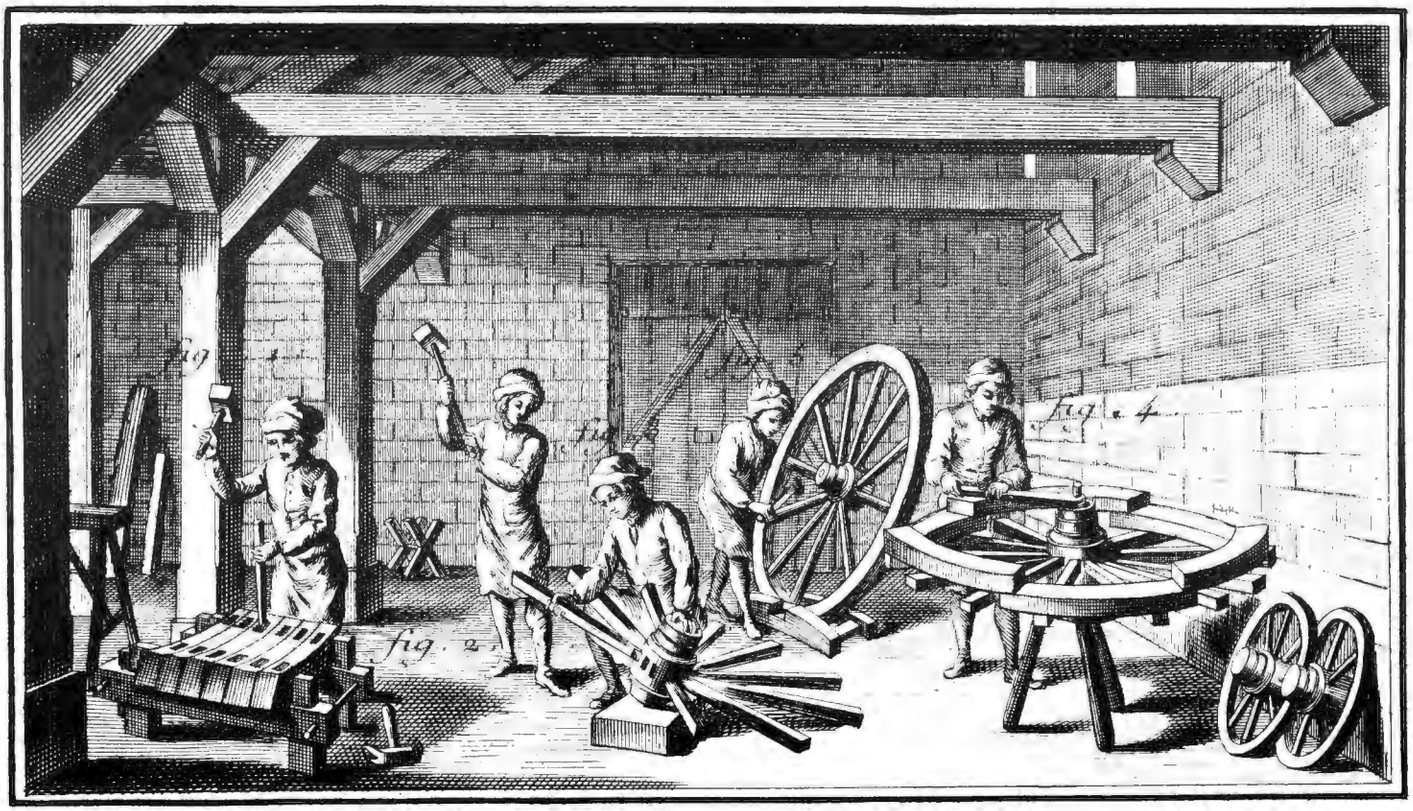
Among English-speaking scholars, however, there is an older tradition of scepticism about the claims of those who would remake society to fit their grand vision. The Oxford philosopher Isaiah Berlin is one of this tradition's most distinguished representatives, and the essays in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* all relate to this

theme. They are a selection of his work over three decades but the book's title gives sense to the whole. It is taken from Kant: 'Out of the crooked timber of humanity nothing straight was ever made.' And the first essay, 'The Pursuit of the Ideal', is Berlin's own account of the development of his thought. It was his speech in acceptance of the Agnelli prize for ethics, given in Turin in 1988. The award, perhaps, is evidence that the gulf separating Anglo-Saxon philosophers from their continental counterparts is not so wide as it seems.

Readers of Berlin's early work associate two titles with his name: 'The Hedgehog and the Fox', a comparison of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, and 'Two Concepts of Liberty', a study of the differing notions of freedom in liberal democracies and totalitarian states. Neither of these essays is cited in 'The Pursuit of the Ideal', but it reflects the concerns of both and draws them together.

This time Berlin is concerned with what the great Russian novelists of the 19th century have in common, and with fitting them into the strand of thought that he ultimately wishes to attack: 'What was common to all these outlooks was the belief that solutions to the central problems [of human life] existed, that one could discover them, and, with sufficient selfless effort, realise them on earth. They all believed that the essence of human beings was to be able to choose how to live: societies could be transformed in the light of true ideals believed in with enough fervour and dedication.'

These assumptions were central to classical philosophy, and, shorn a little of their optimism about earthly paradises, later passed into the Judaeo-Christian religious tradition. But they acquired a special force in the work of the 18th century *lumières*, who sought to apply to human affairs the methods of inquiry that had proved so successful in natural science—the observation of uniformities, the testing of hypotheses and the formulation of explanatory laws. 'The rational reorganisation of society would put an end



to spiritual and intellectual confusion, the reign of prejudice and superstition, blind obedience to unexamined dogmas, and the stupidities and cruelties of the oppressive regimes'.

Common to this tradition of thought, Berlin contends, is a kind of Platonic ideal. Greek philosophers and medieval Christians, 17th century rationalists and 18th century empiricists, and the reformers and revolutionaries of the past two centuries, subscribed to the view that, in ethics as in science, genuine questions must have only one true answer. The tradition holds, too, that there must be a dependable path to the discovery of these truths, and that the true answers, when found, must be compatible with one another.

This last requirement becomes a stumbling block for the human sciences, because the moral beliefs of different cultures, and sometimes different moral beliefs within the same culture, are not necessarily compatible. That fervent 18th century apostle of the human sciences, Voltaire, held that the values of 'enlightened' societies—classical Athens, Renaissance Florence, France under Louis XIV and again in his own time—were identical.

This view is not only clearly false but easily lampooned by Berlin: 'Voltaire's conception of enlightenment as being identical in essentials wherever it is attained seems to lead to the inescapable conclusion that ... Byron would have been happy at table with Confucius, and Sophocles would have felt completely at ease in quattrocentro Florence, and Seneca in the salon of Madame du Deffand or at the court of Frederick the Great.'

But if Enlightenment humanism founders on the fact of cultural differences, Berlin will not allow that such differences mean ultimate incomprehension between cultures. It is a matter of pluralism, not relativism. 'I prefer coffee, you prefer champagne. We have different tastes. There is no more to be said'—*that* would be relativism, but moral disagreements are not like that.

'Ends, moral principles, are many. But not infinitely many: they must be within the human horizon ... If I find men who worship trees, not because they are symbols of fertility or because they are divine, with a mysterious life and powers of their own ... but only because they are made of wood; and if when I ask them why they worship wood they say "Because it is wood" and give no other answer; then I do not know what they mean ... I cannot even call their values subjective if I cannot conceive what it would be like to pursue such a life.'

Berlin invokes 'the human horizon' but does not elaborate on what he means by it. This is a pity, for left unexplained the notion seems wide enough to undermine his argument. The 'Platonic ideal' Berlin wishes to attack is the assumption that to every question 'there is one true answer'. Yet he also wants to say that there is a 'human horizon' within which different beliefs, though incompatible, may still be mutually intelligible. But if a belief is intelligible, surely one can ask whether it is true or false? What does the 'human horizon' then amount to, other than the observation that different people have different beliefs, and they can't all be right? Implicitly, the notion carries with it enough to get universalist humanism going.

Berlin may be content to accept the humanist label. The word does not carry the kind of necessary opprobrium for him that it does for Foucault, and it is the universalist prescriptions of Enlightenment humanism that are his real target. However, by coining the notion of a 'human horizon' and tacitly conceding the assumptions he criticises, Berlin invites comparison with Foucault.

Foucault's work in the history of ideas was prescriptive as well as critical. He wanted *both* to dispense with the notion of the human subject *and* to urge individuals to struggle against the ways in which the purveyors of that notion had acquired power through the human sciences. But, as his critics have often pointed out, in rejecting talk of human nature Foucault undercut the prescriptive element in his own program. For in the absence of some account of the human good, it is difficult to see why people should struggle at all. The timber of humanity may be crooked, but it is all we have to work with.

Foucault is associated with a shift in social theory away from the traditional explanatory categories, in favour of the analysis of areas of discourse. And Berlin works within the tradition of Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy, which has always had a linguistic focus. The way of doing philosophy is so different in each case that an interest in language does not by itself make a point of contact. A parallel, however, does arise when this interest is coupled with their hostility to the universalism of the Enlightenment.

Several of the essays in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* discuss the legacy of Johann Herder, the 18th century German thinker who held that every society has a 'centre of gravity', a kind of particular genius manifest most especially in its language. And the longest essay in the book, 'Joseph de Maistre and the Origins of Fascism', takes as its subject a man whose views Berlin regards as more percipient about the course of modern politics than those of any disciple of Voltaire or Rousseau.

De Maistre ridiculed the *lumières* who argued that language was a human invention, a technique designed to aid communication. According to such theorists there could be thoughts without symbols: first we think, and then we find the symbols to express our thoughts—a notion held uncritically by most philosophers until our own century. De Maistre, however, pointed out that there could not have been a moment when human beings invented language; to invent one must think, and to think *is* to use symbols, an articulated vocabulary.

De Maistre is often dismissed simply as a reactionary, desperately invoking the authority of the church to shore up the social order attacked by the French Revolution. But for Berlin, De Maistre's real starting point lies in his scepticism about the humanism of the Enlightenment: 'The constitution of 1795, [De Maistre wrote] just like its predecessors, was made for *man*. But there is no such thing as man in the world. In the course of my life I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians, etc ... But as for *man*, I declare that I have never met him in my life; if he exists, he is unknown to me.'

In different ways, Herder and De Maistre both prophesied a world dominated by consciousness of belonging to a particular group. The kind of world, in fact, in which we now live. In Europe, the past decade has seen the decline of universalist ideologies like Marxism and a resurgence of nationalism. And, if the old empires of Europe no longer hold sway in the Third World, nationalism is the most virulent legacy of these empires to their former colonies. Among secular ideologies, at least, nationalism is the only 'ism' that still has teeth.

It remains to be seen whether the new nationalism will be a peaceful coexistence of different cultures, as Herder sought, or a source of violent conflict, as De Maistre thought was inevitable. ■

Ray Cassin is production editor of *Eureka Street*.

Frog

If I followed it up
with a linguist
with a sense of humour
would the word 'frog'
sound as comical
in other languages?
Bearing in mind,
despite the Tower of Babel,
babble,
that when God
made the animals
He brought them to Adam
to see
what names
he would give them

Like K3 background radiation
crackling faintly
throughout the universe
I can still hear
the Divine cosmic laugh.

Only it's warm
not cold.

Patrick O'Donohue

BRETT EVANS

Revising Japan

Japan to the Rescue, Humphrey McQueen, William Heinemann, ISBN 0 85561 402 1 RRP $16.95
Bonsai Australia Banzai: Multifunctional Polis and the making of a Special Relationship with Japan, Gavan McCormack (ed.), Pluto Press, ISBN 0 949138 64 9 RRP $24.95.

STRATEGIC NECESSITIES SOMETIMES make for unlikely alliances. In 1915 Japan and Australia fought side by side to help their common ally Great Britain quell a mutiny of Indian troops at Singapore. From 1915 to 1918 Japanese warships patrolled the waters of South-East Asia at the behest of Great Britain and thereby effectively took over the protection of Australia's strategic maritime environment. In 1916 a Japanese warship, HIJMS Ibuki, ensured the safe passage of Anzacs part of the way to Gallipoli.

Could it really be true that the nation responsible for Changi and the Thai-Burma Railway might have also played some small part in the creation of the Anzac legend? Any one of the above facts might just achieve the impossible: the rendering of Bruce Ruxton speechless.

The radical historian Humphrey McQueen has presented many such stories in his latest book, *Japan to the Rescue*, with the intention of dowsing his Australian readers in 'an intellectual cold shower' so that they might look to the end of the 'American Century' with a clear head.

As American power declines and Japan grows in stature Australia must somehow learn to view the world in a new light. Naturally enough for a historian, McQueen wants us to base our current and future external policies upon a reassessment of the past. In essence, McQueen wants Australia to put to the sword some of its most cherished national myths.

Implicit to McQueen's argument is a revisionist methodology. Like the 'New Left' analysts of the Vietnam War, McQueen is not afraid to use terms like 'imperialism' and 'hegemony'; he views international relations as a clash between empires, driven by economic imperatives.

Consequently he refuses to lay the blame for the Pacific War solely at the feet of Japan. Japan was, and still is, a resource-poor nation highly dependent upon imports of oil for its economic survival. According to McQueen, Pearl Harbour arose directly from a United States-led oil embargo against Japan which threatened its economic security. Far from being unprovoked aggressors, the Japanese were merely conforming to the norms of international behaviour favoured by all the great powers, simply: 'war is the continuation of economics by other means'.

McQueen is equally unwilling to accept conventional wisdom regarding the nature of Japanese aggression during World War II. Contrary to popular belief, he argues that the Japanese High Command never intended to invade Australia; that this 'invasion' was not prevented by the allied victory in the Battle of the Coral Sea; and finally, that the barbarous behaviour of the Japanese Imperial Army during the Second World War does not reveal 'an innately flawed national character or culture'.

It is the last, and most controversial, of these propositions that goes to the very heart of Australian anxieties about Japan. McQueen does not seek to downplay the suffering of those men and women systematically brutalized by the Japanese war machine, he merely wants to remind us that the Pacific War was fought without mercy—from both sides.

Australian troops were famous for 'taking no prisoners'; but McQueen asks: is this because the Japanese army was gripped to a man with the code of *bushido* and refused to surrender, or did Australia's soldiers simply take no prisoners in battles against an enemy they were encouraged to think of as sub-human?

Central to McQueen's thesis is the notion that one imperial power is as reprehensible and untrustworthy as another. Not surprisingly, the national myth most firmly in McQueen's sights is the Anzus alliance. In 1951 Australia sought to create an anti-Japanese pact with its wartime ally the United States. Contrary to Australian expectations, however, the Anzus Treaty actually committed Australia to the *defence* of Japan in some circumstances.

THE US SECRETARY OF STATE, John Foster Dulles, rewrote the text to mean that 'there would be an armed attack on the United States if there were ... an attack on the American armed forces stationed in or about Japan under the Security Treaty with that country'. Therefore, should Japan be attacked, Australia would also be at war.

ABOVE: Japanese troops surrendering to Australian forces in North Borneo, 1945.

Had Australia really been duped into accepting a commitment by its 'great and powerful friend' that it felt was antithetical to its national interest? It is McQueen's opinion that this episode set the tone of the relationship up until the present, with Australia's interests taking second place to the needs of the American Empire.

This is the hub of McQueen's argument: 'We need to look on Japan as just another power with which we can cut tactical deals. Least of all should we fear Japan more than any other power'. Australia must learn from the mistakes of its dependent past and adopt a policy of 'lightly armed opportunism'. In pursuit of this policy McQueen counsels the development of a new diplomatic triangle involving Japan, Indonesia and Australia. Both Japan and Australia have a strategic interest in ensuring that Indonesia allows the free passage of shipping through its waterways. Might not Australia and Japan's mutual interest in a safe strategic maritime environment throughout South-East Asia resurrect their unlikely alliance of World War I?

ULTIMATELY, OF COURSE, McQueen neither wants or expects Japan to come to our rescue, but only when we are capable of imagining such a scenario, he argues, will we be able to make the most of the emerging international system.

Two parts history, one part polemic, with a dash of memoir and literary criticism thrown in for good measure, *Japan to the Rescue* is a provocative and timely book. It is also, at times, appropriately scathing: 'Wealthy racists who jeered at Aboriginal land rights discovered that golf courses were sacred sites'. As one of Australia's few independent intellectuals McQueen is free to range across issues and subjects uninhibited by the often stultifying effect of academic tenure and guided by the one of the first laws of writing: 'never be boring'.

One aspect of the Australian-Japanese relationship barely dealt with by McQueen is the now infamous Multifunctional Polis (MFP). The MFP is yet to have a discernible impact upon the Australian economy, but it has certainly given the local publishing industry a marketable debate; several books have now appeared. The most recent, and best, is a collection of essays edited by Gavan McCormack, professor of Japanese history at the ANU, titled *Bonsai Australia Banzai: Multifunctional polis and the making of a special relationship with Japan.*

The book benefits from the expertise of its contributors, but also from a thoughtfulness born of distance. Early debate over the MFP amounted very often to little more than the articulation of a commentator's worst fears or greatest hopes; critics and supporters alike were inclined to take the utopian hype surrounding the project too seriously.

It is only now, four years after the original proposal, with the aid of books like McCormack's, that we can stand back and observe the MFP for what it really is: a distraction from Australia's deepening economic malaise. The MFP is neither an 'Asian invasion' nor 'manna from heaven'; however the style and vociferous nature of the MFP debate is symptomatic of Australia's increasing anxiety about its economic future.

According to one of the book's contributors, Tessa Morris-Suzuki: 'the MFP project is a scheme to build a residential, educational and industrial complex housing up to 100,000 people on the fringes of the city of Adelaide': hardly a wondrous technological fix, or a threat to our democracy. It represents neither a sudden change to the population or culture of South Australia, nor a massive expenditure of public monies. In fact, it represents little more than the type of infrastructural development that the Australian economy desperately needs.

GENERALLY SPEAKING, the Japanese are still as loath as ever to increase their investment in Australian manufacturing, remaining content to view Australia as a combination of quarry and tourist park. Nor does the MFP foreshadow the successful adoption by Australia of Japan's model of economic development.

Indeed, McCormack and his contributors warn against the wholesale adoption of Japanese economic policies. Recognizing the soundness of government intervention in the economy is one thing, but adopting the techniques, and numerous costs, of Japanese capitalism is quite another.

The MFP could represent the beginning of a 'special relationship' between Australia and Japan, if efforts are made to overcome the vast gulf of mutual ignorance that lies between our societies. But how 'special' is

'special'? Australia is already deeply integrated into the Asia-Pacific economy as a supplier of raw materials. The real questions for the future are: will we remain as a mere adjunct to our industrialised, hi-tech northern neighbours, or will we break out of this economic straitjacket and become a successful trader in value-added manufactures in our own right? And how can Australia use its growing relationship with Japan to ensure the latter outcome?

At one point McQueen states baldly: 'Australia is not part of Asia. The reiteration of the claim that "Australia is part of Asia" indicates how far off that incorporation remains ... If we are to become "Asia-conscious", we must simultaneously become "Australia-aware".' Learning how to survive alone in a harsh international environment will be an essential prerequisite to our becoming a part of the region which we call our home but rarely ever visit. ■

Brett Evans is a research officer for the Evatt Foundation

DAVID POLLARD

Money, money, money

DISCUSSION ABOUT THE Australian economy is common and heated at the moment and so it is very interesting to find three separate contributions from Christian sources being offered at the same time. And very different sources they are. Kim Hawtrey left a successful banking career to work full-time for the evangelical cause and his contribution from right field is a very informed piece which subjects many of the current assumptions about means and ends in economics to the judgement of biblical revelation.

Daryl Dixon, who is currently associated with the Brotherhood of St Laurence's Social Policy Research Division, is an established commentator on federal government economic and social policy. The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference needs no introduction. Their current publication, though, is a first—an attempt to write a document which they can all own. It was written by a committee (the Committee for Justice, Development and Peace) for another committee (the Bishops Conference).

The Australian economy is, as everyone knows, facing some severe difficulties. These include: the persistence of inflation; the relentless upward drift in money wages, despite the accord; the long term decline in the terms of trade; the failure of manufacturing to survive the lifting of tariffs and the failure to develop exportable products to replace commodity exports of declining value.

There are also greater forces at work which make the long-term prospects for the Australian economy even more worrying. The collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe may have the odd, though predictable, result of making those areas more self-sufficient in foodstuffs. Until 1917, Russia was a net exporter of grain. Collectivised agriculture made the Soviet Union a net importer of grain. Soon all that will all end. Soviet agriculture will be de-collectivised and the effect will be the end of regular Australian grain sales to the USSR and probably to the rest of Eastern Europe as well.

Life after Debt: A Way forward for Troubled Australia, Kim Hawtrey, Albatross, Sydney, 1991. ISBN 0 86760 136 1

The Way ahead in Fiscal Policy, Daryl Dixon, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Public Sector Management Institute, Melbourne, 1991. ISBN 0 947081 47 X $13.50

Common Wealth and Common Good: A Statement on Wealth and Distribution, Australian Episcopal Conference, Collins Dove, Melbourne, 1991. ISBN 0 85924 912 3 $9.99

But this is only a tiny example of the difficulties facing commodity exports, Australia's staple. The recent problems in the wool export sector have been well publicised. The long-range implication of the abolition of the floor price for wool is that Australian farmers can sell as much wool as they want to at a significantly lower price. The terms of trade for commodity exports have been declining for many years. Wheat and wool are caught up in this slump and there is no particular reason to believe the slump will go away.

THIS PROBLEM HAS long been recognised. The classic response to it has been to develop policies which accentuate manufacturing industry. Unfortunately manufacturing has encountered problems as well. Like Argentina, Australia, after World War II especially, developed a wide range of manufacturing industries under the pro-

tective wall of strong tariff barriers. At one stage about 25 per cent of the Australian workforce worked in manufacturing.

The figure is now about 16 per cent and falling rapidly. Australian manufacturing is not very competitive because it is not actually very good: not for export anyway. Sweden is an instructive comparison. A country of about the same population, not a member of the EEC and with only a fraction of Australia's raw material endowments, Sweden has built up a large and important manufacturing export sector as a result of deliberate government policy based on niche marketing and a single-minded commitment to quality. Scandinavian self-discipline and commitment help.

By now it should be evident that I believe that the essential problems of the Australian economy are supply-side problems: how to add value to the commodities which we produce and how to make products which the world actually wants to buy. Related to this is the problem of changing Australian cultural values, so that we will commit ourselves to producing quality products and to setting wage rates based not on what someone else gets but the market worth of the product.

It is essential to decide what sort of economy we want because many other social policies are contingent upon such a determination. These policies include education, immigration, wages policy and social policy. Which leads us to these three books. All three start with an interest in social policy and structuring the economy to maximise benefits for people. Social policy is something anybody can have an opinion on, and most groups can, if they wish, have some hand in shaping it.

Kim Hawtrey's *Life after Debt* is an excellent introduction to the current problems facing Australia's economy and a very useful guide to the changes (viz. microeconomic reform, deregulation) currently being tried. He takes the reader through recent economic history and shows why we are now where we are. He also puts the problems in a wider perspective and takes seriously the increasing interdependence of the Australian, East Asian and Pacific rim economies.

He then leaps to the personal. Greed corrupts. Human beings lose sight of the spiritual. The means become the ends and the economy ends up as a trough which benefits the few who are able to sink their snouts into it. As economics it is quite engaging. As theology it reflects its individualistic evangelical roots and says little, settling for an appeal to personal conversion which, considering the recent behaviour of Australia's captains of industry, is not a bad start. Fortunately there is a lot more economics in it than theology.

Daryl Dixon's book focuses on fiscal policy and how to reform it. Fiscal policy is about taxes and the budget—how public money is raised and spent, and what effect both actions have on people's economic and social behaviour. We have heard a lot more recently about monetary policy—interest rates and the supply of money and their effects on production, savings and investment—than about fiscal policy. But the importance of fiscal policy remains central for the standard of living of most Australians, and especially the poor, who are not worried, for example, by mortgage interest rates.

The basic thesis is that Australia's fiscal restraint potentially threatens those on low incomes. The challenge it addresses is how to meet legitimate macroeconomic ends while safeguarding the standard of living of the poorest. He argues for full employ-

ment—unemployment now exceeds 10 per cent—high growth and social justice, i.e. equal opportunity. These three aims provide the framework for the development of a well buttressed argument from the Left calling for growth with equity.

Dixon identifies the central problems of the ailing Australian economy as inflation, a savings shortage, the balance of payments problem, foreign debt and overinvestment in property. Actually I think these are best treated as symptoms of a deeper malaise, the inability to develop a truly competitive market economy where rewards have some realistic relationship to input. The reason there is overinvestment, for example in property—currently being corrected, much to the chagrin of Tricontinental, Rothwells, Bond and scores of others too highly geared to survive a falling market in land—is largely because investment in making things is too risky.

Dixon goes on to suggest a range of corrective policies. The argument does not need to be reproduced here. Once the correctives are established the argument is taken over by another author, Bruce Prosser, who responds with an examination of the social policy implications of Dixon's case. This response restates the now rather discredited arguments for universalist community service provisions—everyone has access to welfare not just the poor—as a way of beating Dixon round the head.

The real value of this sort of dialectic is to show how a complex question can be unpacked by allowing people with very similar sets of values to argue about the best policies for achieving them.

The third book, the Catholic bishops' statement on wealth and its distribution, *Common Wealth and Common Good*, was three and a half years in the writing. Probably the length of time is part of the cost of adopting a methodology whereby all parties—15 pages of them according to the acknowledgements at the end—are listened to and all the bishops have to agree on the final form. Of course it needs to be pointed out that the published document presents itself as a 'draft'. It is not intended to be a definitive statement and is therefore open to public comment.

The aim of this wide ranging exercise is an ambitious though laudable one: to produce a document which will be taken seriously by government as a philosophical basis for profound policy change in favour of the poor. Somewhere along the way, however, this aim is transmuted into an exhortation to Catholics to take seriously the question of wealth distribution and do something about it. The two aims, while important in themselves, become confused and the document ends up dealing adequately with neither.

When the statement first came out some bright journalist called it *Rawlsian* and opined that its philosophical assumptions lay with the great American ethicist. In my view, a cursory read of the document's 100 pages suggests that it contains no consistent philosophy of social justice .

RAWLS HOLDS THAT those that want to construct a social contract, who have no conception of the common good and no knowledge of economic variables governing society, should view social and economic inequalities as having to satisfy two conditions: they must be equally attachable to all positions in society and they should give the greatest advantage to the least advantaged members of society.

This is fairly heavy liberalism, quite defensible within its own terms, but rather different from the somewhat unfocused approach of this document. In *Common Wealth and Common Good* we are presented with a basic version of a Biblical theology of social justice where revelation is presented as a seamless garment of Old and New Testament. By the time we reach chapter five we are urged to sell all and follow. From the perspective of an institution, of course, this does offer an important challenge, but it is not particularly helpful for the majority of families struggling to live with mortgages and car payments.

There is a problem with this kind of message: theology needs to be wrestled with because it is not simple. It reflects the complexity of God and the ambiguities of the divine-human relationship. There is no simple single demand in justice. There are complex, ambiguous, dimly perceived and changing demands mediated by competing priorities of the good, and no comfort anywhere that one has indeed done the good in truth. Christian ethical life is always problematical. While the concerns of social justice are rightly central in this document, they are presented in too simple a way.

At the same time, when compared with the professional treatment of the other two books, the presentation, here, of contemporary economics is not particularly instructive. For example: 'those who control corporate wealth are ... strongly influenced by the profit motive, which has its own inherent dangers'. It could well be argued, however, that profits are needed to produce investible funds which are necessary for employing people: the profit motive is essential for any well run economy. Perhaps what the document is really talking about is greed, which is something entirely different and rightly condemned.

Or again: '[senior executive salaries] have accentuated the gap between those at the top and at the bottom of the income scale ... When the same percentage increases are awarded to all salary earners, those at the top of the salary scale received much more ... than those lower down.' On the contrary, it is possible to argue that some people should be getting high salary increases while others should be getting zero, especially if one takes the long view on the future efficiency of the economy. Do mere income differentials denote injustice?

The end product is a document which does not really succeed as economics or policy nor as an educational statement. It falls between two stools. If there is more to come I hope the committees decide more precisely what the document needs to say and to whom it needs to be said. If they are serious about about influencing government policy, that means they must be more professional, in terms of economic analysis, than the policy makers the government already has working for it. In this area the document has a long way to go.

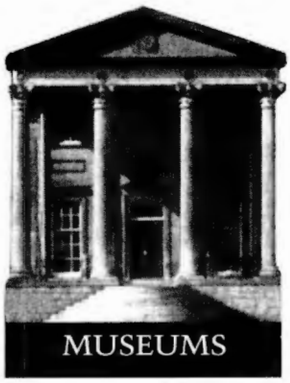
David Pollard is an executive with the Australian Securities Commission.

Next month: 'Homilies or prophecies'. **Bruce Duncan CSsR** examines further the bishops' wealth inquiry.

The New Floor

Digging three rows of holes to start with
the remembrance of physical work comes early,
that moment of unguardedness when the load
is shared equally between body and mind;
something it has in common with palpable love:
a design feature to stop the species dying out.
Its symptoms are tentative beads of sweat,
a deeper breathing that falls into step,
and the sensation of having new hands,
of feeling them tighten with plump blood.
Waiting to be remembered after these fade
is the pleasure of knowing how things work
and a reminder of the ordinary details involved.
For instance, the simplicity of your tools:
hammer and nails; chisel, pencil and saw.
And for your measurements not much except
a spirit level and a roll of string.
No amount of technology could make
the finished floor more level than these can.
It's as good as that other thing, poetry
which only needs a pencil and some paper.
With love the lines fit into logics of their own:
the first of redgum stumps, then tin caps, bearers,
joists, and finally the bare pine boards.
They lie there at the end of low-tech work,
tongue in groove and side by side as tight
as lines from Dante's faithfully measured book:
an understanding to keep the years together.

Philip Hodgins



SUSAN CRENNAN

EXHIBITIONS

Blessed the fruit of the earth

Plants in the Bible: An exhibition at the Jewish Museum of Australia, Toorak Road, South Yarra, Victoria.

Beyond his hope, Eve separate he spies,
Veild in a Cloud of Fragrance, where she stood,
Half spi'd, so thick the Roses bushing round
About her glowd, oft stooping to support
Each Flour of slender stalk, whose head though gay
Carnation, Purple, Azure, or spect with Gold,
Hung drooping unsustaind, them she upstaies
Gently with Mirtle band, mindless the while,
Her self, though fairest unsupported Flour,
From her best prop so farr, and storm so nigh.
Neerer he drew, and many a walk travers'd
Of stateliest Covert, Cedar, Pine, or Palme,
Then voluble and bold, now hid, now seen
Among thick-wov'n Arborets and Flours
Imborderd on each Bank, the hand of Eve;

Milton, *Paradise Lost* IX, ll 428-438

TAKING THEIR CUE from Genesis 2: 8, many poets and painters have imagined the botanical beauties of the Garden of Eden. This exhibition starts there and moves beyond the loss of innocence to the theme of agriculture in the Bible and from that to the enduring festivals and rituals related to the rhythms of the agricultural seasons of Israel. The layout of the exhibition emphasizes this progress.

In order to enter the corridor representing the Garden of Eden, it is necessary to pass by a display case which contains texts concerning the geography and topography of Israel and photographs of the historical homeland of the Jewish people. Amongst these are photographs of 'Capernaum and the Sea of Galilee' (1912) and 'The Mountains of Judea, Hills of Ephraim,' (1940s) which although not contemporary, nevertheless show the Israel of this century before the modern division of 1947 and before the influx of settlers after World War II. There are a number of small albums of pressed flowers, made with olive wood covers from around the turn of the century. The flowers, arranged in stylised patterns, were popular with First World War soldiers as mementos of Palestine. It is impossible not to be moved by the faded pink rose petals, the washed-out blue of the wild borage and salvia from the hills of Jericho and West Jerusalem.

Up the stairs then, to the museum proper and past a fine photograph of the Western Wall of Jerusalem by Ivan Earl (1989). In the middle of the unyielding stone of the wall springs a lovely arceate *capparis spinosa*, with alstroemeria—like flowers drooping over the stones. There are various reproductions of Biblical plants such as *lilium candidum*, narcissus, sea daffodils and cedars of Lebanon from the *Besler Florilegium* and E.M. Lilien's woodcuts from *Die Bücher der Bibel* (1922), side by side with reproductions from *Your Garden*. In fact the strength of this exhibition lies in its enthusiasm, candour, and the lack of snobbery which allows it to display a wonderful amalgam of photographs, prints, artefacts, ritual objects, real food and real grains.

The exhibition continues with selected prints of the Garden of Eden, ranging from the medieval simplicity of a print, from *Biblia Pauperem*, to the layered whimsies of Chagall. There is also a print of the well-known painting by Lucas Cranach, the Elder (1472-1553), the perfect golden apples, the main focus in the drama. Then, in startling juxtaposition, a print of the gouache with stencil overprinting on black paper by Margaret Preston, showing an aboriginal Adam, his black Eve and tiny black Abel fleeing a vengeful white angel standing guard over a koala and kangaroo filled Eden. The exiles' path leads to proteas and eucalypts.

The next stage of the exhibition takes its theme from the later post-fall chapters of Genesis—the time when man must till the earth by the sweat of his brow. There is a large room divided by panels lightly painted with representations of the Judean hills, through which one can look to the richer colours of a separate section containing ritual objects. In the larger of the two rooms, the links are drawn between agriculture and its natural rhythms as taught in the Gezer calendar and Jewish rituals in prayer and special festivals. There are various texts describing crops grown in Biblical times and explanations of the major festivals, Pesach (Passover), Shavuot (Pentecost) and Sukkot (Festival of the Tabernacles).

In the ritual section there is a small

but graceful grouping of prints—a simple Kiddush scene, a harvest panel. Against these are set ritual objects of great beauty. There are intricately worked Torah finials in the shape of the priestly fruit, the pomegranate; there is also a three-tiered Seder plate depicting the story of the Exodus, and exquisite etrog boxes, my favourite being a beautiful silver box with a smooth ovoid surface topped by fine incised leaves and stalk. Then there are silver spice containers from Poland, continuing the craftsmen's ritual decorative themes of flowers, leaves, pomegranates and pears, and the menorah itself recalling, it is said, the shape of *salvia palaestrina judaica* (sage).

Then to the last room of all which is not only visually beautiful, but full of other pleasures especially for children. There is a bowl of pomegranates—green, pink, orange, lemon, yellow—in varying states of ripeness and over-ripeness. There are dates, figs, grapes, walnuts, a gorgeous plate of terracotta-coloured lentils, and samples of the grains of Israel—barley, wheat, sorghum. There is a real mortar and pestle surrounded by sennapods, black cumin, turmeric, coriander in a veritable bazaar for the eye, the senses of smell, touch and taste. The earthy and terracotta tones in the food and pottery are set against a number of iron and bronze age utensils on the one hand, and faded World War I vintage photographs of Israel on the other. One photograph depicts a father and son selling oranges and unleavened bread, displayed against bare baked earth. Man and boy are scowling into a fierce sun, below an enormous shadow across their adobe, across their whole world. There is no shadow or even flicker of a buyer; life in the early settlements it seems, from this and other photographs, was hard.

This exhibition is low budget, graceful, intelligent and eclectic. It captures one of the elements of Judaism, namely the ability to anchor icon and ritual in the everyday. It makes no more than passing reference to the difficulties of modern Israel. What it does however is celebrate, effortlessly, simpler congeries, including the following of the loss of innocence by triumphs of toil, bread, sweat, blumen and blessedness. It deserves a wide audience. ■

The exhibition is open until September 29th, Wednesday & Thursday 11am-4pm, Sunday 2pm-5pm.

Susan Crennan is a Melbourne barrister.

LEFT: *The Descendant of the High Priest*, by Isidor Kaufmann. The child is traditionally dressed and carries ritual objects.

Dole with a hole

The New Start program, replacing the old dole, was launched with an animated TV ad showing some lucky person climbing up from the safety net, aglow with expectation. Another person flies by on a trapeze. The rising star grabs the trapeze. The other person falls off into tele outerspace. It's a fair bet that many who are out of work will identify with the extrapeze artist. Too much to hope that the safety net was not taken away?

Ring a bell?

'Permanent commitment is less a prediction of my future than an act of belief in my history. I believe that the fabric woven of these blessed events will not be frayed by the uncertainties that will surely come.'— John Staudenmeier.

He who begins by loving Christianity better than truth, will proceed by loving his own sect or church better than Christianity, and end in loving himself better than all.' —Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Hit list

Tennessee Williams: 'I have a distinct moral attitude. I wouldn't say message. I'm not polemical, but I have a distinct attitude toward good and evil in life and people. I think I regard hypocrisy and mendacity as almost the cardinal sins. It seems they are the ones to which I am most hostile: I think that deliberate, conscienceless mendacity, the acceptance of falsehood and hypocrisy, is the most dangerous of all sins.

Think about it

Your beliefs will be the light by which you see, but they will not be what you see and they will not be a substitute for seeing.—Flannery O'Connor

Bright spark

A scientist friend writes to persuade us that we should buy $25 compact fluorescents instead of incandescent lights. He argues that if every Australian family swapped one incandescent for one compact fluoro, we would save the energy output of a nuclear power plant per annum. 'Your beliefs will be the light by which you see'?

Irish logic

Sir John Pentland Mahaffy, provost of Trinity College, Dublin, and tutor of Oscar Wilde, once observed than 'an Irish atheist is one who wishes to God he could believe in God.' He also is

credited with noting than 'in Ireland the inevitable never happens and the unexpected constantly occurs.' And finally: 'The most popular speaker is the one who sits downs before he gets up.' Mahaffy, a Church of Ireland clergyman, was once asked by an evangelical Protestant, 'Are you saved, Dr Mahaffy?' Mahaffy replied, 'Yes, but it was such a very narrow squeak that I never boast about it.'

Gloss on Micah 6:8

This is what you should do: love the earth and sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to everyone that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your income and labour to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience and indulgence toward the people, take off your hat to nothing known or unknown or to any man or number of men. *Re-examine all you have been told* at school or church or in any book, dismiss what insults your own soul, and your very flesh shall be a great poem.—Walt Whitman, from the preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

This month's award for meaningful integratiion of aspects of Australian life goes to:

EUREKA STREET

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