

Preserving the sanctity of creation

The alliance between the Orthodox Church and environmental scientists may sound paradoxical, yet it is only the latest expression of the Church's ancient inheritance. The Bible and the patristic literature of the Church convey a deep understanding of the sanctity of the whole created world.

The lives of the saints and great ascetics of the Church are examples to us of a loving relationship with the whole of creation. In Orthodox tradition, being able to communicate with one's natural surroundings is considered a sign of sanctity. The patristic teachings advocating self-restraint and love of all God's creatures seek to develop a relationship between humans and the rest of the natural world which is not based on utility and self-interest.

Therefore, from our Orthodox perspective, the global environmental crisis is a matter of profound concern.

Through man's materialistic approach, nature is not seen as the creation of God, but rather as the container of resources necessary for our survival. This allows humans to treat creation as something there purely for our convenience. In the logic of convenience, the question of whether nature needs to be conserved or destroyed is only answerable in terms of human needs and desires. Destruction and conservation become two sides of the same coin.

Exploitative approach

The environmental sciences, as they are generally practised today, express humanity's exploitative approach to the natural environment. One needs only to read the language used to see this. Such terms as 'the carrying capacity of ecosystems' and 'the economic value of environmental goods' reflect humanity's treatment of nature as a commodity.

The continued destruction of the natural environment is essentially a spiritual problem, which the Church seeks to change. The Orthodox Church understands the nature of the universe in a way that is essentially eucharistic, a term which originates from the Greek word *eucharistia*, which means 'thanksgiving'. For the Christian East this tradition of giving thanks to the Creator is not an individualistic process. The Divine Liturgy, the supreme Christian mystery and sacrament, is a communal act. The consecration of the Eucharist is celebrated by the entire perishable creation and it is this creation that is affirmed and sanctified.

This world is, and has always been, God's world. Within it there is the inescapable reality of sin, the turning away from the love of God. The Liturgy is the 'antidote' to, and a judgement of, the temporary and sinful nature of the entire creation. The eucharis-



by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople

tic understanding of the world as God's creation requires a loving relationship between people and nature.

According to Church tradition, creation is dependent on the will of God, and does not have the means to sustain itself. Humans are distinguished from the rest of creation because they can choose between love and hatred. The greatest challenge for a human being is to employ this freedom not destruc-

'The destruction of the natural environment is a spiritual problem.'

tively, but with the aim of experiencing the love of God and the bonds of co-createdness with the whole world, and thus, in a sense, to share in the divine work of creation.

It is our responsibility as the first Shepherd of the Orthodox world to sensitize the flock to the proper way of relating to the created order. It is in this spirit that the Church of Constantinople, the first throne in the Orthodox world, has undertaken momentous initiatives in an effort to find solutions to environmental problems.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate has organized several environmental seminars and more recently initiated an environmental education programme. We have been copatron with the European Union on a series

of 'floating' shipboard symposia which have fused together the wisdom of science and the power of religion and reinforced the urgency of cooperation in the protection of our natural environs.

The first symposium, in 1995, celebrating the 1900th anniversary of St John's Book of Revelation, travelled through the Aegean Sea identifying the degeneration of the world's waters as a new apocalypse confronting all mankind.

The second, in 1997, voyaged around the Black Sea, visiting all six shoreline countries. The response was overwhelming and contributed to a growing movement against the catastrophic decline of the sea's ecosystem.

The third symposium, in 1999, followed on from the Black Sea voyage by addressing one of the great rivers which drain into it. Participants journeyed down the Danube from Germany to the Delta on the Black Sea, examining the consequences of over-utilization; pollution by industry, agriculture and sewage; the problems of major dams and altering river courses; and the impact of war. The symposium created greater awareness of these problems and of the spiritual necessity and rights of future generations to clean water with rivers and seas rich in natural life.

Frontline

Symposium IV, planned for 2001, will study the environmental challenges of the Baltic Sea, on whose shores some of the wealthiest nations in the world live side by side with neighbours who are struggling through a period of economic and social transition. For decades the sea formed part of the frontline of a confrontation between east and west, and the Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox traditions are all represented around it. Our voyage will aim to promote unity, shared responsibility and an understanding of the desperate need for strong community action.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate seeks to promote the meaning of true communion with the entirety of creation, and the need to relate to the world in a way that acknowledges the sanctity of creation.

His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople is the spiritual head of some 250 million Orthodox Christians worldwide.

NEXT ISSUE

Lead story: *For A Change* looks at relations between the 'best of enemies', France and England.

Feature: Can India's IT miracle help its poorest citizens?

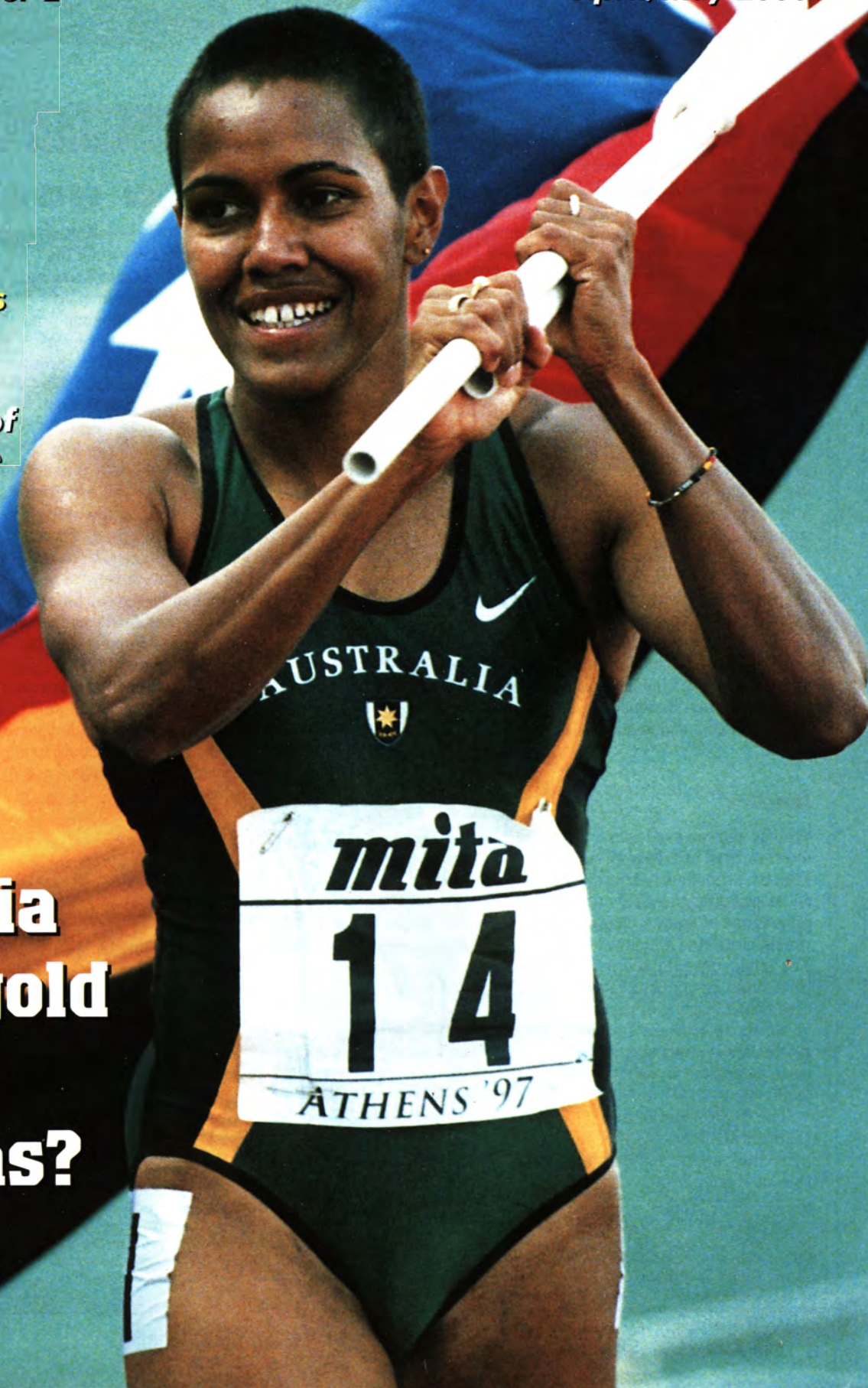
FOR A CHANGE

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Will Australia go for gold in race relations?



By Edward Peters in Oxford



Phew!

When I woke up on 1 January 2000, a sense of relief flooded over me. 1999—and the one-year Clean Slate Campaign I had chaired—was over. Not that it hadn't been an exciting year.

Twelve months earlier our little team—a varied group including a PR professional, a Hindu student, an Imam and assorted well-intentioned amateurs like myself—had set ourselves a target. We wanted to invite everyone in the UK to use the approach of the millennium as an incentive to put something right in their lives.

We didn't, in the end, reach more than a few million people—but that's not too bad given our lack of machinery and funding. Indeed one person wrote recently: 'I think it's probably had the kind of impact that advertisers dream about, in relation to cost and public profile.'

Bonfire

Schools showed particular interest. Staff at Edward Feild Primary School near Oxford developed a four-week programme of study which was widely circulated nationwide. The school used it itself in November, culminating in a ceremonial burning of papers on which children and staff had written things they wanted to leave behind in the old millennium.

The children performed sketches and music on the theme for parents and friends. One child later wrote that the

theme had 'changed my life' and rebuilt her relationship with her mother.

Another school submitted entries to a special schools' competition. A typical one read: 'Once I drew on the window sill and blamed all of it on my six-year-old sister. I think I should own up to my Mum and also say sorry to my sister for blaming her when she didn't do anything.'

Good sport?

Most of the media attention we received seemed to get the point. 'To mark the millennium,' wrote *Daily Mail* sports columnist Ian Wooldridge, 'you simply list the ghastliest things you have done in your life and write to or ring up the other party to effect a reconciliation. In my case, this would fully occupy me between now and New Year's Eve.... I would definitely apologize to Graham Kelly, former Football Association chief executive, about whom I once wrote a

hurtful article without knowing all the facts.'

Mail bag

Sitting in the campaign office there were days when the phone never stopped ringing, and others when so little happened that we thought no one was the least bit interested. What helped us through the difficult times was the steady flow of people who wrote in.

Many wrote about how reconciliation had resulted from an apology. 'I had harboured a hurt for years against one old friend,' wrote a Scot. 'I wrote a letter of apology. She phoned and asked me to forgive her. We talked for ages. The friendship that was dead came alive.'

Others recounted tales of financial restitution: an employer who had underpaid a casual worker, and now paid him the difference; a shopper who had kept quiet about being repeatedly undercharged and had made amends.

One elderly man took the message very seriously. 'As the oldest of three young brothers, I got the largest allowance. One day I flaunted my wealth by offering brothers aged three and five the sum of \$1 each if they would eat dirt. To my extreme shock, they each did so. I added shame to shock by renegeing on my deal. Yesterday I read about a Millennium Clean Slate Campaign. I decided to start with my earliest crimes and am sending each brother a cheque for \$20, the present value of \$1 in 1930.'

Endearing

The simplicity of such stories made its mark. Through them, wrote Libby Purves in her weekly *Times* column, 'you get an endearing snapshot of people willing to throw out resentments and prejudices and present a smiling, open face to the new century.... The humble, private notion of apology and restitution and a fresh start needs encouraging in the private domain, not least because in the public domain it is virtually extinct.... In a globalized age, beset by unimaginable macroeconomics and garish world celebrities, there is comfort in small things and private people.'

Clean already

Not that everyone thought the campaign was for them. 'I am pleased to say,' someone wrote, 'that my soul is in pristine condition and I most fortunately have no need to start with a clean slate.' Lucky man! ■



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Cover: Cathy Freeman, world women's 400 metre champion, brandishes the Australian and the Aboriginal flags.

Photo: Sporting Pictures

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

The season of renewal

This issue appears as our Christian readers prepare to celebrate Easter, with its message of rebirth and renewal. Our Guest Column is written by the spiritual leader of the world's 250 million Orthodox Christians, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople.

Patriarch Bartholomew is known as the 'Green Patriarch', because of his concern about environmental issues. He has forged a formidable alliance between religious leaders and scientists at a series of shipboard symposia on the state of the world's seas. In his column he describes the spiritual basis for this, in his church's ancient traditions of reverence for creation.

The Orthodox Church stands on the fault line between East and West, and the Patriarch is also known for his work for reconciliation—a theme which is taken up elsewhere in the issue. We report on two attempts to address the legacy of the slave trade and, in a lead story from Australia on the eve of the Olympics, John Williams focuses on his country's track record in race relations.

Australia's transformation from a predominantly Anglo-Celtic society to one of the most multicultural countries on earth has been remarkable. So has the popular response to revelations about the suffering of the 'stolen generations' of Aboriginal children, taken from their families in the interests of assimilation. When the facts came out, the government was reluctant to act—but the people took matters into their own hands, and flocked in their thousands to sign 'Sorry Books' expressing their sorrow and repentance for the past.

Australasia has a way of shaking up one's narrow perspectives, as I found on a visit this time three years ago. For me, as a north European, Easter's promise of rebirth is inextricably tied up with the advent of spring. As the light returns, bulbs shoot through the ground, buds appear on bare twigs and the shoot opens to the possibility of new life. So it was a bit of a shock to discover churches in New Zealand celebrating Harvest Festival at just this time of year, their autumn.

In the same way, Australians' direct, from the heart, response to the dark side of their history challenges our assumptions. While, as John Williams points out, there is still a long way to go, the response to Sorry Day and the Journey of Healing attest to the power of apology in enabling the wounds of history to begin to heal.

And they are a reminder that we cannot leave everything to our leaders. We can all have an impact on issues ranging from the environment to community relations—and what better time to make a new start than Easter?

Mary Lean

FOR A CHANGE

• closes the circle between faith and action, action and faith. It is for anyone, anywhere, who wants to make a difference to the world.

FOR A CHANGE believes

- that in a world torn by ancient hatreds, the wounds of history can be healed.
- that in the family and the workplace, relationships can be transformed.
- that in urban jungle or rural backwater, community can be built.
- that peace, justice and the survival of the planet depend on changes in attitudes as well as structures.

FOR A CHANGE

- draws its material from a wide range of sources and was born out of the experience of Moral Re-Armament.

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A NOTE ON MORAL RE-ARMAMENT

Moral Re-Armament was launched in 1938 when Europe was rearming. Frank Buchman, MRA's American initiator, called for a programme of 'moral and spiritual rearmament' to address the root causes of conflict, and work towards a 'hate-free, fear-free, greed-free world'. Since then people of all backgrounds and traditions have been active in this programme on every continent.

MRA is open to all. Its starting point is the readiness of each person to make real in their own life the changes they wish to see in society. A commitment to search for God's will in daily life forms the basis for creative initiative and common action. Absolute moral standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love help to focus the challenge of personal and global change.

Will Australia go for gold in race relations?

As Australia prepares to stage the Olympics, John Williams offers a personal sketch of a fortunate country with huge questions before it.

The Olympics are a superb way to celebrate the start of this millennium. And Sydney, one of the world's most beautiful cityscapes, is an ideal place to delight in the incredible human—even superhuman—achievements we will watch in September.

Whether you'll actually be there, or will be one of the billions looking over the shoulders of the TV cameramen, you might like to know something about today's Australia. Until 1901 it was just a collection of British colonies, so how is it doing now?

The government is worried that the media covering the Olympics will concentrate on the degrading conditions in which too many Aboriginal Australians still live,

and will make a fuss which will undercut public support for some good things which are at last being done. But surely a better approach is to let the facts speak for themselves.

At the beginning of World War II, Australia was one of the most homogenous countries on earth. Over 98 per cent of us came from Anglo-Celtic stock. Today 2.6 million of us speak one of 282 languages other than English at home.

'Mate' is a word you hear a lot in Australia, though for some it now has offensive overtones. In the early days, when the pioneers grappled with appalling bushfires, drought and floods, your safety, even your life, depended on those alongside you, your mates, and it didn't matter where the hell they came from. The national belief in a 'fair go' for everyone is something you can

appeal to. It's sometimes more honoured in the breach than the observance, but has lain behind pioneering social legislation in which Australia has led the world. We were the second country to give women the vote, for instance.

By a combination of good luck and skilful management, Australia has a booming economy that, to the experts' surprise, was not sucked into the recent Asian downturn.

We've been lucky in several economic bonanzas. In the early 19th century, settlers found that the soil south-west of Sydney provided excellent pasture for merino sheep. The global market for Australian wool still exists. In the 1850s gold was discovered in large quantities—and, a century later, enough oil and gas to meet most of our requirements, along with vast mountains of iron ore, nickel and other minerals.

We enjoy a good 'stoush' (an all-in brawl), and even the wealthiest young man likes to feel he's a bit of a 'larrikin' (derived from larkin'). Larrikins, such as the instructor at my local gym the other day, can brighten your life. He couldn't have been out of his teens; I'm, well, decades beyond that. His opening gambit was, 'Did y' get up to any mischief on Saturday night?'

A touch of the larrikin stops you being constrained by what's possible or what isn't. In the Barcelona Olympics of 1992, for instance, the swimmer Kieren Perkins shattered the world record for the 1,500 metres. In the Atlanta Olympics four years later, he only just made it into the final eight by a few hundredths of a

second. We all thought he hadn't a hope in the world, but he somehow won gold again. At the time of writing Australian teams and individuals are world champions in 37 sporting events—a remarkable statistic for a population of just over 19 million.

We also delight in an incredible environment. We catch our breath at the sight of a million gum trees on a mountainside at dawn. At a swoop of amazingly-coloured birds. At a kangaroo breaking out of the bush. Or at an empty beach with the surf pounding—and there are thousands of miles of those.

A visiting Englishwoman recently exclaimed when she saw her first kangaroos: 'What a strange way to design an animal!' Well, that's an act of God or biology. But to take the thought a step further, a place like Australia where new designs can be tried out for a tired world may be useful.

As Stepan Kerkyasharian, who heads a state ethnic affairs organization, said to me the other day, his face lighting up: 'This country could have a wonderful destiny!' Implied, of course, was: But only if....

If we hurdle the vital challenges now facing us, and don't sidle round the edges of the track.

For Australia faces inescapable issues: making a society of many cultures work, creating a sensitive relationship with our Asian neighbours and, above all, responding to the grim facts of how the Aboriginal people have been treated.

Keeping Australia white was official policy from Federation in 1901, originally to protect Australian jobs. In the early Sixties some academics suggested allowing some 150 Asians a year to become Australians, so everyone could get used to the idea. In 1966 the conservative government allowed entry for 1,000, and in 1973 Gough Whitlam's Labor government abolished the White Australia policy.

White settlement began in 1788, horrendously badly. Britain wanted a place to park its unwanted criminals. And, since Captain Cook had reported in 1770 that a large land mass in the southern ocean did indeed exist, the mandarins in Whitehall wanted to grab it before anyone else, the French in particular.

White occupancy was actually based on a lie. When Cook landed in Botany Bay and claimed the country for the British Crown, no farming settlements were visible. Sir Joseph Banks, the naturalist accompanying Cook, suggested that the local people must be nomadic and therefore could have no right to the land. This concept later became known as *terra nullius*, empty land, though the idea was never made into law in Britain.

When Arthur Phillip was appointed the new colony's first Captain-General and Governor-in-Chief in 1788, he was instructed by the British government to create a relationship with the Aborigines: 'to conciliate their affections, enjoining all our subjects to live in amity and kindness with them'.

So obviously everyone knew that the land was not empty. Indeed, anthropologists today



Russell McPhedran/Associated Press

Sporting Pictures

Will Australia go for gold in race relations?

estimate that Aboriginal society has existed for at least 40,000 years, perhaps 60,000. But it took 204 years before the concept of *terra nullius* was rejected at law, in the High Court Mabo case of 1992, which also ruled that Aborigines who could demonstrate a 'close and continuing relationship' with an area of land could have 'native title' to it.

So it's small wonder that Aborigines today treat the whites' arrival as an invasion.

As I grew up I heard vaguely that family members had been in Australia since the beginning of white settlement. Later, as I discovered facts like the fundamental lie of an empty land, I became determined to find out more.

The late 18th century was a cruel era, with floggings of several hundred lashes for trifling offences, and huge crowds at public hangings.

On a Saturday night in January 1783, David Kilpack, my great-great-grandfather, was 'making merry' at Clapham in London. He was apprehended with a bag over his shoulder containing two cocks, two hens, two ducks and one gander, each of them worth a shilling. He told Justice Buller at the Old Bailey that he had found them in the street, and 'supposed they had been dropped from some cart or wagon'. The judge's verdict: 'Guilty. Transported for



Convicts awaiting transportation from Chatham dockyard in 1828: John Williams' ancestor was shipped in 1787

seven years.'

But the boat to Australia didn't leave till May 1787, four and a half years later. It arrived in January 1788 after a 252-day voyage.

Kilpack's ship, *Scarborough*, was the worst in the first fleet, but hopefully not as bad as the ships in the second, on which his wife-to-be travelled. These were equipped by the firm which had designed the living quarters for slaves being transported from Africa to America on the notorious 'Middle Passage'. The convicts' ankle-irons were rigid bolts some nine inches long, and just to walk was to risk breaking a leg.

In his bestselling account of the convict era, *The Fatal Shore*, Robert Hughes describes conditions on one second fleet ship, *Surprise*: 'In a heavy sea, the water sluiced through her. The starving prisoners lay chilled to the bone on soaked bedding,

unexercised, crusted with salt, shit and vomit, festering with scurvy and boils.' One prisoner wrote to his parents, who printed the letter as a broadsheet: 'When any of our comrades that were chained to us died, we kept it a secret as long as we could for the smell of the dead body, in order to get their allowance of provision, and many a time have I been glad to eat the poultice that was put to my leg for perfect hunger.'

Such men and women were emphatically not willing settlers intending to spoil a paradise. But their experiences may have left them so brutalized that they were quite unprepared to meet people of a totally different culture—let alone 'conciliate their affections'.

Between 156,000 and 162,000 men, women and children were sent to the other end of the earth before transportation ended in 1868. As the decades passed, conditions for convicts improved—and many free settlers arrived.

David Kilpack was granted a conditional pardon in December 1794, by which time he had married Eleanor MacDonald, who had stolen four linen sheets. They had four children, and in 1795 were granted a lease of 80 acres of land at a quarterly rental of one shilling. One of the Kilpacks' descendants became a respected High Court judge.

One can feel sorry for the Kilpacks, but not for another of my ancestors, Captain Richard Brooks, who commanded the *Atlas*, which sailed from Cork in 1801. Sixty-five convicts died on the voyage, 'largely,' says Hughes, 'because they had to make way for 2,166 gallons of rum', which Brooks planned to sell to the tiny population of Sydney. Although the Governor of the day, Philip Gidley King, refused to allow him to land the rum, Brooks brought several other shiploads of convicts over the years, and became wealthy by selling supplies to other ships.

He then charmed a later Governor, Lachlan MacQuarie, into granting him as much land as he could walk round in a day. His walk took in some of the best parts of Sydney, and he invited influential friends to a picnic lunch to demonstrate how far he had gone. Fortunately for the city, one of the Governor's aides was awake to what was being given away and changed the grant to a number of country sites. Brooks built a stately Georgian mansion on one of these, where he died after being gored by a bull.

All I ever heard of him as I grew up was how wonderful the house was. But he sounds like the kind of ruthless operator who gives politics a bad name.

The early arrivals nearly starved because ships carrying supplies were wrecked and the soil was harsh. In retrospect it is amazing how rapidly they and their descendants got on with the job of making a viable settlement, despite horrendous droughts and bushfires.

The colonists, free or fettered, had no idea of the depth or harmony of the Aboriginal relationship with the land. According to the historian Geoffrey Blainey, 'if an Aboriginal in the 17th century had been captured as a curiosity and taken in a Dutch ship to Europe, and if he had travelled all the way from Scotland to the Caucasus and had seen how the average European struggled to make a living, he might have said to himself that he had now seen the third world and all its poverty and hardship'.

A more recent story illustrates how well Aborigines had their act together. Some surveyors in the outback heard by radio that their helicopter had broken down and couldn't bring them their dinner. Soon after, they came upon some Aborigines. 'What's worrying you?' asked the Aborigines, and produced a complete and satisfying meal in a very short time from ingredients that were all around them.

The historian Inga Clendinnen, in the prestigious Boyer Lectures on Australian radio last year, told how she came to grasp 'the huge ambition and the huge achievement of traditional Aboriginal paintings' by



Post-war Londoners contemplate a new life in Australia.

seeing aerial photographs of the Australian landscape: 'great rivers coiling over the land, looping strings of jade waterholes, the subtle gradations of colour in rough-textured scrubs'. The paintings, she realized, were 'elegant eagle's eye representations of what are in reality vast maps: maps charged with metaphysical meaning and teeming with cosmic narratives. And I thought: how did Aborigines do it? After all, they only had their legs. How were they able to comprehend such expanses when they could only see them piecemeal, and at ground level?

'There is only one possible answer. They did it with their minds.... Australia's original people developed steeping thought-structures—intellectual edifices so comprehensive that every creature and plant had its place within it. They travelled light, but they were walking atlases, and walking encyclopedias of natural history. They were Scheherazades, too, because this complicated knowledge was not written down, but allocated between human minds in song, dance and story....

'Traditional Aboriginal culture effortlessly fuses areas of understanding which Europeans "naturally" keep separate: ecology, cosmology, theology, social morality, art, comedy, tragedy—the observed and the richly imagined fused into a seamless whole.'

To treat such people as savages is an incredible insult. But for most of us white Australians, it wasn't intentional: we grew up—and grow old—without even knowing an Aborigine. I've had several chances to remedy my cloistered upbringing, and have close Aboriginal friends. One day when I was getting heated about what we whites had done, one of them laughed and said, 'Now don't you go round feeling guilty!' So what should I feel? What constructive action can one take to remedy the sins of history?

In the mid-Seventies a young man who is now one of Australia's leading Aborigines came to my home for a barbecue. I suggested a game of tennis. 'But I don't know how to play,' he said. So I showed him the rudiments and we played a set. And then another. Which he won. I didn't see him again for a quarter of a century, but a few weeks ago I was at a conference he addressed. Afterwards he was discussing something apparently important with a group of his advisors when I happened to walk by. He swung round, pointed at me and said, 'And I won the tennis!'

There is an overflowing fountain of humanity, humour, perceptiveness and wisdom among the Aboriginal peoples. But we have stood back from it. Having dived into this fountain a few times, I ask myself: What is the cocktail of shyness, arrogance, self-centredness which held us back? It seems the height of stupidity.

Perhaps it's simple: we were determined to remain as we were, to shelter behind the traditions of Britain and Europe, to retain the right to be narrow-minded, superior. To cut ourselves off from the hugely different world we had shouldered our way into.



Aboriginal art: 'charged with metaphysical meaning'



Today one in 20 Australians is of Asian origin.

Will Australia go for gold in race relations?

Our affection for Britain and Europe meant that we were ready to throw ourselves into both world wars. After 1945, we looked from a great distance at the horrific devastation that had overtaken all that was so precious in Europe, and felt we must share our bounty by embarking on a massive immigration programme. We also realized that other nations to our north might covet our empty spaces like the Japanese had.

From 1947 to 1954, if you wanted to come from Britain to Australia, it cost you only £10, provided you promised to stay for two years and live and work where you were asked to. Before long, the scheme was widened to include 'displaced persons' from European refugee camps (soon renamed 'New Australians') and later still, people from Mediterranean countries. Intellectuals from the other side of the world found themselves toiling manually, and Australia benefited from major capital works.

From 1973, when the White Australia Policy ended, we began to accept migrants from Asia, Africa and South America. As boat people from Vietnam began to arrive, sympathy and some guilt helped change the criteria for entry, and now one in 20 Australians is of Asian extraction. Some people, unfortunately, have been unsettled by this, particularly at times of unemployment, and politicians like Pauline Hanson have grabbed global publicity with their promises to undo all that has been done.

Proportionally, the postwar migration into Australia has been one of the largest in human history. Our population in 1947 was in the region of 7.7 million. Between 1 July 1947 and 30 June 1974, the country absorbed 2.3 million migrants. Twelve years later, in the census year of 1986, 3.5 million people out of the total population of 15,601,890 had been born overseas.

When the immigration programme began in 1947, the presumption was that new arrivals would be assimilated into Australian life, as earlier migrants, mostly British, had been. But by the early Fifties so many were arriving from totally different cultures that this was no longer good enough.

Those involved in the search for a new migration policy came from a wide range of viewpoints. They debated, interacted with each other, agreed and disagreed for decades, but seldom let their differences interfere with progress. One of those most involved was Jerzy Zubrzycki, founding Professor of Sociology at the Australian

A living memorial

by Jean Brown

I spit at that place every time I go past,' glowered a former resident of the Colebrook Home in South Australia. She was referring to the site of a now demolished institution, which was home over nearly 30 years to 350 Australian Aboriginal children who had been taken from their families under government policies of forced removal. Hearing her experiences and beginning to understand the results of two centuries of colonial dispossession and disempowerment prompted the Blackwood Reconciliation Group to seek out other former residents. The group is one of hundreds that have sprung up around Australia as ordinary people have chosen to know and 'own' the shameful side of Australia's history. Growing public awareness has resulted in a people's movement working for recognition, apology and social justice.

As the Blackwood Reconciliation Group met the former Colebrook residents, it became painfully evident that a cosmetic reconciliation would never heal the hurts of the victimized nor change the hearts and attitudes of the dominant culture. The process of really hearing and honouring the stories of individuals and looking for forgiveness together became a key to planning a memorial to the 'stolen children', which could be a place of reflection and healing for black and white together.

A three-year venture of consultation, listening, barbecues, fund-raising and building friendships has resulted in a sacred place of sculpture and fountain, history and current reality. It is far more than stone and bronze, rather a living memorial for the healing and transformation of both indigenous and non-indigenous alike.

On a plaque next to the Fountain of Tears, a granite sculpture that remembers the pain of the families left behind, are the words of a woman removed from her family when she

was five. 'And every morning as the sun went up the whole family would wail. They did that for 32 years until they saw me again. Who can imagine what a mother went through. But you have to learn to forgive.'

Former residents and their families and many from the local white community have come together on three occasions to unveil the different stages of the memorial. Over 2,000 came to see the Fountain of Tears start to flow.

Along the path that curves around the self-sown grove of young eucalyptus trees, the story is told on plaques on boulders. The bronze statue of the Grieving Mother, hands open, head bowed, pleads with the generations to come, 'Please, let it never happen again.'



The statue of the Grieving Mother on the site of the former Colebrook home.

National University in Canberra. Zubrzycki once said that a policy of assimilation was 'like a dust-heap'. Instead people should be encouraged to maintain a continuing creative link with their original culture as well as their new one.

In time, the word 'assimilation' was replaced with 'integration'. Finally, in the late 1970s, both main political parties faced the reality of the range of migrants and the term 'multiculturalism' was accepted.

Since then, migrants arriving in Australia have immediately been offered English-language courses. Anyone who cannot understand a government form or statement can phone for immediate translation. A Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) has been created, in a daring, deliberate attempt to keep people in touch with the country they came from. SBS

radio broadcasts in 68 languages; its TV arm, which broadcasts in 61, is watched by more than 5 million people a week.

But here again, the achievement falls on its face where Aborigines are concerned. Twenty-seven per cent of the population of the Northern Territory is Aboriginal. Many speak little or no English. But they are not offered interpreters for courts or medical clinics—or for committees of inquiry into conditions.

Assimilation has been the stated policy of successive governments towards Aborigines. And yes, this has meant almost literally throwing them on the dust-heap, as anyone who visited 'reserves' in the northern states one or two decades back could see.

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, set up by the government in 1991, has given the wider public a chance to be informed and shocked by what has been done in its name and to take action. The Council consists of 13 leading Aborigines, including the chairman, and 12 of the nation's most responsible non-Aboriginal people in the media, business and unions. The reconciliation process it initiated has involved thousands of people in 'learning circles' and 'reconciliation groups'.

A group in Blackwood, South Australia, for instance, started with a study circle, hoped the government would do something adequate, but then felt that a lukewarm official response would put the reconciliation process in jeopardy. 'Blast the government!' said one, 'we'll do it anyway.' (See box.)

From the late 1800s into the 1970s, officials removed black children who had a white parent or grandparent and placed them in foster-homes and institutions in the hope that they would forget their black families. To make things worse, a number of these children were sexually abused, even in church institutions. Taking the children away from their families was justified as the only way to give them the benefits of white society. But it was actually a deliberate attempt to wipe out Aboriginality.

Babies were snatched from their mothers' arms, and children were dragged from school into police vans, and the desk-tops they were hanging onto were ripped from their hinges. This was a sin against humanity, not just a well-intentioned practice that didn't quite work.

The scandal of the 'stolen generations' came to light through an official inquiry headed by a retired High Court judge, Sir Ronald Wilson. He was so incensed that he called for an official apology and a national day on which sorrow could be fittingly expressed. When the government failed to respond, the people took it into their own hands. Half a million people signed 'Sorry Books' and presented them to Aboriginal

leaders on 26 May 1998.

A year later, a large crowd assembled in Parliament House, Canberra, to launch the 'Journey of Healing', an imaginative Aboriginal concept that gives a glimpse of what we can expect if this relationship really gets freed up. The Journey, with a catchy song to get it going, calls on all Australians to go deep enough in their own spiritual traditions for the past to be left behind. A few days earlier, members of the stolen generations gathered at Uluru, the great Central Australian rock. There Mutitjula elders ceremonially 'welcomed them home' to their families, communities and rightful identity, and gave them sticks inscribed with a message of healing which they have taken to many parts of Australia.

At the time of writing, the current Prime Minister, John Howard, has refused to make an official apology because he and his government were not responsible for the policy. In mid-1999, he issued a statement in which he said that everyone recognized the treatment of Aborigines as a major blemish in Australian history, for which we all had 'deep and sincere regret'. It had been drafted with the help of a newly-elected senator, Aden Ridgeway, only the second Aborigine to be a member of the Federal Parliament.

Many people gave a sigh of relief when this resolution passed both houses of the Parliament, but most Aboriginal leaders were not satisfied, doubtless because no reforms were announced at the same time. And like many others I asked myself what was the difference between expressing regret, particularly deep and sincere regret, and apologizing?

The argument that you don't have to say sorry for something you didn't do would have my vote on most things, but not on this. Regret means, 'It's a shame that such-and-such happened to you.' Apology means, 'I'm very upset that what I and my people have done to you has been so calamitous.' It implies action, not just words.

Racism is a worse scourge even than



Jerzy Zubrzycki: assimilation is 'like a dust-heap'

AIDS. It could ruin the world's chances of creating a society that has said goodbye to conflict and war. For centuries, the white segment of the human race has been making life hell for the non-white segment. It is clear—from the Olympics, if nothing else—that no race is intrinsically superior.

I personally may not have been consciously racist, but my segment certainly has been—and I have benefited from a system which has been skewed in favour of my race. If I say, 'I don't have to apologize', that is taken by those who have suffered as meaning, 'There's really nothing to apologize for'.

Many people are searching for perspective. As Robert Fitzgerald, Community Services Commissioner for the state of New South Wales, said in December, 'There has been a great silence as to the moral values, to the fundamental social function of economic activity. Many factors are driving a greater sense of individualism. But at the end of the day people are saying, "What we also crave is a sense of community."'

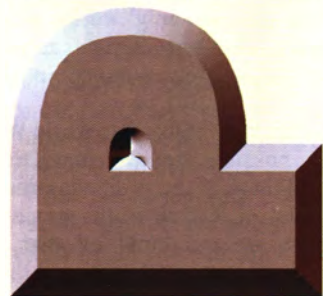
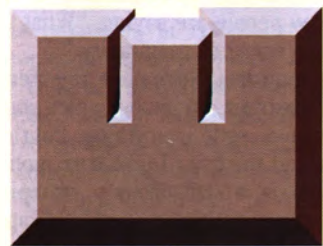
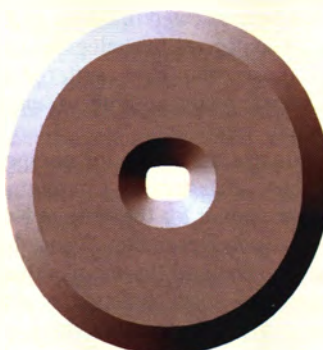
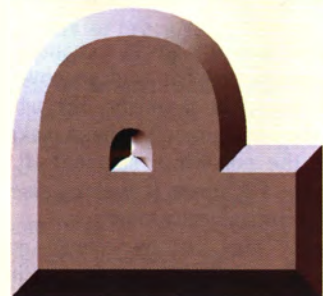
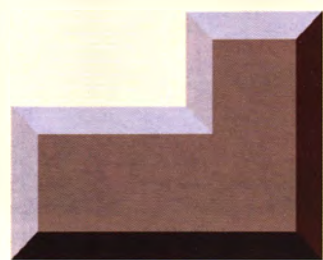
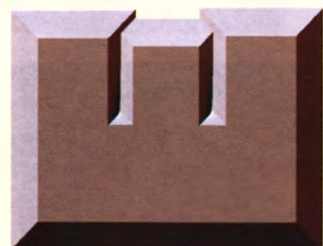
A referendum last November rejected a bid to make Australia a republic, which some had hoped would settle everything. Political activists started the cry, 'Don't trust politicians!' Which is a dangerously sweeping statement: many politicians are dedicated people. It may be closer to the truth to say, 'The political process only works when deeper matters, like setting right ancient wrongs, are passionately pursued in the community.'

The great migrant influx after World War II made it possible to welcome first Europeans and then Asians as citizens, leaving behind a lot of bigotry in the process. Now, perhaps, we can build on that to ensure that Aborigines get the 'fair go' they deserved two centuries ago.

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation has been circulating a draft document on what true reconciliation will require. It will be presented to the nation on 27 May 2000. Perhaps that day, or sometime during the Games, the penny might drop about what is really important in the life of Australia. This much-loved country may be approaching a vital moment of truth. We need, if you like, to take a deep breath and go for gold. ■

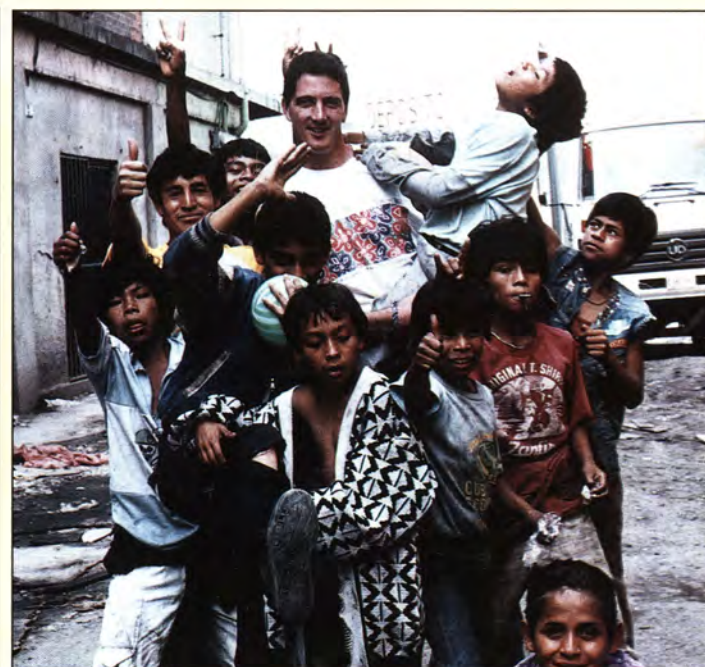


Helen Moran and Johnny Huckle, writers of the Journey of Healing theme song



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Edited by
Edna Yee



Duncan Dyason with Guatemalan street children

Toybox for Guatemalan streetchildren

Sitting in leafy Buckinghamshire on the edge of London's commuter belt, watching BBC television on a Sunday evening, is not many people's idea of a trigger for a life of commitment to disadvantaged children on the other side of the world. Yet, that is what happened to Duncan and Jenni Dyason.

Duncan had a difficult, deprived childhood, which included burglary and rejection by his family. Thanks to a questioning mind, mixed with a street-wise sense of humour, he found jobs, digs, God and a wife, Jenni—an Australian who shares his deep faith.

It is nine years since Duncan and Jenni watched a documentary called *They Shoot Children, Don't They?* about the streetchildren of Guatemala. At the time Duncan was working as full-time youth worker at St Leonard's Church in Chesham Bois near Amersham. This programme led them to give up job and home comforts to decamp with their newborn daughter, Katelyn, to Guatemala City.

First, however, they raised funds for the streetchildren among their youth groups, and the support they received became the springboard for the formation of Toybox, a national registered charity.

In a book he has written about those early days in

Guatemala City, *Miracle Children: The Toybox Story*, Duncan says, 'It was a challenging time for us as we witnessed a reality we'd rather not have known.' They saw children sniffing glue, an eight-year-old trying to rob a passer-by at knife point, young girls involved in prostitution, police who harassed and even shot streetchildren, and whole families living in tin shacks on the edge of the city's mountainous rubbish tip.

The Dyasons raised the first £15,000 needed to move to Guatemala in just five months. For the next two and a half years they lived and worked in the country, with varying degrees of success and disappointment. They became convinced that there was little point in outsiders paying flying visits and disappearing as quickly as they had arrived. The streetchildren needed love with a solid foundation, and that meant the work in Guatemala being led by nationals.

Today, there is a Guatemalan director, staff and trustees, mirroring Toybox's set-up in the UK. Four homes, two for each sex, have been built and the streetchildren, after first going through a 'reception' stage, move into the homes, from where they receive regular education. There's also a 'high risk' team, working with parents and children who seem most likely to take to the streets if they do not receive help. The charity has learned to work with rather than against the Guatemalan government, which

has recently changed to more democratic policies and has started training its police in more humane methods.

There is a five-year plan to build more homes—two this year if funds permit—and to rescue more children. British students have been inspired to spend their gap years working with Toybox both in Guatemala and the UK. Despair as Duncan sometimes does about the reaction of the churches, in both Britain and Guatemala, there is little doubt the Dyasons have made a difference and inspired others to try to do likewise.

Peter Harland

Pathway to regeneration

It annoyed Pauline Maclachlan that her mother and her neighbours, all pensioners, were constantly terrorized by rude and noisy youths playing football against their bungalows. She also felt it was unfair for the boys that they had nowhere else to play. However, instead of just grumbling about it she tried to find some way of helping her community.

It was at this time that her local area of Moreton, together with 13 other most needy areas in Wirral in north-west England, was due to receive regeneration money from Europe and also from the British government. 'Pathways' committees were being set up to decide how to use this money. These are consortia of partners, from the public and community sectors, who work together to create opportunities for local residents to have access to education, skills, training and jobs.

Pauline applied to join her local committee and before long found herself the Chairwoman. She worked hard to enlist as many local people as possible: community associations, councillors, local trades people, police, council officers, teachers and local residents. About 20 meet regularly and their committee is one of those that are most representative of the community. This Pathway committee needs someone with vision and enthusiasm as so many people feel hopeless and are cynical about the local council meeting their needs.

Joining the committee was a steep learning curve for

Pauline. 'I had never done anything like this before,' she said, 'but I felt led to volunteer to be chairperson, as no one else was willing. The committee would have folded and we would have lost all the funding.'

'I often have a chance to talk with people before and after meetings. Many simply need a listening ear, especially those with responsible positions, and a chance to say what is on their minds. Many have now become personal friends. I feel the more we care for each other and for the other person's concerns, the more we achieve in terms of practical results.'

One positive achievement has been an extension to the local library that will provide access to computer facilities and training, advice service and careers guidance. Pauline worked on this for a long time and is delighted to see its completion, as are the local people.

She is also on other committees. One coordinates all that is happening on the 13 'Pathway' committees, which helps each area to get an overall view instead of just concentrating on their local area. Another, the Wirral Partnership, links all the agencies bidding for or receiving funding. This eliminates waste and strengthens teamwork. The

third employs and trains long-term unemployed and those whom it is difficult to employ.

What happened to the boys who were playing football? 'That is an ongoing matter which we have not yet solved, but we hope to with the next round of funding. I have made friends with them.' *Ann Rignall* While this issue was at the printers, the editors received the tragic news of Pauline Maclachlan's sudden death.

Otranto cares for refugees

Otranto is a small port on the south-eastern tip of Italy, just 50 miles from Albania. Its location has recurrently brought it into the headlines because the surrounding coast is the easiest landing spot for the big rubber dinghies with powerful outboard engines used by smugglers carrying all kinds of illegal merchandise. They also carry refugees from wars, ethnic cleansing or starvation in Asia and the Balkans. Taking refugees is the smugglers' tactic to prevent the Italian Coast Guard from shooting at them.

The policy of the Italian government has been to discourage the influx. But the Catholic Church of Lecce and Otranto opened all their avail-

able facilities as a temporary shelter. Local volunteer groups have time and again rushed to the coast to provide aid. In the worst emergencies groups from other regions came to help.

'The population is warm-hearted, but they tend to fear that this influx may threaten the moderate prosperity they have gained through decades of hard work, which most started by migrating themselves,' said Don Mirko Lagna, Vice-Director of the Otranto Caritas, the Church body that promotes and coordinates action for justice and peace.

What has made them keep at it in spite of inadequate cooperation on the part of the state? Before replying he insisted on a visit to Otranto Cathedral to see the huge 12th century mosaic floor. It depicts a gigantic tree with beasts and humans entwined in its branches to represent Genesis, the life of Alexander the Great, the Knights of the Round Table and the Carolingian Knights, the constellations and the months of the year. The tree is not rooted in earth, but rests on the backs of two elephants representing India.

'This shows that contrary to our misconceptions of the Middle Ages, the area from India to Ireland was one civilization with constant interchange between the different cultures,' said Don Mirko. 'Otranto, which was an important port since early Greek times, was in the mainstream of this interchange.'

The Don Tonino Bello centre, named after a local bishop who fostered peace and reconciliation, is where the immigrants are brought for the most urgent relief and to be identified. They are under strict surveillance because some may have an interest in escaping before identification, but the centre is run entirely by volunteers.

Since its opening ten months ago 20,000 people have passed through it. Franco Mancarella, a local medical practitioner, was among the first to take care of the boat people seven years ago and gave them all his spare time. His wife, Adriana, and daughter were carried away by his passion and now serve as voluntary nurses.

The volunteers also wanted to pour their experience into something more permanent.

They founded Agimi (Albanian for dawn), an association which not only promotes relief work, but also fosters cooperation between the Albanian and Italian peoples and the economic advance of Albania. Its activity extends to helping this area, now in the backwaters of Europe, refine its position in the mainstream of culture thanks to the immigrants from many nations.

Agimi also organizes summer volunteer camps for Italian students who come to improve the facilities, and welcomes volunteers from other EU countries. Joke Wagenans from Antwerp is one of these volunteers. 'When you see war and the flight of refugees time and again on television,' said Joke, 'it does not quite seem real. It is so far away from peaceful and complacent Belgium.'

The Diocese of Lecce had been providing for immigrants for years, so it is no wonder the Government asked for its cooperation. 'They came to us, so we could dictate our own terms,' said Don Cesare Lo Deserto, secretary to the Archbishop. He combines his duties with running the government-sponsored Regina Pacis hostel, in a disused diocesan holiday centre for children of poor families.

Many of the hostels opened by the government under the recent immigration law have run into trouble with riots and immigrants absconding. But none of the 25,000 guests that have been through Regina Pacis since it was open in 1997 has left without permission though the door is always unlocked.

The centre is organized and operated by the guests themselves, not an easy feat to accomplish with a constant turnover. 'This gives them the dignity of looking after themselves,' said Don Cesare. The minimal Italian staff, partly volunteer and partly salaried, concentrates on helping each guest to sort out his or her particular problem. Because they feel cared for and treated as human beings instead of office files, they do not want to escape.

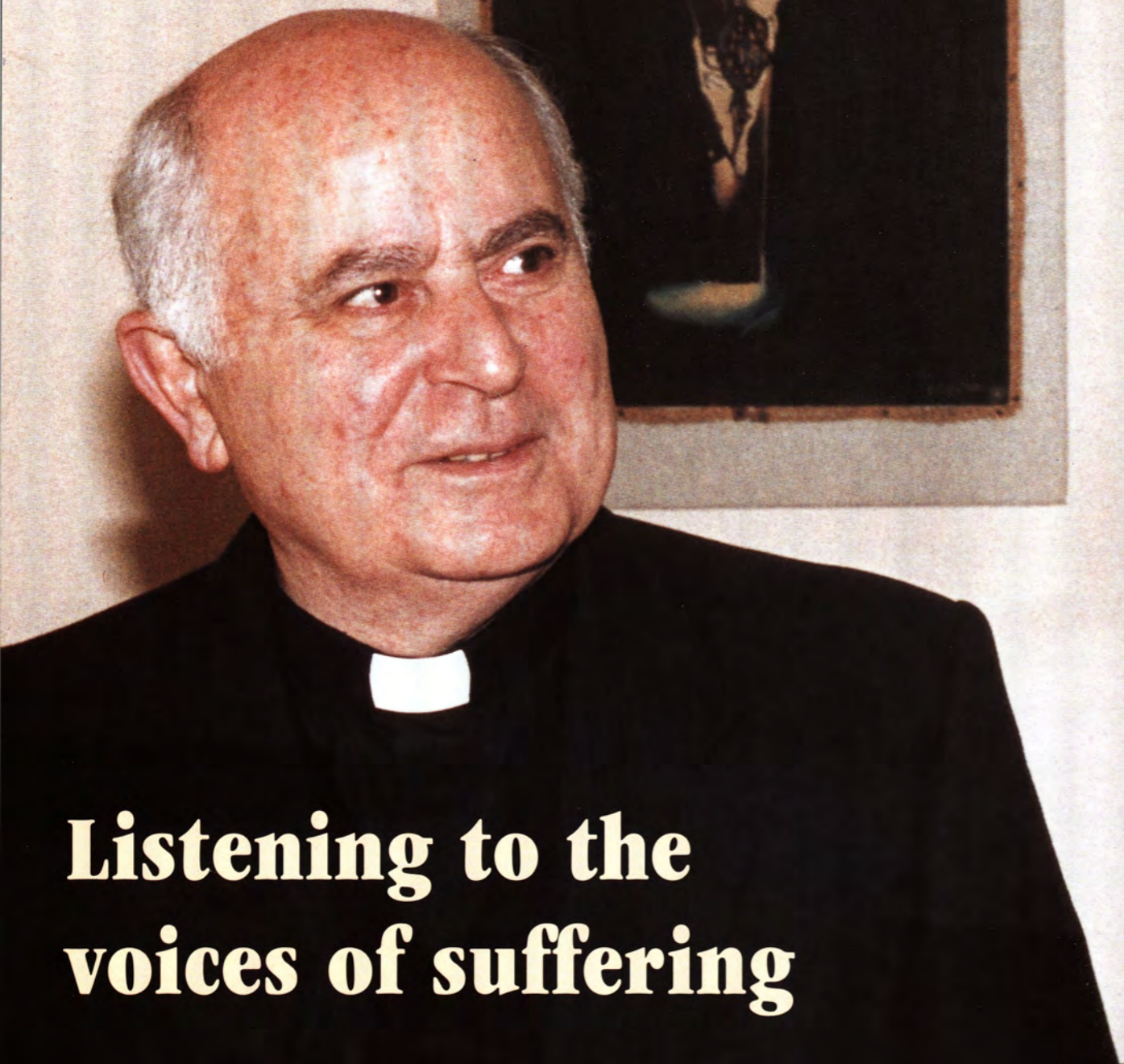
Now the government is seeking new ways of cooperating with volunteer groups and has come to Regina Pacis to find out how to do it.

Adriano Costa



Pauline Maclachlan with volunteers, clearing a playing space for young people

Wallasey News



Listening to the voices of suffering

Bjørn Ole Austad meets the Director of Caritas Malta, a priest who feels the pain of those in difficulties—and puts others to work to help them.

John Azzopardi

Some years ago I attended a Mass for the parents and families of young people who had lost their lives because of drug abuse. The Mass was celebrated by Monsignor Victor Grech, who constantly reaches out to those who suffer more than most.

His life began in Cospicua near Malta's Grand Harbour. During the heavy bombing raids of the Second World War this area was the hardest hit. The Grech family had to flee to the town of Zejtun some kilometres away. 'It was the beginning of the war and I was around 11 years old,' he recalls. 'Everything was crumbling around me. I saw people and buildings fall.'

Victor's father was stationed in Alexandria, Egypt, with the Royal Navy, and at one point his mother and brother were injured and had to spend three months in hospital. 'My smaller sister and I stayed all that time in the shelters,' he goes on. 'I realized the futility of things and looked for something permanent, something which made sense. The painful experience of powerlessness was a time of intense purification. Something in me was dying, and something was being born. I felt vulnerable, but safe at the same time. It was a liberating experience of God and the beginning of my surrender to his healing presence.'

A conviction grew that the priesthood would be his way of serving God. After eight years of studies at the seminary and the university in Malta, he was ordained in 1956. He was soon asked to be the Vice-Rector at the seminary, and in 1963 became Rector. However, Caritas has been his life and calling since 1977.

This work grew out of the talks he used to give to young people at the Catholic Institute just outside the capital, Valletta. He believed they would find a deeper commitment to God once they were put in touch with suffering and injustice. Initially 20 responded to his call to give time and energy to attend to the country's spiritual and social wounds.

'Fr Victor had a vision,' says one of those who accepted the challenge. 'He seemed to go about it in a very serious and professional way. That attracted us.' The young volunteers received spiritual and social teaching and training by experts in their fields. Every three months there was a spiritual retreat. Fr Victor, as he prefers to be called by those who know him, sent them to visit elderly and sick people, the children's homes and the slum areas of Valletta. They talked with people, finding out their problems. They met prostitutes and their children.

Rita Rizzo was amongst the first to volunteer. Today a mother of three and one of Caritas' paid staff, she remembers: 'Fr Victor used to say that it was not clear in his mind how the work should develop. He just sensed a leading from God to proceed.' This approach inspired her and others to give their best.

The number of young volunteers grew quickly. When Mgr Grech took over as Director of Caritas Malta it was only a coordinating committee for four associations. Today it is an organization with more than 20 different programmes, combining the dedication of 500 volunteers with 51 paid professionals. This enables Caritas to have a significant impact on a country of only 370,000 people. Among recent volunteers have been some highly qualified retired people, including Anglu Fenech, for many years the General Secretary of Malta's biggest trade union.

'To stand alongside people in difficulties' reads the cover of one of Caritas' booklets. The organization branches into care for families, youth, the sick and the elderly. It runs programmes in schools and parishes, and offers much-praised courses in parental skills. Recently it has also come to the assistance of victims of unscrupulous loan sharks.

Caritas' work with drug addicts began in 1984 when the Foundation for the Rehabilitation of Drug Abusers was set up. Fr Victor decided to employ professionals alongside the volunteers. He travelled to Ireland, the USA and Italy to study what kind of rehabilitation programme would best serve the needs in Malta. There are now

'Spirituality is about becoming aware of the gifts which people around us represent.'

two rehabilitation centres, and Caritas has its own research team to monitor the Maltese drug problem and its causes. Its school survey in 1998 showed a dramatic increase in the use of illicit drugs compared with 1991. New research shows that 80 per cent of those in rehabilitation have been neglected or physically or sexually abused before taking drugs. Such research gets media attention and builds public and political awareness of the problems.

Caritas' literature conveys its high standards. Good intentions are translated into clear targets, hard work and professionalism in the service of people in need. Yet the leader of Caritas, seated behind his desk, is reticent in speaking about himself. His voice conveys helplessness as well as certainty. Once or twice there are tears in his eyes as he speaks about the painful reality with which they are in touch. During all these years he has kept an attitude of being on the search. Success has not lured him into adopting a self-assured image.

In the last 30-40 years Malta has gone through huge changes. The social reality—where there used to be large pockets of poverty—has become one of general affluence. The Maltese mentality still has a strong imprint of traditional Catholic teach-

ing but is turning pluralistic. There are easy-going lifestyles and less emphasis on morality. Fr Victor is happy about the material progress. But he feels a passion to reach out to those excluded from the table of the wealthy majority and to the victims of the modern stresses which make love freeze in so many homes.

'Young people are particularly vulnerable,' he says. 'There is a lot of emptiness in our society. Young people feel it. They yearn for something that is meaningful. Many of them jump from one thing to another. Others, however, know how to commit themselves. Young people in general detest a double life. A life of total dedication to God interests them.'

He says that a feeling of not being valuable causes inner pain. Young people need to know that they are loveable, valuable and capable. That idea is at the heart of the rehabilitation programme for drug addicts. First the focus is on getting them free from physical dependence, then on giving them back their sense of dignity and self-esteem. His experience is that many become free through rehabilitation.

Fr Victor keeps up a tough pace of work. A constant stream of people come to him for counselling. He prepares numerous talks, sermons and radio programmes. Does he feel worn out or lonely when so many expect so much from him? 'It does not take much for me to relax. I look out of the window, I listen to some music. Five minutes do a lot. I marvel at the beauty of the countryside and nature.' But some friends and colleagues have been insisting that the occasional five minutes of relaxation are not enough. They think he needs a holiday. To apply some gentle pressure they collected money for his 70th birthday last year. He laughs. The money has not been touched yet.

'I never feel lonely,' he says. 'There are patches of solitude. But they help me to be with God. I do not get depressed or fed up. I love people. There is a lack of awareness today. Spirituality is about becoming aware of the gifts which people around us represent. There is something beautiful in every person. People need to know that they are loved by God and are his children.'

'I need God's guidance every day, and God's moment is every moment,' he goes on. 'I listen a lot to what is on people's minds and hearts.' In his radio programmes he reckons to speak for only two to three minutes and listen for the rest of the 45.

Listening to people is not just a spiritual matter for Mgr Grech. It is the key to good leadership. He sees a pressing need for sound leadership in Maltese society. 'Leaders need a vision and a sense of mission. Too often their attention is only on the short-term problems and providing crisis-management. In order to find a vision they need to learn to listen to people at the grassroots and discover their needs.' Then their lives, just like the young people's, may be transformed by contact with suffering. ■



Sir Conrad Hunte, the West Indian international cricketer, died in December. TC 'Dickie' Dodds, himself a former professional cricketer, pays tribute to a man who will be remembered for his contribution to human relations as much as for his sporting prowess.

A cricketer for the oppressed

Conrad had a smile and a laugh that could lift the spirits of the gloomiest roomful of people. The smile was set in a face as rugged as the North Coast of Barbados where he was brought up. It was a face that had confronted the fastest bowlers in the world when he opened the innings for the West Indies cricket team with conspicuous success.

As far as I know, Conrad was the first cricketer to be given a state funeral. The cathedral was packed with a congregation headed by the Governor General and the Prime Minister of Barbados. The service was televised across the Caribbean.

Why was Conrad so honoured? Of course he was well known as a cricketer. But in the West Indies great cricketers seem to grow on trees. *The Guardian*, London—one of many papers to publish an obituary—wrote, '[Hunte] could well have been a figure of significance had he never picked up a cricket bat.' The London *Independent* wrote, 'He was a deeply committed Christian who believed he had a mission to work on behalf

of the underprivileged and oppressed, and many a young person in the Caribbean and South Africa will grieve at the news [of his death].'

To begin to understand him, you have to go back to his beginnings. Born in poverty in Shorey's Village, he walked barefoot three miles to school. Like many Barbadians his passion for cricket began early with bats fashioned from palm fronds and balls of cork bound with tape and string. Their pitches were on paths or any flattish piece of ground or beach.

Sundays were special and the young Conrad was taken to church with several others by his grandmother. She would make them sit in front of her. You could not twitch. You could not look round. The regime was strict and regular.

Conrad's cricket flourished and in 1960-61 he was part of the West Indies team touring Australia. He was a man of religious conviction, yet, as he candidly admits in his book *Playing to win*, this did not stop him 'exploiting women for my pleasure' and using cricket 'for fame and fortune'. A turn-

ing point came after he gave a radio talk in Adelaide. He concluded, 'I hope to contribute much to the world effort of sowing love where there is hatred, reaping peace where there is war and spreading light where there is darkness.'

He received many appreciative letters but they 'did not please me.... They spotlighted for me what a hypocrite I really was.' He found himself praying, 'I have made a mess of my life so far. If you will give me another chance, show me what to do and give me the strength to do it, I'll do it.'

Shortly after this an Australian, Jim Coulter, invited him to see a film which had a profound effect on him (see box). The following Good Friday Hunte committed his life to God.

Conrad's new life led him to temper his natural stroke-making flair in the interests of his side. For instance in the Test against England at the Oval in 1963 the West Indies needed 253 runs to win. As he silently listened for God's direction early on that last morning, his thought was to be 'careful and

vigilant all day'. After the fall of the first wicket the brilliant Rohan Kanhai came in and began hitting the ball all round the ground to the increasing cheers of the crowd. When he passed Conrad's score Conrad grew jealous and thought, 'You can score as fast as Kanhai. Show him.' Then, remembering his earlier thought, he pushed the temptation aside. Kanhai was out next ball. The West Indies went on to win the match with Hunte 108 not out.

As the years passed, he became increasingly aware of the race issue. In *Playing to win* he wrote: 'As I looked at the world scene and saw the gathering storm clouds of race hatred, I saw the need to try and bring an answer... But I did not want to get involved. I faced two hurdles. First, one of self-interest. It would cost me my career.... Second, the dilemma of pride. If I tried to do something I feared I would be misunderstood by the black people who would accuse me of being an "Uncle Tom".'

The first hurdle fell when a knee injury forced Conrad out of the game for at least six months. He described how the second, more difficult, hurdle fell: 'I was walking up a London street called Down Street. On my right was a public house which sold a brand of beer called Courage. On my left was a church. As I wrestled inside with the need to decide what to do... I heard what I believe was the voice of God saying "Look up". I looked up and saw the sign on the pub "Take Courage". I went into the church on my left and on my knees accepted the commission to fight with others to forestall racial violence in Britain.'

In *Playing to win* Conrad Hunte set out his approach: 'I had come to the conclusion that the advocates of Black Power were right in much of their diagnosis of the injustice and inhumanity in today's society, but their cure was inadequate.... They were seeking to cure what was a deep human and spiritual need with materialistic methods. They reckoned without the fact of human nature. Human selfishness is cruel, whatever the colour of the cloak it wears. Change is necessary. But to be permanent and realistic it needs to be a revolutionary change in human nature, drastically and on a world scale beginning with one's own.'

An indication of how far Conrad succeeded in his endeavours may be gleaned from the fact that a riot which the police had been expecting in Notting Hill, London, never took place. Local authorities attributed this in large measure to encounters of Black Power members with Conrad and his MRA colleagues during the previous months.

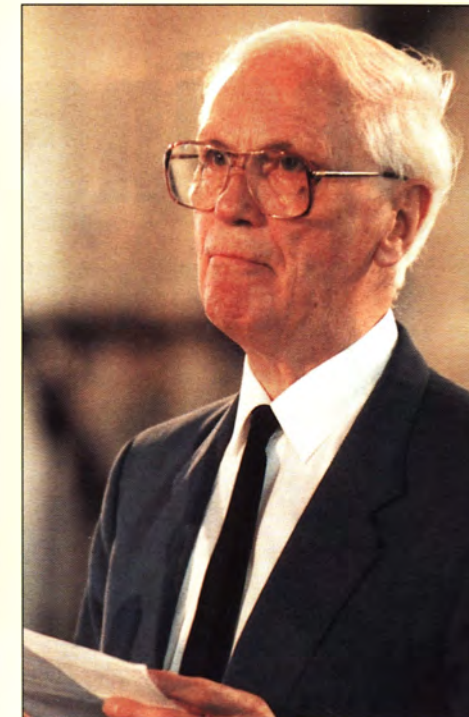
After a campaign which took him to 33 British cities, Conrad was invited to the US to help with the racial situation there. Whilst working in Atlanta, Georgia, he met and married Patricia, an anchorwoman for a TV news channel. Patricia continued her high profile job while Conrad was 'house father' to their three daughters, Roberta, Grace and Veronica, pursuing outside MRA work when he could.

When apartheid ended in South Africa, Conrad suggested to his friend Dr Ali Bacher, Managing Director of the United Cricket Board of South Africa, that he might have a part in the reconciliation process and that he could help inspire and motivate youngsters in the townships about true cricket. The Cricket Board invited him. He consulted his family. With great courage they decided to make the move, and spent the next seven years in South Africa. He saw it as a chance to help the dispossessed and disadvantaged to find what he had found. Bacher said at his funeral: 'He preached reconciliation. Today thousands and thousands of young South Africans are better because of his influence.... We regard him as one of our greatest adopted sons.'

For whatever reasons, strains were placed on Conrad and Patricia's marriage during this time. Finally, in 1999, Conrad felt that the time had come to return to Barbados. Patricia, on the other hand, wanted to return to Atlanta where she felt that their two younger children would get a better education. So there was a parting of the ways.

Back in Barbados, the government offered him a job with the youth of the island and awarded him a knighthood. West Indies and Barbadian cricket had fallen far from the heights of the Hunte-Sobers-Hall era, and he felt that he might have a part in reversing the decline. He won a hotly contested election for the Presidency of the Barbados Cricket Association, and brought a new team onto the board. He immediately had an impact with his flair for unselfish teamwork.

A few weeks later he flew to make the keynote speech at an MRA conference in Sydney, Australia. The day after he arrived, whilst playing tennis with his friend



Dodds speaking at Sir Conrad's funeral

Coulter, Conrad died from a heart attack.

We are left with the question, why a state funeral? Perhaps the secret lies in the tributes paid by Conrad's three daughters at that service, encapsulated by Veronica who said: 'My father lived his life filled with love and compassion and faith and joy. I ask you all to put aside your differences and your pain and your hurt and remember that my father loved you all with everything inside of him.'

I shall remember Conrad as the man who epitomized the Bible verse: 'If I have the faith to move mountains but have not love I am nothing.'

Becoming one person

I met Conrad Hunte because of a shared talent for sport. His talent showed in superb play, while mine took the form of devoted watching and constant day-dreaming about it. Finally I became embarrassed about my obsession, and had a quiet word with the Almighty. I apologized for having put sport ahead of spiritual and other more worthy aspirations. He seemed to say: 'Thanks, but why don't you invite the West Indies cricket team to see *The Crowning Experience*.' This film, produced by MRA, was about the African American educator, Mary McLeod Bethune. Born of slave parents, she had founded a university and become an advisor to the White House.

It was 1961 and the West Indies team had just arrived in Melbourne fresh from the first tied Test (international) match in the history of cricket. They had brought life back to the game and it was front page news.

When the film finished Conrad immediately said, 'I have felt we [Barbados] may get our independence but whoever can harness the bitterness left from slavery will

finish up in charge of my country.' This film was the first thing he had seen that could deal with that bitterness. He decided to try Bethune's approach, as portrayed in the film, of listening in quiet for God's direction. The results were immediately apparent. Wes Hall, the fearsome fast bowler, later told me, 'That Conrad, he's gone too far. He returned money to the Cricket Board because he had bought his cricket gear at wholesale rates and yet claimed retail rates. Now they are thinking we all have done it!'

My last conversation with Conrad, an hour before he died, was about how he longed to get a winning spirit back into the West Indies cricket side.

At the time of our first meeting I was struck by Conrad's transparent honesty. He told me that he felt God had given him the thought: 'thou practisest not what thou preachest', in relation to the temptations of life on the road. Nor can I get out of my mind the prayer he prayed: 'Please, God, make me *one* man, not two.' Surely it is a prayer for our time.

Jim Coulter

Finding a purpose for life

by Paul Williams

Goretti Nguyen was born in Saigon, Vietnam, and migrated to Australia when she was eight years old. There she was reunited with her father who had been separated for six years from the rest of the family as a result of the Vietnam war.

As a teenager she was an avid fan of British pop music in general and of the Birmingham group Duran Duran in particular. So when in the mid-Eighties Bob Geldorf staged his famous Live Aid concert, broadcast round the world, to raise money for the famine in Ethiopia, it caught Nguyen's attention. 'I remember trying to stay up through the night, hoping for a glimpse of Duran Duran,' she recalls. 'I also remember thinking to myself, "When I grow up I want to help people as well." I remember that pledge as clearly as if I had made it yesterday. But how was I meant to "help people"? I searched for that answer for many years.'

After graduating from university in economics, she just 'fell into' her job with a department store group. Promotion came 'without any special effort on my side'. All the time she was searching for something more fulfilling. She joined different voluntary groups which might offer an opportunity to 'help people'. One of these was Australian Vietnamese Youth Today (AVYT). The meetings were held in a large house called Armagh outside Melbourne. 'I regularly ventured in and out,' she says, 'although I had no significant contact with the residents. Nor was I particularly interested in what else took place there.' All she knew was that they were involved with something called Moral Re-Armament.

As her dissatisfaction intensified, she decided to take a year's 'working holiday' in Britain and other parts of Europe. 'I wasn't only after adventure,' she says. 'I was ardently hoping to discover a new path for my life.' But after eight months it was cut short by a need to return home on urgent family matters.

With nothing having changed, she went back into a job that seemed even more aim-

less than before. She felt trapped and without direction. She became physically ill and increasingly mentally stressed. 'It was an ordeal just to get up for work each day.' Her parents could not understand the root of her unhappiness. This led to an eventual breakdown in relationships. 'They were about the darkest days of my life. I suspected I was approaching a danger point in mind and body.'

After returning home she had resumed her responsibilities with AVYT. This time she began to get to know some of those living in the Armagh house. 'One day I found myself having an intimate conversation with a Taiwanese lady and sharing with her all my troubles and heartache. She showed me a brochure about a course they were running called *Life Matters*. As I read it I was speechless. "Are you looking for hope? What gives meaning to life?" It was as though someone had been reading my mind. I knew I had to attend this course. On false pretences, I excused myself from work.'

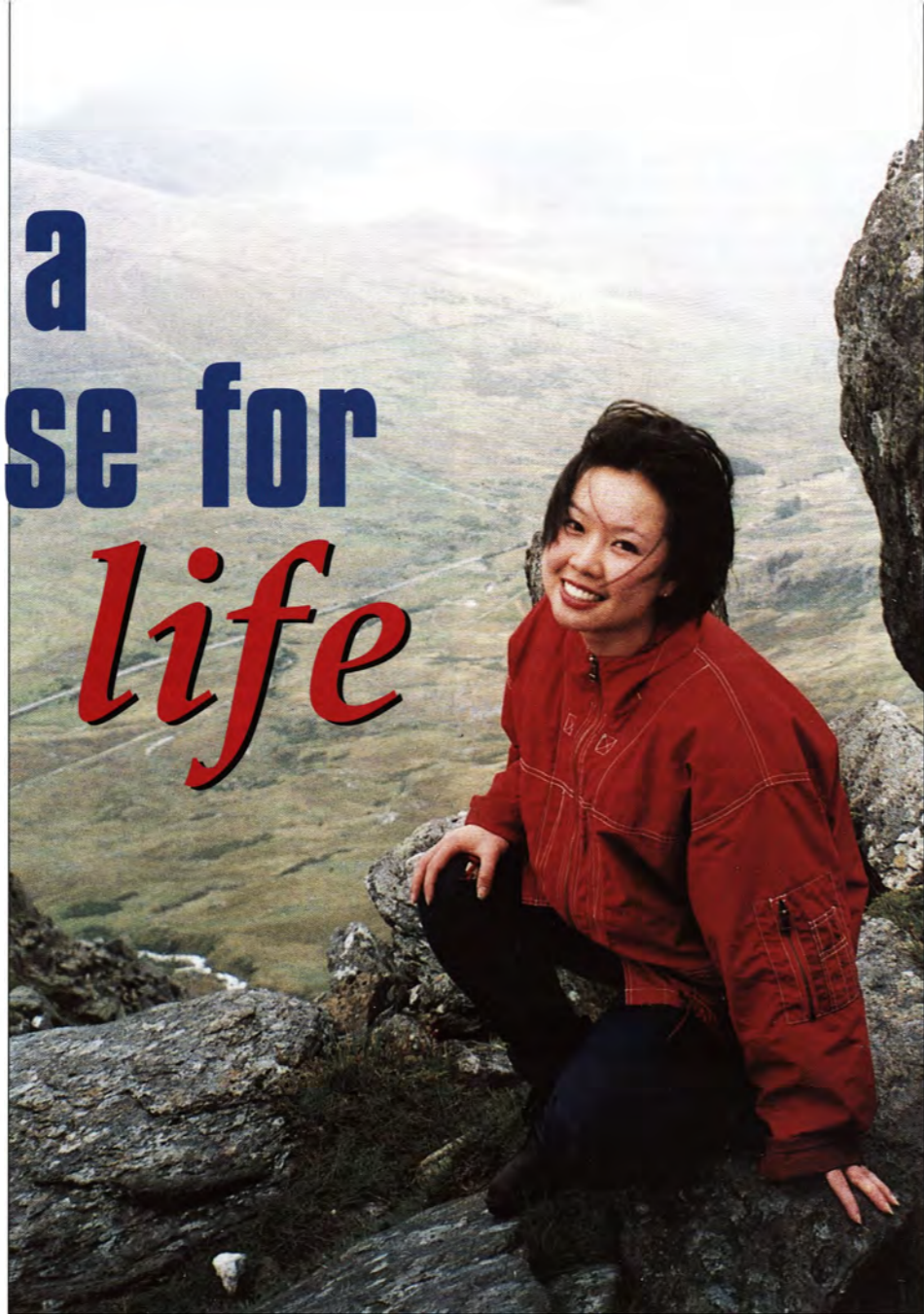
Now everything seemed to slot into place. Acquiring new strength from the nine-day course, she made two decisions.

'First and foremost to be true to myself and secondly to dare to take a chance. I knew what this meant for me. What I had so far seen, heard and read about MRA spelt hope-giving work. Here were people who put the emphasis on the individual's power to change society—starting with themselves. This was the kind of work which would give purpose to my life, even though there was no financial comfort or security.'

Despite the natural fears of her parents she handed in her resignation. 'As if I had forgotten the warmth of the sun on my skin, I felt a return of total body warmth. Yet I had no idea where this choice would take me.'

'Two and a half years later,' she reflects, 'I have been taken round the world with adventure as my constant companion. But above all (she is currently National Youth Coordinator for MRA in Australia) I am where I am meant to be—in an environment where I can help young people find purpose and a "quality of life" for themselves. I am now trying to give to others what I myself had for so long been looking and yearning for.'

Goretti Nguyen: 'round the world with adventure as my constant companion'



Contributing what you are

Information, inspiration and practical tips for 21st century peacemakers' was the theme of a recent reunion conference of young people who had taken part in the Caux Scholars Program, an annual month-long course in conflict transformation (see *FAC* Vol 12 No 6). The 25 former Scholars travelled from as far away as Mozambique, Russia and California to attend the weekend event in the new MRA centre at Greencoat Place, London, from 28-30 January.

The aims were to renew the vision the programme graduates first found at the MRA centre in Caux, Switzerland, to refresh their skills, deepen

their understanding and to give hope and inspiration to those who often work alone and in difficult circumstances.

Quaker peacemaker Adam Curle, who has invested much effort over 40 years in conflict situations, gave the keynote address. He underlined the importance of 'being with' people who are suffering violence in today's many conflicts. 'Non-violence means responding with something like love to people who are threatening you.' He concluded by urging his audience to 'live constantly in the light of eternity,' and said, 'Your main contribution to humanity is what you are.'

Randy Ruffin

FOR A CHANGE

FAC depends on charitable gifts to extend its outreach, particularly in countries with currency restrictions. Any gifts in the UK through covenants, Gift Aid or legacies are tax deductible.

These and other gifts should be made to: Moral Re-Armament, 24 Greencoat Place, London SW1P 1RD, UK (Registered Charity No 226334). Bank account details and Gift Aid forms are available on request.



Nizhny Novgorod meeting

Thirty young people travelled by train for two days to attend a week-long Foundations for Freedom (FFF) regional meeting in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, in January. Others came from Novosibirsk in Siberia. FFF, based in Britain, aims to equip those from former communist lands with the moral and spiritual values that will undergird democracy.

The theme of the meeting was 'Human values and beliefs: the keys to survival in the New Millennium?' Mike Lowe from

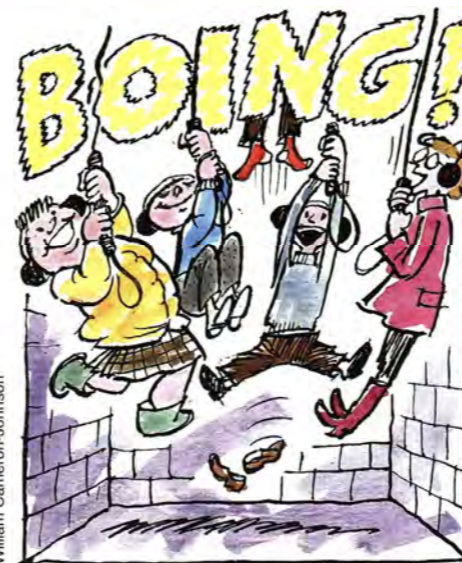
Britain talked about the significance of tradition, of how it connects the experience of the past with the present. Other speakers included a Russian Orthodox priest and a philosopher-historian who spoke on 'morals and history'.

Edna Yee

QUIZ OF THE CENTURY

The winner of our prize competition (Vol 12 No 6) was Jerry Barrett of Chico, California.

ROUNDAABOUT



William Cameron-Johnson

Firing the bells

Midnight on New Year's Eve. The villagers are gathered in the churchyard to greet another year. On the first stroke of 12, the church bells peel out, fireworks light up the sky, and the champagne corks pop. A new century, and a new millennium, has begun.

That was how it was meant to be, anyway. Up in the belltower, we all knew that this was the night in 365,000 to be a bellringer. English church bells are rung—and hung—in a different way from those in other countries. It's all a bit technical, but the fact that they're mounted on wheels, with a checking device to stop them spinning round and round, means that they complete a 360 degree revolution each time they sound and that the ringers can control their speed and change their position in the ringing sequence.

It can take a while to learn how to do this. The key thing is to keep your feet on the ground, keep hold of the end of the bell rope and NEVER RING AT THE SAME TIME AS ANOTHER BELL. Except, when as he did this New Year's Eve, the rector asks you to

'fire the bells'. This means ringing all six at once, in an impressive crash, and it's a great deal easier when you don't mean to do it than when you do.

Last time we tried to learn to fire the bells we got complaints from a local resident who said she couldn't hear her TV on practice nights. This time we had pity on the community and practised with the bells muffled.

On the great night, as the clock ticked towards midnight we stood poised, holding our ropes, waiting for the cry, 'Look to, fire the bells!' As the hand moved to 12, the bells crashed out, in complete (well nearly complete) unison, 12 times. Then we began to ring 'Grandsire Doubles', an ancient 'method' devised in the 17th century.

It was only later that we discovered that the rector, down in the churchyard below, was still in mid-prayer when the bells fired—an unequal competition if ever there was one. The choir, who then burst into song, didn't fare much better. But the ringers had a terrific time.

And after all it was our night.

Hurst Green

Forgiveness at the gate of no return



Pilgrims from the diaspora walking towards the Gate of No Return on the shores of Ouidah, Benin, from which at least 3.5 million Africans were sold into slavery.

Paige Chargois travelled to West Africa for a meeting between the descendants of those who bought and sold Africans and the descendants of those they shipped to the Americas.

In the halls of the US Congress, a heart beats for racial reconciliation. The efforts of Congressman Tony Hall and Senator James Inhofe led to 100 Americans journeying to Benin, West Africa, to attend to what one called 'the irresistible need to heal the wounds left behind' by the slave trade.

Congressman Hall first introduced a resolution apologizing for slavery to the US Congress in June 1997, and has worked unceasingly—but so far unsuccessfully—to get it passed.

Undaunted, Hall and Inhofe took their efforts to the global community. Together with various religious leaders they crafted a moment in which apology could be heard and forgiveness extended: the Leaders' Conference on Reconciliation and Development in Cotonou, Benin, last December.

The conference was attended by several heads of state or their emissaries, including the Presidents of Benin and Ghana and the Vice-President of the Dominican Republic. The Presidents of the Togolese Republic and of Algeria sent representatives, and delegations from Europe took part. Politicians brought their faith and religious adherents brought their political will to heal the horrors of our collective past.

Hall and Inhofe had spent much time over

several years with President Mathieu Kerekou of Benin. According to Inhofe, they 'felt the guilt of slavery [that] in order to have a buyer, there had to be a seller'. Inhofe said that he was not there as a politician, but as 'a follower of Jesus'. 'I'm here because I started a mission.'

From the shores of Benin alone, more than 3,000,000 Africans were sold into slavery. The official statement of the conference read: 'We owe to ourselves never to forget these absent ones standing among us who did not die of their own death, to acknowledge our share of responsibility in the humiliation and opprobrium, to feel shame for what those absent ones did, to look differently at the false images, to surrender to forgiveness in order to start afresh and pursue our goal towards progress, and free ourselves from misery without succumbing to vanity of material possession. For Africans, this awareness opens the way to forgiveness and reconciliation.'

Addressing the audience of mainly Africans and African Americans, Hall declared, 'As a citizen I can apologize! I'm part of it too... my sins... my ancestors; take these apologies and start to heal... start to close the wound that is there.'

One of the European representatives at the conference was Fenton Jones. 'This is the

hardest message I have ever given—representing tens of millions who were made rich at your expense,' he said. 'I'm one who carries generational guilt. I'm so grateful to you for even allowing me to stand here.'

Referring to the complicity of even the Papacy, Jones quoted a statement in which Europeans were encouraged to 'attach, subject and reduce to slavery' the Africans that could be captured. 'God is doing something in our midst to cleanse our sin [of having] become rich at your expense. We bow and confess our sins.'

Jones' words ushered in one of the most poignant moments of the conference when Jerry Rawlings, the President of Ghana, embraced him as a brother. There was no doubt that a new level of racial healing had already begun.

This scene was replicated in various ways over the five days of the conference. A choir sang heart-wrenching lyrics to a rhythmic beat and melodic sounds:

We're so sorry, so sorry!

Somebody say so.

Sorry for the betrayal.

Sorry for the separation.

Sorry for the suffering.

Sorry for the loss of identity.

Some were so overwhelmed that they cried out while others wept in silence.

President Kerekou had invited the kings of Benin since many of their ancestors had sold Africans to Europeans. He declared: 'This conference is a spiritual conference. Listen to what your conscience will dictate to you.... The mission has been accomplished.... The forgiveness has been accepted and reconciliation made possible.'

The delegates were taken to the city of Ouidah and to the sandy shores across which Africans walked to board the ships which would separate them forever from their homeland. There, near 'The Gate of No Return', participants sang songs of faith and heard from British and American clergy.

I had noticed that, throughout the conference, only one woman had been allowed to speak. Here in the shadow of this infamous gate African men desired to kneel and offer their apologies to African Americans whose ancestors had been sold into slavery. As a cleric and a woman I noticed that there were no African women who had shared in the apology here or at the conference centre.

Each human being needs to apologize for his or her own sins. The men couldn't apologize for the women nor vice versa. I moved to the microphone and called for an African woman to come and take her place with African men in offering the apology as I had taken my place with African American men



LETTERS

From Alexander Pinchook, Mozyr, Belarus

I am Doctor of Physics and Assistant Professor in Mozyr State Pedagogical Institute, Gomel province, 50 km from the 'dead zone' created by the Chernobyl nuclear accident. I am also the leader of a team which is dealing with the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

When they say that Chernobyl is the greatest accident in the history of mankind, it is not a journalistic cliché. It is a severe reality.

In 1999 the levels of radioactive substances in children in village high schools were tested. In the most contaminated area, levels were up to 100 times the internationally allowable level. In less contaminated areas, the average level was still well above the allowable level.

The International Committee for Radiation Protection considers that there is a linear dependence between the dose of irradiation and the risk of cancer or other diseases. In other words, if the child has 100 times the allowable level of radioactive substances in his or her body, their risk of disease will be 100 times higher.

Our team have been trying to fight the situation since 1991. Most of our members are teachers. We have been helped by Holbrook Teter, a psychologist from San Francisco, who visited many schools and communities with us between 1993 and 1997. (He died from a heart attack in January 1999.)

Our main goals are:

- 1 To protect the population from radiation
- 2 To build 'fear-free' communities
- 3 To promote healing

Our first goal is achieved by health education. The tests mentioned above proved that children's levels of radioactive substances are substantially decreased after health education.

Secondly, we strengthen village communities. The presence of our staff is, in itself, therapeutic: people get attention and they can discuss possible health measures.

Holbrook Teter's words on the psychological effects of the disaster illustrate the necessity of our work: 'Among them are depression, avoidance, smouldering anger which is unacknowledged, denial and psychic numbing. Everywhere a loss of faith in a future, hopelessness and helplessness, is expressed.

to receive the apology. For women were not innocent bystanders during the slave trade.

(The following day this was confirmed. My African guide shared the story of how the King of Abomey wondered why the King of Ouidah was getting so rich. He sent his daughter to marry into the family and 'spy out the source of his wealth' and report back to him. He then captured the King of Ouidah and took over his lucrative slave trade venture.)

I explained that in Europe and in America

Teachers worry about widespread passivity and problems with memory and concentration among students. Those who have long-term teaching experience state that there is a clear-cut increase in these problems since the Chernobyl disaster.'

Parents, teachers and other adults want to protect children and keep them from harm. We can't tell when tiredness and lack of interest are due to the physical consequences of radiation and when they are due to stress.

The children themselves are bewildered and frightened. They often say: 'We have no future!' or 'We feel strange'. Both children and adults say: 'There's nothing you can do about the situation.'

To achieve our third goal we listen, which Teter describes as 'the most basic healing method'. He writes, 'Active listening means making sure the other person is aware of your attention. A focus on feelings promotes the goal of relief from tension. All feelings are acceptable, even if the listener doesn't agree with a particular attitude.'

Our work used to be supported by World Vision Belarus and the Soros Foundation in Belarus. Unfortunately both of these organizations have closed down, and our work has been significantly abridged.

I think it was God's will that I recently got a few issues of *For A Change*. I and my wife, who works as a journalist in the local newspaper of a town located in the highly contaminated area, invite you to visit us in order to see the situation and our work with your own eyes.

From Bill Peters, Deal, Kent, UK

The first FAC editorial of the century generously acknowledges work by Martin Dent and me in Jubilee 2000 and by Edward Peters in the Clean Slate Campaign. Ours also is a clean slate campaign but of a slightly different type and scope!

The importance of the MRA centre at Tirley Garth in the Jubilee 2000 campaign has been widely recognized and acknowledged. But the circumstances somehow never get clearly stated.

Early in 1993 Richard Pearce, a New Zealand colleague, and I were kicking around some economics ideas, among them that Adam Smith was wrong to argue that self-interest was the only human motivation

needing to be taken into account in economic analysis. Eventually we came up with the idea of holding a seminar to examine that and related points, including 'Third World' debt, at Tirley Garth. We constructed a list of possible participants, from a number of countries in the North and South.

I had been a member of the South Atlantic Council (an all party parliamentary group dealing with Argentine-British reconciliation after the Falklands War) with Martin Dent for several years, and I knew his special interest in Nigeria and Malawi. I suggested inviting him, and he came. At the seminar there emerged such close congruence between the two papers we offered that we soon saw the need for our future close collaboration.

Martin began his work in this field in 1990 when he began a petition to the UN Secretary General about poor country debt remission among Keele students. I began in 1983, on retiring from the Diplomatic Service, and spoke about the Third World debt from the platform at the MRA centre at Caux, Switzerland, in that and several succeeding years, as well as undertaking 25 intercontinental journeys taking in over 40 countries, often for MRA business or conferences.

From Michael Coyle, London, UK

I am planning to produce a book for charity including inspirational sayings and writings which will be in the form of 366 daily meditations based on spiritual texts and quotations. I hope to be able to add an individual comment from those who contribute each quotation; this will describe just why the words chosen mean so much to them.

I would like to invite readers to contribute any sayings or quotations (up to 150 words long) which mean most to them, together with 100 words or less which describes how this has changed their life or aided their spiritual growth.

If they would like to add a preferred date, I will do my best to ensure that their contribution, if used, appears against that date.

All profits will be donated to a charity to help our homeless youth.

The editors welcome letters for publication but reserve the right to shorten them. Please write to 'For A Change', 24 Greencoat Place, London SW1P 1RD. E-mail: fac@mra.org.uk.

needed to hear her say, 'Sorry!' We both wept deeply. The act of forgiveness was now complete: male and female.

There were fervent words of repentance steeped in agonizing cries and pleas for us to forgive. Few acts of forgiveness have ushered in more joy. There was something so right in the centre of my soul: full confirmation that God was in this process. Shouts of hallelujah concluded our time together. Reconciliation had begun. ■

BOOKMARK



If you don't have children and don't read the literary pages then chances are you've never heard of the Harry Potter phenomenon that is sweeping the world.

Penned by JK Rowling, a 31-year-old graduate of Exeter University, the books concern a boy on the verge of adolescence struggling to discover who he is. Harry Potter lives with his cruel aunt and uncle, whose hatred of him is fuelled by their fear of his true identity. Then, on his eleventh birthday, Harry is accepted by Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and finally learns that he is a wizard whose parents were killed by the evil Lord Voldemort. Harry's escape as a baby from death at Voldemort's hands has made him a hero in the 'Wizardin' world'.

Each book in the series (there will be seven in all) tells of Harry's successive years at Hogwarts. Readers will be correct in their assumption that Voldemort is still lurking, slowly building his army of followers, and has neither given up on killing Harry nor on bringing the Wizardin' World under his control.

The first book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Bloomsbury, London, 1997) was written when Rowling was a penniless single mother living in Edinburgh. Her own story includes writing the book in cafés while her three-month-old daughter was asleep; not having enough money to photocopy the manuscript to send off to publishers; and being turned down by Penguin and Harper Collins. She put all that behind her when the rights to her first book were sold in America for £100,000—an unprecedented amount. (Most British children's writers can count on about £2,000 a year from their books.)

By July 1999 sales of her first two books had topped 750,000. *The Philosopher's Stone* stayed in the top half of *The Times* of London's best-seller list for over 14 weeks. In Britain, book three (*The Prisoner of Azkaban*) was embargoed on its day of release until 3.45pm

Anyone for quidditch?

When Sarah Mayor Cox started reading the Harry Potter stories, she forgot she was a lecturer on children's literature. What's so special about the series which is taking the world's children—and adults—by storm?

so that children did not miss school to buy it. 16,853 copies were sold within three hours! It went on to win this year's Whitbread Children's Book Award, with some demanding that it should have won the overall prize. The fourth book now tops Amazon.com's ongoing bestseller list even though it won't be published until July 2000.

I love books. They bulge out from the overstuffed shelves in our house and cover every horizontal surface. I read them for pleasure and I also earn my living from them. The sheer number I have to read and

the way I have to read them often compromise my spontaneous enjoyment of them. So I was astonished by my reaction to the Harry Potter phenomenon.

One night, two books into the series, my son aged three pulled *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* out of my hand and said in a very firm tone, 'Can't you get your nose out of those Harry Potter books?' He had been primed by his father, but he was right—I had spent every available minute glued to one of the Harry Potter books.

For the first time in years I had read something without my filter of reviewer, academic or critic on. At the end of book three I thought, 'Now I must start to critically evaluate these books in the light of what I know of quality literature'. But that was my logical head. My heart just wanted to read the next book in the series.

Not everyone loves the Harry Potter books, however. In eight states across the USA they have been branded as handbooks for 'witchcraft and violence', although Chuck Colson, a Christian evangelical preacher and former Nixon aide, says the magic is 'not occultic' and comments on the 'enormously inventive' nature of the first book. The list includes: the school train to Hogwarts which leaves from platform nine and three quarters at Kings Cross Station, school lists which instruct 'first years are not allowed their own broomsticks', and the game Quidditch (a version of football played on broomsticks with four balls).

Critics are also divided. Some, like the reviewer from *The Scotsman*, have raved about its 'unassailable stand for the power of fresh, innovative story-telling in the face of formula horror and sickly romance'. Others like Judith Ridge from Australia have labelled them as 'superficial and derivative... carelessly executed' and offering 'troubling ideologies'.

Some of the literary outrage may be well found-

ed. Writing in *Viewpoint* Ridge argues that Rowling has broken the most important rule in fantasy writing: that a story must 'follow its own internal logic which allows readers to suspend their disbelief of what could not be true in the "real world"'. She claims there are 'many examples of laziness and poor planning in the plotting'.

Critics need to remember these are first novels—each is better than the last. In a way it's a shame that Rowling's first book was not a stand-alone novel, where she could have honed her craft and let the story die a quiet death. Instead she has been catapulted into stardom from the very beginning. Her writing has tightened. *Prisoner of Azkaban* is her best yet.

Rowling is the last to claim she's written masterpieces. In the fourth book she has promised to tackle the tricky questions of Harry's hormonal changes in an honest way. And she's acknowledged that some of the characters will have to die in their battle against Lord Voldemort.

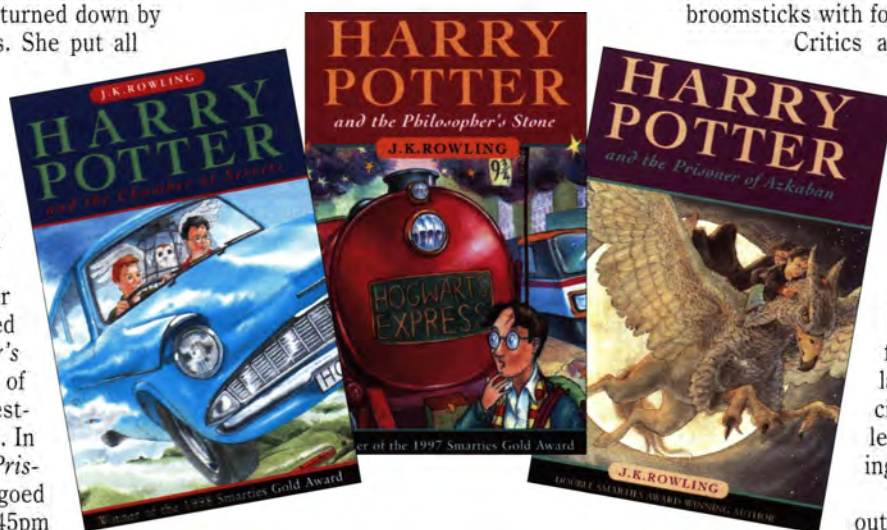
As an educator I am ecstatic that books can generate so much excitement in children. After all, is this not the age of the computer, the internet and drugged-out teenagers? Hooray that something as old-fashioned as a book can generate so much emotion. I do however agree with Philip Hensher's opinion in the London *Independent* that success and appeal to children should not be confused with literary merit.

Although a little light in parts—'Magic Lite, Disney magic' as Judith Ridge puts it—Rowling's books are rather moral. Matthew Fort of the *Guardian*, London, even goes so far as to suggest that Harry Potter is 'alarmingly old-fashioned. He is not post-modernist, ironic, sophisticated, slick, hip or street-smart. He is cheerful, decent, kind and brave, loyal, good at games and rather moral'.

And maybe that is why Harry Potter has become such a phenomenon. There is a little bit of Harry, his friends, and the predicaments they get themselves into in all of us. We respond to the longing he feels for his dead parents, our skin creeps as he faces the evil Voldemort, and ultimately we all want reassurance that who we are and the decisions we've made are OK.

But don't just take my word for it—read the books for yourself, discuss them passionately with others, make up your own mind about Harry Potter and then wait for the next great literary controversy to hit.

Sarah Mayor Cox lectures in Children's Literature to preservice primary teachers at La Trobe University, Bendigo, Australia, and writes for a number of publications.



BOOK REVIEW

BETTER THAN LIVING A LIE

She said yes—the unlikely martyrdom of Cassie Bernall

by Misty Bernall
Plough Publishing, £7.99, \$20
ISBN 0-87486-987-0

She said yes is a profoundly touching little book by Misty Bernall, whose 17-year-old daughter Cassie died in the Columbine High School massacre of 20 April last year.

Cassie was hiding under a school table, hands clasped in prayer, when two fellow students burst in. One put his 9mm handgun to her temple and asked her if she believed in God. She said 'Yes' and before she had time to reply to his second question, 'Why?', 'they just blew her away', according to a student witness. 'Cassie was scared, but she sounded strong, like she knew what she was going to answer,' reported 16-year-old Joshua Lapp.

Cassie was hailed throughout America's media as a modern-day martyr, though she was not the only hero of that appalling day. Another girl declared her faith to the gunmen and survived. A teacher was shot dead as he blocked a hallway to protect his students.

'The cruellest irony', writes Misty Bernall, was that Cassie would not have been at Columbine had her parents not pulled her out of another school, in order to rescue her from the sort of evils that drove the two young killers. They had chosen Hitler's birthday to go on their murderous spree.

Cassie herself had been drawn into witchcraft, black magic, self-mutilation, drugs and murderous intent against her own parents. Misty only discovered this after finding letters to Cassie from her friend, a self-styled vampire. They make for blood curdling-reading. But they also point to Cassie's intense loneliness and how far her parents had lost her confidence.

Misty admits that she had been too keen to please her daughter instead of setting 'boundaries'. Cassie had apparently given her soul to Satan, writes her mother. 'Unfashionable as it might be to suggest it, I felt that we were engaged in a spiritual battle.'

Then came a remarkable change in Cassie. Her parents put her temporarily into a Christian Fellowship School. One weekend she took part in a Christian retreat involving 'Goth types and a lot of kids who dressed like punk rockers'. There, amidst

the singing and friendship, she broke down in tears. She returned from the weekend to hug her mother: 'Mom, I've changed. I've totally changed. I know you are not going to believe it but I'll prove it to you.'

From then on, Cassie's main concern was how to be useful to God. She transferred to Columbine High at her own request. On the morning of her death she handed a note to her friend Amanda: 'PS. Honestly, I want to live completely for God. It's hard and scary, but totally worth it.'

Now Misty Bernall is able to 'see the loss of my daughter not so much as a defeat, as a victory.... To me, Cassie's life says that it is better to die for what you believe than to live a lie.'

What struck me, reading this book, was how young were those involved. Cassie was only 15 when she got drawn into her particular vortex. Her killers were 18.

But the book hardly addresses the gun culture in America which allows teenagers to own handguns and semi-automatic rifles and which too often leads to school murders. When will America start decommissioning its privately held weapons?

Each generation has to choose for itself the values it lives by, though that can sound like a parental cop-out. Parents can, at the very least, provide the nurture, affection and boundaries that give children the security and self-confidence which Cassie seems to have found before her untimely death.

Michael Smith





A DIFFERENT ACCENT

by Michael Henderson

Liverpool faces the past—and the future

The English city of Liverpool is transforming the image it once had of dilapidation and decay. Its waterfront area is cleaned up, thriving and very tourist-friendly. The home of the Beatles and the Mersey Sound, of the Grand National and championship football teams, of Anglican and Catholic cathedrals joined by Hope Street, is looking to become, in the words of its Lord Mayor, 'a true 21st century city'.

As part of that commitment, without much fanfare and with little media notice, it has taken a monumental step to leave the past behind.

At the height of the slave trade Liverpool shipowners financed 40 per cent of the European ships involved. The city's wealth grew initially out of the triangular trade taking manufactured goods to Africa in exchange for slaves for the Americas and then carrying produce back from the plantations to Britain. Slave ships from Liverpool made 5,000 Atlantic crossings. Memories of this time are still evoked by the carvings of African heads which adorn the city hall and by streets which bear the names of merchants enriched by the trade.

In 1994 steps were taken to acknowledge this history, when a permanent gallery devoted to transatlantic slavery was opened in the Merseyside Maritime Museum. In 1999, as its last formal act of the millen-

nium, Liverpool City Council passed unanimously a resolution apologizing for the city's role in the Atlantic slave trade. 'This was the proudest moment of my political life,' says Lord Mayor Joseph A Devaney.

The resolution stated that while the city had been bequeathed a rich diversity of people and cultures, learning, architecture and financial wealth, the human suffering had been obscured. 'The untold misery which was caused has left a legacy which

'Slave ships from Liverpool made 5,000 Atlantic crossings.'

affects Black people in Liverpool today.'

The Council expressed its shame and remorse for the city's role in 'this trade in human misery'. It made 'an unreserved apology' for its involvement in the slave trade and the continual effects of slavery on Liverpool's Black communities. 'The City Council hereby commits itself to work closely with all Liverpool's communities and partners and with the peoples of those countries which have carried the burden of the slave trade. The Council also commits itself to programmes of action, with full participation of Liverpool's Black communities,

which will seek to combat all forms of racism and discrimination and will recognize and respond to the city's multicultural inheritance and celebrate the skills and talents of its people.'

The Lord Mayor says that in apologizing the city sought neither forgiveness nor absolution. 'It is my belief that Liverpool can only be truly forgiven after a process of reconciliation through action has taken place,' he says. The city is planning an event where representatives of those who bear the burden and the legacy of the slave trade, both within the city and from the Americas and Africa, will be invited to set out their vision as to how Liverpool might finally put its past to rest. 'When this process of change is successfully completed we will have earned forgiveness and absolution,' Devaney says.

Canon Nicholas Frayling, Rector of Liverpool, was asked to speak in the Council Chamber before the resolution was put. Interviewed later, he said, 'It was highly significant and most remarkable that the resolution was passed unanimously in a Council Chamber that has seen so much controversy and partisanship. It was an indication of how deeply the members of the Council were touched, both by the content of the resolution and the passionate way in which it was proposed and seconded.'

Commending the Council for its forward-looking act, he had told them, 'The only way to bring about lasting reconciliation is to face the pain of history with courage, and then to change.'

Lord Mayor Devaney says, 'We must look to the future and ensure that the mechanisms, programmes and policies are in place which will ensure that the world recognizes that our city has changed forever.'

Michael Henderson is a British journalist living in the USA.

James Stephens/The Stock Market

REFLECTIONS by Christine Karrer

Leaf in the stream



Some time ago I wrote the following: 'I am like a leaf that has fallen into the water. It goes wherever the current takes it—with no mind of its own, nowhere to go, no purpose, de-rooted and too fragile to change its course. It is only in a stream and could still be swept onto the side. But will it be strong enough to hold tight? Or will it eventually end up in the great big sea, even more lost, with no escape? What made it fall off the tree in the first place? Why didn't it hold tight to the branch where it was safe and got the nourishment to stay fresh and green?'

I wrote this because I had distanced myself from God, and was feeling lost and without security. But I was also wondering where I really belonged. I haven't lived in Switzerland, my birthplace, for many years. I had left Australia, the country where I felt most at home, after three years to work in Britain.

Then I heard someone say, 'Home is where the heart is'. It occurred to me that I had not allowed my heart to go where God had led me, and instead I was holding on to a dream that made me unhappy. The moment I understood this, I realized that my heart and home could be anywhere, as long as God was at the centre of my life.

Many of us experience real inner suffering when we feel lost, not quite knowing where to go next. The following words have been a great encouragement to me during such times:

'When we come to the edge of all the light we have and we must take a step into the darkness of the unknown, we must believe one of two things: Either we will find something firm to stand on or we will be taught to fly.'

In the film, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, Jones has to reach a cave to find the cup of eternal life. Having overcome several challenges, he comes to a ravine which is too wide to jump. He knows there is no going back and that he just has to trust. So he closes his eyes and takes a step into the nothing. To his great surprise, he discovers an invisible bridge.

I was deeply moved by this scene because it illustrates so well how we can always trust God, no matter how desperate the situation. For me faith is taking steps into the unknown.

Just before I left Australia, I was preparing to go on a three-week trip to Ayers Rock with a friend. I was really looking forward to this long-time dream coming true. Then I suddenly had a strong feeling that I should cancel the trip and go back to Switzerland. I couldn't understand why I felt this, but it was too important to ignore.

So I started my return journey, stopping off in Malaysia for a few days. There I got the news that my father was in hospital with a brain haemorrhage and was between life and death. I was able to get a flight the very same day. It was so important to be there for my mother: we were able to take it in turns to be at my father's bedside. My father recovered, and those two months turned out to be the richest time I have ever had with my parents. If I had gone on the journey to Ayers Rock, nobody would have been able to reach me in the desert.

All of us are hurt at times, sometimes very deeply, and we often struggle to find forgiveness and new love for those who hurt or disappoint us. Hurts can become a security, an excuse for my behaviour—how I am, what I do, what I fail to do. It can make me hard and unloving—not only to the person who hurt me—and block me from reaching inner peace and freedom.

It is up to me whether I open my heart, make myself vulnerable and as a result find real healing and forgiveness.

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