

Carols by Candlelight

The Analysis of
an Australian Folk Ritual

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Carols by Candlelight is an annual public ritual which began in Melbourne in 1938 and was introduced by many other cities during the war years that followed. Its popularity has continued to the present day with several hundred thousands attending the ceremony throughout Australia each year. The significance of this folk ritual, however, has apparently not been explored by scholars. Even on the broader context of Christmas, Gavin Weightman could write in 1975 that there was almost no sociological or anthropological work on the significance of Christmas for the family or the family for Christmas /1/. The present analysis of this event within the Christmas cycle does not claim to be a sociological investigation. Rather, it is designed to provide a preliminary empathetic description of the components of this ritual using selected phenomenological categories with which to organise and interpret the materials. Interviews were conducted with participants before, during and after the ritual in 1975, 1976 and 1977. Data gleaned from these interviews was interpreted in the light of the wider context of Christmas in Australia /2/.

We have used the term "folk ritual" to designate this particular ceremony. While there is considerable lack of clarity about the meaning of terms such as folk religion or civil religion /3/, this ritual can legitimately be classified as folk. It is conducted by community organisations rather than the church, is perceived by participants as something for "the ordinary bloke" rather than the ecclesiastical community, promotes values consistent with folk attitudes rather than official

church teaching concerning Christmas and preserves traditional symbols commonly accepted as belonging to the wider community rather than exclusively to the dominant Christian religion of the society.

One of my reasons for selecting this rite is that, of all the Christmas customs, it seems to be one of the few which developed primarily in Australia, though its popularity has now spread to places such as Hong Kong.

My basic intention in this study, then, is to isolate the major features of the ritual process and the corresponding religious meanings expressed by the actions and sentiments of the worshippers participating in this rite. Finally, I shall attempt a tentative cosmology of Christmas reflected in the folk belief patterns exposed through this analysis of the ceremony. Wherever possible I have preserved the idiom and language of the participants in the descriptions which follow.

Setting the Calendar

Christmas begins for children in cities like Adelaide and Melbourne with the spectacular children's pageant of John Martins or Myers. That event stirs the traditional impulses of the season through a panorama of fantasy culminating in the figure of Father Christmas. Carols by Candlelight is usually held about eight weeks later, often on the Sunday night before Christmas Day. Coming as it does at this juncture in the calendar, it interrupts the buying frenzy of the community in a dramatic manner. It falls in the midst of that final countdown of shopping days before Christmas when the so-called spirit of commercialism appears to control the entire city.

This hiatus in the frantic Christmas season is one time when many citizens pause to consider deeper values. It is described as "a time to make you think", or "a chance to get out of the commercial rat race and think about the true meaning of Christmas". This date provides an opportunity for communal feelings of goodwill to be expressed beyond the immediate obligations of the individual family. By attending Carols by Candlelight the worshipper also participates in a charitable venture. In Adelaide, for example, the proceeds of the event benefit sick and handicapped children. Thus through this ceremony communal, charitable and religious impulses are drawn together at an appropriate date.

This date, moreover, is quite distinct from the ecclesiastical calendar and not officially connected with the weeks of Advent. This day is apparently the community's time for reversing the rites of excess typical of the season and pointing to an underlying message of serious hope which might appear to be negated by their actions during the remaining busy days of the Christmas calendar.

The Structure of the Rite

The structure of the rite is based on the pattern of a public concert

with a sequence of performers, a master of ceremonies and an intermission. The same structure has persisted without major changes since the inception of the ceremony over 30 years ago. The vocal performances by the choirs, ensembles or soloists alternate with carols sung by the gathered assembly of worshippers. Each performance is preceded and followed with comments by the master of ceremonies who expresses delight or appreciation for the rendering. His congenial tone is an expression of the warmth and goodwill of the occasion. He says nothing which could be interpreted as partisan; he mentions no religious denomination. He is the spokesman of a common ecumenical sentiment which pervades the season. As such, he is a lay officiant in a kind of Christmas religion at its annual festival of goodness and goodwill.

The performers in this festival represent large portions of the worshipping community; they are the local community on stage. The high schools are present, for example, through the polished Pembroke Girl's Choir. The 4th Military District lays down its arms for the day to appear on stage as a peace loving band playing the "Chit Chat Polka". The altruistic youth of the city are represented by the Boy's Brigade of Australia who have the honour of taking up the collection for charity at intermission. The items rendered by these performers are intended to provide "something for everybody". An aria is juxtaposed with a jig, Silent Night is balanced by the Marche Militaire, and the rock refrains of Stylus offer counterpoint to the "gentle strains of Mary's Boy Child". The musical programme is climaxed by a "stirring rendition of the Hallelujah Chorus" from Handel's Messiah and followed by an approximate benediction in God Save the Queen which approximates a closing benediction.

Yet whatever the apparent incompatibility of these musical pieces, they have one thing in common, viz., they are selected because they are thought to be "the songs of the people" rather than those of any organisation or institution. They represent a happy union of entertainment and edification; celebration in song is subordinate to, yet compatible with, the deeper ideal of popular Christmas beliefs.

Thus, while this ceremony has the basic structure of a public concert, the Christmas theme, the community singing, the diversity of popular offerings, the combination of civic and sacred symbols and the message for the devotee, distinguish this event from other public concerts. Nor does the rite approximate a Catholic mass or a Protestant service of the Word typical of the season. Carols by Candlelight stands as a distinctive community rite loved by the common folk and tolerated by most ecclesiastical institutions.

The officiant, moreover, is normally not a clergyman, but a popular public figure. In Adelaide Dick Moore from "The Advertiser" has served as Master of Ceremonies since its inception in 1944. Some of those interviewed said that the presence of a clergyman on stage would "ruin the ritual". This annual ceremony was their kind of worship and the church had no right to interfere.

Transformation of the Space

Spatial patterns give power and atmosphere to public rituals; the defining arena for a given occasion is transformed by the arrangement of the symbols and the rhythm of events. Here again the primary model for the spatial arrangements of Carols by Candlelight appears to be a typical open air concert. In the foreground a stage is decorated with greenery for the appearance of the several performers who remain on stage throughout the ceremony. Facing the stage the worshippers are seated on rows of chairs or rugs and cushions scattered across the lawns of a hillside. Boundaries are fixed around this designated area; at several gates people may purchase a programme and a short (4 inch) candle as their means of entry.

The spatial structure is further transformed into a sacred place by a series of symbols designed to complement the natural open air setting of the occasion. Above the stage a sign reads CAROLS BY CANDLELIGHT. No other verbal messages intrude in a visual form, not even MERRY CHRISTMAS or CHRIST IS BORN. The very name of the ceremony, it appears, has gained an independent power which is not to be diluted by allusions to other Christmas rites. In Adelaide the only other attendant symbols are two huge candles (about 12 feet high) which burn boldly at a distance on either side of the stage. In Melbourne the candle is set in a wreath suspended above the stage. Above the wreath hovers a childlike cherub. Additional cherubs stand serenely in the background of the stage, a testimony to the perpetuation of folk symbols representing angelic tenderness, goodness and peace, a tradition which diverges radically from the biblical portrait of huge semi-animal, semi-divine cherubim and seraphim.

The open air setting establishes a feeling of the great outdoors, the world of nature at peace. The ducks and swans floating on the peaceful Torrens River in Adelaide's Elder Park, the green grass, the tall trees and the warm summer evening heighten the atmosphere of natural calm and beauty. The comments of the crowd are indicative of these sentiments. "It's so peaceful and lovely". "You get a good feeling when you come here". "It's almost like the fields of Bethlehem". In the minds of many worshippers the space has assumed an atmosphere of natural blessing, order and harmony appropriate to the occasion and expressive of their own inner feelings.

Within this setting of natural and sacred symbols the transformation of space is experienced as a progressive rhythm through the ritual. The ceremony begins in daylight, continues through dusk, sunset and then into the darkness of the summer night. The transition from light to dark, from day to night and from blue skies to star-filled heavens, provides a corresponding natural symbolism for the occasion. As the natural transformation progresses, the mystery of growing communion via emerging candlelights is gradually revealed. As the darkness intensifies candlelights increase in number until a panorama of small flickering

lights is displayed across the audience. The space has become a spectacle, a visible expression of meaningful communion and quiet mystery.

This spectacle is described each year in the Adelaide Advertiser in a number of recurring images. One such description reads:

“as the sun faded the first candles flickered and from the top of the Festival Centre the huge crowd looked like a patchwork quilt interwoven with glow worms”/4/.

This folk metaphor, mixed though it may be, seems to reflect sentiments correlative with the process of special transformation. Glow worms, like each personal candle, are gentle hidden creatures whose power is revealed almost magically in the dark. The patchwork quilt recalls grandmother and memories of past Christmas joys. Thus something of the mysterious, the sentimental and the natural are blended into a new whole through the transformation of space in this Christmas rite. For the devotee the space becomes sacred; the profane amphitheatre becomes a place of intense communal presence.

Intentionality of the Symbols

The two overt symbols of the ceremony are announced in the very title of the occasion, namely, Carols by Candlelight. At first blush it may appear that the candles are strictly functional; they enable the worshippers to read their song-sheets in the dark. Yet, the presence of large (12 foot) candles on either side of the electrically lit stage and the separate ritual of holding the candles aloft indicate that another intentionality is assumed. The candles stand for the tradition of a particular unity of faith expressed through ritual.

Individual candles are, of course, open symbols that worshippers are free to fill as they choose. Some of those interviewed suggested a traditional symbolism of light as hope for the future or “life itself”. Others pointed to the Christ child sent as “light into the world” and still others saw the candles as the collective expression of a common goodwill. The candle, as we all recognise, has been a folk symbol for sacred rites in numerous cultures. When it is brought into juxtaposition with this Christmas ceremony, however, it points to the Christmas faith which the common folk share in this season.

The ritual of the elevation of the candles is the climax of the ceremony for many worshippers. Participants are invited to stand and raise their candles aloft for all to see. This act is performed about mid-way through the second half of the programme when it is totally dark. In that moment, the space which has been slowly transformed as darkness fell is suddenly revealed as a shimmering spectacle. A tremor of amazement at the glittering mystery runs through the crowd and all are one.

Each candle is part of the whole and through this ritual act adults experience a sense of ritual exhilaration along with the children they hold up to view the splendour. The lowly candle makes them one in the night.

The candle is truly ecumenical and universal. No one can object to a candle. A crucifix would be overtly Christian, a crib would suggest specific denominational traditions, while Father Christmas belongs in the broader commercial context. The candle, however, is acceptable to all. It points to that underlying universality of Christmas expressed in the following editorial:

“Christmas is the loveliest and most universal of celebrations, reaching far beyond the shrinking boundaries of Christianity. It shines with incomparable hope in an enormous area of the world where the Christian faith has been officially repressed, though not extinguished, for nearly 60 years in the name of enlightenment.

Christmas has become almost a religion in itself. It is for all men and for all faiths. It is the everlasting beginning. It excludes nobody”/5/.

The carol is a comparable folk symbol which persists outside the tradition of the Christian churches. Its origins lie with street singers. Its acceptability within the mainline churches is relatively recent and still not total. For much of the last century carols were forbidden as improper for accompanying ecclesiastical rites. Liturgical purists would contend that they are out of place in the sanctuary of a Christian church. According to the clerics of the last century, “Carols will never stand the test of time - the schoolmasters will eradicate them”/6/. Neither schoolmasters nor clerics have succeeded in suppressing these religious songs of the people. They now far surpass the traditional Christian hymn in popularity and have been virtually accepted as hymns. They are, in fact, a prime expression of the popular Christmas ethos in virtually every town in this country.

Perhaps more significant is the role the carol plays in mediating contact with the traditional roots of the ritual. The carol enables a vocal confession of faith in or respect for the Christ child at a range of meaning levels without the embarrassment of formal public testimony to that effect. For some the child may be the Son of God, while for others he may be a token of new beginnings or peace. This intentionality of the carol as a symbol can be seen against the background of the other components in the ritual. In the 1976 ceremonies in Melbourne and Adelaide, neither the masters of ceremony, the lord mayors, nor any of those delivering a message made specific allusion to Jesus Christ and his birth. In previous years where reference has been made to the birth of Jesus Christ the intention has not been dogmatic or kerygmatic

but a passing allusion to a universally accepted symbol of the Christmas tradition.

Carols are thus vehicles for a communal renewal of the unspoken message, the inner conviction of the worshipping community that the Christ child is a common heritage which gives meaning to the life of ordinary folk in our secular society. That message is not preached aloud; but it may be rediscovered personally in song together. Through the carol the Christ child belongs to the people.

Integration as Family

If allusions to the prototypical family of Bethlehem are only made obliquely through carols, the same cannot be said for the family as an institution and symbol of contemporary society. The family is celebrated as central to this rite as it is in a whole complex of Christmas activities. At Carols by Candlelight one can observe as in few (if any) other major public rituals of Australia, a range of individuals from babies in cribs to teenagers, adults, and elderly citizens. All age groups are present in significant numbers. Yet more important than this age spread are the groupings of individuals in family or friendship units. As their comments reveal, "Here we feel like family". "We can't be a family in church. We can't be ourselves in church". The church for many of those who attend this annual rite is known as an institution whose worship is geared to placid adult audiences, not to the family as a lively unit.

During this Christmas ceremony informal family groupings of about 3 to 10 in number sit together in a free and casual atmosphere. They bring along rugs, pillows, toys, sandwiches, drinks, and the ever-present Australian eskie. In Adelaide one gets the overall impression of about 20 thousand picnics all congregated in one place. Rarely does one find someone seated alone. Those interviewed insisted that they would not like to attend if they had to come alone, for this ceremony was a time set apart to enjoy being family. Here they reinforced that symbol as a power in their lives. Some of those present deplored a gradual dissolution of the family as the primal institution of our society. For them Carols by Candlelight was a major Christmas ritual where groups could participate as families in a religious event without the expected pressures of formality, denominational identification or public confessions of faith. Here they could be themselves, viz., "ordinary families".

These observations about the family as central to the ceremony correspond to recent sociological studies of the family at Christmas. In a cross-national survey /7/ conducted in Bulgaria, Finland, Germany and Ireland, the role of the family in secularization was explored, especially in relation to the Christmas season. The "institution of the family in its privatistic orientation" was seen as a "rival institution of

religion and its organizational form, the church”/8/. According to this report,

“the family and its functional needs made Christmas the most important festival and then transformed it since the beginning of industrialization into a familial structure of its own. If one would extend the meanings of the sacred and the supernatural far enough, then one may with Thomas Luckman conclude that the bulk of religious thought has remained much the same in the process of modernization and consecutive secularization. It has changed only its location from church to, among others, family”/9/.

Another survey /10/ conducted by the Opinion Research Centre of England (1972) attempted to gauge whether Christmas was viewed as a religious occasion, a family occasion or a holiday. Nearly 60% said it was a family occasion while only 11% saw it as a religious event. Here the British survey and the cross-cultural study reflect a common trend. A similar tendency seems to be evident in Australia. However, a ritual such as Carols by Candlelight illustrates that the choice between a religious and a family occasion is a false one. The contrast is rather between ecclesiastical and folk religion. This Christmas religion, if we can call it that, seems to involve the affirmation and integration of the family through the household rites of gift exchange and dinner. As such it is a type of Christmas folk religion!

In the ritual of Carols by Candlelight the sacredness of the ordinary family is established for many participants through a ceremony grounded in ancient religious traditions of Christmas. Here the household family rituals are preceded by a public celebration of the family in a wider context. Family becomes the operative symbol of speaker after speaker who refers to the worshipping assembly, the city of Adelaide and the whole of mankind. On this day “we are one big family”. Yet of all the grand collage of Christmas traditions, both pagan and Christian, the family gathering, as such, it seems, is one of the few with no really ancient antecedent.

Nevertheless, the family is now assumed by the folk community to be basic to the eternal order of things and the family gatherings at Christmas more fundamental than assembling for church rituals or street fairs. Through Carols by Candlelight that theme of the ultimate primacy of the family in society is promoted and a sense of communal solidarity, as families with a Christmas faith, is reinforced.

Sanctification of the Civic

Considerable ink has been spilled in analyzing so-called Civil Religion in America /11/. The coronation rites and celebrations point

to the residue of a possible civil religion in England. But whether a broad based civil religion can be excavated in Australia is debatable, regardless of how often parliament begins its sessions with prayer. In *Carols by Candlelight*, however, there is a certain sanctification of the civic. This is apparent not only by the appropriation of acceptable community space for the occasion, but also by the inclusion of civic accents at pivotal points in the ceremony.

The Adelaide rite is framed by two civil songs, namely, *Song of Australia* and *God Save the Queen* (played twice in 1976). Similar national and civic songs are rendered by performers from time to time. In both the Melbourne and Adelaide rituals the Lord Mayor is summoned to address a public message of welcome and goodwill. He acts as the *paterfamilias* of the city. Thus the civic official replaces the ecclesiastical; yet the ceremony is not necessarily less religious in its import. Under the symbol of the family, albeit an extended one, the civic is, as it were, sanctified through this ceremony, and the social order given a sacred support symbol.

In Adelaide in 1976 the civic dimension was enhanced by the announced presence of the popular Governor Sir Douglas Nicholls. Through such elements, civic values are seen as consistent with, and confirmed by, the common faith presupposed by the gathering. These values can be overtly civic as with the case of the Lord Mayor's speech in Adelaide (1976). He first stated his sincere wishes of goodwill to all present. He interpreted goodwill for the Christmas to mean that all citizens should keep the city of Adelaide free from litter. His parting words were: "I wish you a happy and holy Christmas and a prosperous, healthy and clean New Year". Perhaps cleanliness is indeed next to godliness in the memory of the pious folk he addressed. In any case the civic was clearly felt to be supported by the sacred in the context of this ceremony.

It is striking perhaps that the civic element does not evoke a certain national pride which would modify the Christmas theme. Apart from the *Song of Australia* in Adelaide - a local rather than a national symbol - Australian symbols are rarely introduced. There are no Australian carols, Australian folk songs or Australian heroes. The universality of the Christmas tradition is preserved throughout the ceremony. Here there is a unity with the family of all humankind.

Celebrations of Deep Sentiments

Of the worshippers interviewed at the ceremony, about half did not attend church or consider themselves religious according to their popular Australian definition of that term. Yet many of these same people said that *Carols by Candlelight* was religious for them in some undefined way. A deep sentiment or interior experience was understood as an important component of the religious in this ritual context.

Admittedly, Dick Moore the Master of Ceremonies in Adelaide, contends that the ceremony is not intended to be a religious but a family event celebrating the real meaning of Christmas. By religious he seems to mean ecclesiastical. An anonymous spokesman from John Martins contended that their children's pageant was likewise a family event celebrating the real meaning of Christmas . . . instead of that "religious stuff". The two events are clearly not identical though they depend on a common set of feelings operative in the community at this season.

What kind of deep sentiments are expressed as genuine experiences in this ceremony? The first is probably that of communal praise and thanksgiving. Deep feelings of appreciation for our land, our way of life, our freedom and our heritage are linked with gratitude for life as a sacred trust. That response of thanks is often grounded in the gift of the Christ child as a supreme expression of God's goodness to all. Through song and acts of charity the worshipper expresses this gratitude openly.

Some maintained that through the ceremony their feelings of goodwill to others were heightened. A genuine warmth, kindness and closeness to other human beings was evoked through this communal expression of the Christmas spirit. They experienced the goodness, hope and humanity of other human beings to a far greater degree than at other times of the year. The underlying Christmas message of "peace on earth goodwill toward men" came alive in their own circle of friends and beyond. Thoughts about the unfortunate in other parts of the world were more frequent, expressions of kindness more overt and the search for meaning in life more intense.

Alongside these experiences of gratitude and goodwill can be ranged a third, somewhat less definable experience, of wonder. The sacred atmosphere, the flickering candles, the carols, the communal spirit of Christmas and the awareness of "a deep mystery hidden" in the event being celebrated, combine to produce a reserved yet joyful sense of wonder. The family, baby Jesus and the ritual itself are seen as wonder-producing forces in people's lives.

These sentiments are endorsed and perpetuated by the photos and symbols included in the Carols by Candlelight programmes provided for the worshippers. United family groups singing at previous Candlelight services, children caught in wonder amid the glow of candles, the glittering panorama of upheld candles or happy handicapped children in need of Christmas charity are typical of the photos used to confirm attitudes prevalent on this occasion.

The experiences of the folk community may not assume the form of a dramatic trance, a mystical flight or a numinous confrontation. Yet there seems to be a serious if unassuming contact with the roots of its faith, a Christmas faith common to many Australians. It is that faith and its attendant cosmology which I shall now propose as the concluding thesis of this paper.

Cosmology of Christmas

Any clues as to how worshippers at Carols by Candlelight perceive reality will obviously be limited in number. Yet within the complex of the total Christmas religion we may be justified in proposing a folk religious schema which is somewhat at variance with dogma of the main-line churches. To detect this schema is precarious since many of those interviewed said that Carols by Candlelight was a time "free from dogma", and "far from denominations attempting to impose rival opinions". This ritual was seen as a "celebration for the ordinary bloke". Here no one else was going to tell them what to believe.

It is my contention that three basic orders are presupposed by the expressions of faith and worship found in Carols by Candlelight and related Christmas ceremonies. The first of these is very obviously *the social order* involving the local community and city as a meaningful and cherished structure within which to live. But within that structure the pivotal power and sacred symbol is not perceived to be the institutional church or the business but the family. If all else be lost, the family must remain as the true bastion of security, hope and order. The Christmas rituals celebrate the family as the basic structure of society and the Christ child as God's expression of love for the family he has created to preserve the fullness of life. Carols by Candlelight approximates an ordained family ritual where the total community affirms its faith in the most meaningful symbol of their society. Thus, Christmas is often called Jesus' birthday as if he were one of a family in which we all share. The family birthday party becomes the analogy for understanding what this event means, namely, a point in the communal calendar when we celebrate the family as a fundamental symbol of the eternal order of things reflected in society.

The second structure which seems to be important in the cosmology of Christmas is *the natural order*. This feature was an overt element in those societies of the Northern hemisphere who celebrated Christmas as part of the ancient mid-winter cycle of festivals. The birth of Christ corresponded to the rebirth of the Sun or the first stirring of the sap. In Australia the natural order at Christmas time comes to mean "life", life as a cycle of new beginnings, life as a precious gift in the face of an endlessly expanding universe. Where the Christ child is linked with the natural order, he is described as the special gift of God to men, the expression of his will that all should have a happy and prosperous life in the New Year.

The Christmas Jesus is a token of all the gifts of nature, life and land. In this context he stands for the good things of life we receive from a source greater than ourselves. He has become the super Christmas present indicative of all annual birthdays and life cycles. The traditional Christian idea of a deity becoming incarnate at a pivotal point in history so as to change the very order of existence and announce the

intrusion of the Kingdom of God into the midst of reality, is not evident in this folk religion. Christmas is the time of new "life" and hope within the recurring patterns of life itself. The traditional historical and eschatological features of the incarnation have been lost in the feast of the people!

A third order which seems to be emphasized in the Christmas cosmology is what I have termed *the human*. The celebrations of Christmas arouse a strong awareness of a common humanity. Goodwill to others, acts of charity to unfortunate fellow humans, and peace on earth are strong themes which point in this direction. This humanity we share is common, not merely by virtue of our physical composition, but in the symbol of our nature as "ordinary folk". The implication seems to be that under the skin we are all much the same, ordinary humans with similar weaknesses, but essentially good at heart. Once a year we affirm our common goodness at Christmas, not in a narrow pietistic way, but in a warm ceremony of song. When a link is made with the Christ child, it is with the baby Jesus as the symbol of innocence and goodness *par excellence*. He is the child of the ordinary folk. Not only is Christmas for the children, but through its rituals there is an empathetic return to the patterns and assumed purity of childhood. At the centre of the human order is the innocent child who seeks to stir a consciousness in each of us at Christmas time.

The family, the child, and the gift of life are three obvious symbols which point to three primary orders of existence assumed in Christmas religion. The unifying force which lies behind these orders might be called "eternal goodness". Some may speak of God, others of Providence and still others of the hidden mystery of life. Yet, in the last analysis, the underlying structure of all things is believed to be an eternal goodness which maintains the orders of our existence and arouses in us a consciousness of that undeserved goodness at least once a year. This good, however, is not portrayed as locked in an inevitable cosmic battle with the forces of heaven or hell. Nor is that good depicted in the sacrificial life of a deity on earth, though such an image may be common at Anzac. Rather, the great God of Christmas religion is found in the annual upsurge of goodness in the face of social, political and commercial pressures which tend to delude people into assuming a self-sufficiency or selfish individuality that is contrary to the deepest core of their human natures. Christmas it seems, retains those rites designed to keep us in touch with our humanity, our conscience and our inner goodness.

The candle, with its multiple intentionality, symbolizes the presence of this universal goodness for all worshippers. The candle, held by each member of the family, is the light at the centre of the primary social group; in addition, it is the light which transforms the natural order as it shines forth in the darkness; and thirdly, it is that universal symbol of human hope and life for all present. The candle, moreover,

unites with the carols in this Christmas content to highlight the transcendent symbol of a child as the "light of the world". Through the candle and its attendant complex of symbols, the cosmology of Christmas is given a centre appropriate to folk attitudes at that particular moment of the Christmas season.

Carols by Candlelight, then, is a major folk ceremony for the community whereby these beliefs and attitudes are confirmed. The gratitude, goodwill and wonder experienced on that occasion point to the child, the family and the gift of life as fundamental to the world view of these folk and the candle as a simple symbol of their unity in that world view.

Endnotes

*This paper was presented in a slightly more popular form as the Presidential Address at the A.A.S.R. Banquet on the 25th August, 1977. It retains a popular flavour which we believe to be consistent with the topic in hand.

1. Gavin Weightman, "Families at Christmass", in *New Society*, 25 December, 1975, p. 677.
2. The majority of the interviews were conducted in connection with the ceremonies in South Australia. I wish to express my appreciation to Mr. Dick Moore of the Adelaide Advertiser who made available to me all past programmes of Carols by Candlelight and the newspaper comments from the past 34 years.
3. See Peter Glasner, "The Study of Australian Folk Religion: Some Theoretical and Practical Problems". This address was delivered at the Inaugural Conference of the Australian Association for the Study of Religions, August, 1976, and is published in Victor C. Hayes (ed.) *Australian Essays in World Religions* (Adelaide: A.A.S.R., 1977). Some significant attempts to define "folk religion" include, C. C. Lemert, "Defining Non-church Religion", *Review of Religious Research*, 16; G. Mensching, "Folk and Universal Religion" in *Religion, Culture and Society*, ed. by L. Schneider (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1964).
4. *The Adelaide Advertiser*, Monday, Dec. 20, 1976.
5. *The Adelaide Advertiser*, December 18, 1976.

6. Expressed by an aged informant quoting an earlier tradition.
7. G. Luschen & Others, "Family, Ritual and Secularization", *Social Compass*, Vol. 19 (1972).
8. *Ibid.* p. 535.
9. *Ibid.* p. 535
10. Cited by weightman, *op. cit.*, p. 677.
11. Note especially, R. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America", *Daedalus*, 1967 and the recent collection of articles on "Civil Religion and Education" in *Religious Education*, Vol. LXX (1975). cf. Michael Young, "The Meaning of the Coronation" in J. Toby, *Contemporary Society*, (1965), p. 439ff.

CAROLS BY CANDLELIGHT

1977

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8.15 p.m.

1. "Song of Australia"....Linger (arr.J.V.Peters)
THE COMBINED CHOIRS
2. "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing".....Mendelssohn
"BEN"
3. * * * "BEN" * * *
4. "I Saw Three Ships".....Traditional
5. "Christmas"Gale
"Watching at Night".....arr. Davis
"Ding! Dong! Merrily on High"arr. Deale
PEMBROKE GIRLS' CHOIR
6. * * * MARTY RHONE * * *
7. "Once in Royal David's City".....Traditional
8. * * * BRIAN PORTER * * *
Accompanist: John Brice
9. "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen"....arr.Perry
BAME OF THE 4TH MILITARY DISTRICT

INTERVAL

During this break, members of The Boys Brigade Australia will approach you with official collection tins. We ask you to be generous.

9.15 p.m.

10. Theme from "Rocky".....arr. Angus
BAND OF THE 4TH MILITARY DISTRICT
11. "O Come, All Ye Faithful" Oakley
12. * * * "BEN" * * *
13. "Away in a Manger".....Traditional
14. "And the Glory" from "Messiah".....Handel
THE COMBINED CHOIRS
15. The Lord Mayor of Adelaide, Mr. G. Joseph
16. "Good King Wenceslas".....Traditional
17. * * * MARTY RHONE * * *
18. "The First Nowell".....Traditional
19. "Dear Christians, Let Us All RejoiceLuther
THE COMBINED CHOIRS
20. "Silent Night"Gruber
21. * * * BRIAN PORTER * * *
Accompanist: John Brice
22. "God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen".....Traditional
23. "Hallelujah Chorus" from "Messiah".....Handel
24. "God Save the Queen".....arr. Jacob