Features

Religion in the Australian Media

Questions of media control and quality have become urgent in this country. Financial deregulation and the spectacle of continually changing ownership of the media in stock market adventures have highlighted problems of editorial integrity and the threatened and actual loss of potentially high quality publications and programming possibilities.

Against this background, we have witnessed constraints on public funding for ABC radio and television, the near demise of SBS and increasing pressure for commercial sponsorship to top-up declining public budgets.

Central to all the debates are aspects of the media's relation to Australian culture, its ability to shape opinion and direct or suppress discussion on crucial cultural issues. The place of religion in our culture is one such issue, and is closely connected with matters of gender, race and ethnicity, dominant mythologies and the vexed question of 'Australian identity'.

Contributors to this issue of the *REVIEW* have been asked to reflect on specific aspects of these complexities. Although much energy has been expended on ensuring a wide range of topics, attitudes and styles — personal, speculative, political/analytical — it is clear that a future issue of the *REVIEW* could take up this theme again to highlight further points of debate and focus on other major topics. Readers are asked to notice the new section, COMMENTARIES, and contribute to the development of this and other themes. [Ed.]

Anti-Semitism and the Media

Rodney Gouttman

Faculty of Education and Humanities
S.A.C.A.E.

One of the greatest sins in Judaism is that of 'lashon ha ra', that is, the slander or perpetration of falsehoods about someone. And yet, because Jews have dared to maintain their beliefs and customs from antiquity to the present era, they have had to suffer the lash of calumny, to be the object of vicious mythologies, and suffer the ignominy of derogatory stereotyping. In many cases, anti-Jewish hostilities have had much more to do with the self-interests of the perpetrators than with Jewish practice. Indeed, anti-Judaic feeling played a central role and purpose in the development of the early Christian Church, which was later to have a similar deleterious influence on Islam in its formative years. When the value base of Western civilisation became Christian, anti-Jewish sentiment was culturally cemented, and became available to malcontents and propagandists to promote for

their own religious, racial, or mystical reasons. Even when the normative base of Western civilisation, of which Australia is a part, became more secular and humanistic, the anti-Jewish canards still remained.

The term 'anti-Semitism' was said to have been first used by the provocateur Wilhelm Marr in 1879, to describe both the intense contemporary anti-Jewish feeling that had been whipped up in Germany, and the actions perpetrated in its name. An 18th Century linguistic taxonomy of 'semitic', was racially transformed by the ideological successors of Count Gobineau into an anti-Jewish industry. The term 'anti-semitism' was applied to Jews alone, and in the linguistic parthenon of Judeophobia, it attained an unfortunate preeminence alongside words such as diaspora, ghetto, pogrom, and later, genocide and Holocaust.

Any assessment of the extent of anti-Semitism in the Australian mass media today, must obviously take into account direct evidence and intention. However, it cannot be disassociated from three powerful influences — the traditional view of the Jew in Western culture, the Holocaust, and the Arab/Israel conflict.

There is little evidence to suggest that the mainstream mass media in Australia has promulgated naked anti-Semitism in recent decades. One can point to isolated examples, such as the acknowledged blatant anti-Semitic cartoon with its medieval motifs in *The National Times* of May 4-10, 1984. Sydney's pro-Iraqi journal, *An Nahar*, was taken to task on September 4, 1986 by the Australian Press Council, for its numerous anti-Semitic articles. Publications of the ultra-Right-wing Australian League of Rights have never given up their anti-Jewish diatribe. Radio station 3CR's rabid pro-Arab and anti-Israel rhetoric, have at times been studded with anti-Semitic innuendo. Paul Madigan, a 3RRR presenter, has drawn the ire of the Jewish community in concert with other ethnic groups. There is the irritating use of the phrase, 'the Judeo-Christian tradition' as if Jewish ethical thought and moral exegesis passed into oblivion some two thousand years ago. Headlines dealing with Israeli retaliation to terrorist attacks scream the 'eye for an eye' slogans, propagating, via the sin of omission, the old Christian stereotype of Judaic law.

Along with other non-Anglo Celtic groups, Australian Jews are often identified in the media by their religious affiliation in situations where this usage is utterly irrelevant. Jews are also obliged to suffer such intentionally tasteless and culturally irresponsible segments as George Negus' infamous 'Sixty Minutes' vignette on the ultra-orthodox sector of Jerusalem. Sometimes the ABC's religious programmes allow views which may be interpreted as religious anti-Semitism, as do some Church bodies as the Australian Council of Churches. In the exercise of the right to free speech, letters-to-the-editor are allowed which are clearly anti-Jewish. Certainly, there have been instances where overseas articles have included quite blatant anti-Jewish content. This is often a product of the uncritical usage of overseas copy. Nevertheless, blatant anti-Semitism is not a general feature of the mainstream Australian media.

However, this fact in no way answers the question as to why Israel is singled out for a constant attention which transcends the bounds of normal critique. Why does the Jewish state have to carry a moral and ethical load that Israel's greatest critics in the media refuse to accept for others, especially the Arab states? Is there a sense of reverse racism at play? Lord Immanuel Jakobovits, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth has said that for the media, "Jews still remain a group apart, not quite judged and treated by the same criteria as pertinent to other religions and minorities'.[1] He may, of course, be accused of a highly developed sense of paranoia. But, other commentators, not Jewish have supported this contention. One of these is Clyde Holding, Australia's Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs. On May

28, 1988, the Minister shared with a Melbourne audience his puzzlement as to why the minuscule State of Israel, both demographically and geographically should "elicit such continuing newsworthiness as it does". He felt that this inordinate concentration of attention bordered on the obsessive, and queried why other perennial war zones and theatres of interethnic conflict received scant or no mass media coverage. The Minister concluded that the exaggerated concern with Israel went beyond the bounds of current affairs, and was bound up with the circumstances that brought the Jewish state into existence. He argued that the West's support for the establishment of the Jewish state came in part from a desire to expiate guilt associated with the Holocaust. However, there was a price to pay. This expiation:

> ...reduced pressure on its collective conscience by creating its own expectations that Israel would become repository of Western Idealism, but somehow Christian values and ethics...concepts which professedly apply to Christian nations, but which were never adhered to if they were contrary to perceived national interests...

Of course, there were also socialists, who professed an anti-religious world-view, who were similarly ready to burden Israel with their ideological visions of utopia.

There are undoubtedly many pragmatic, historical, political, strategic, economic, geographic and moral reasons that cause Israel to be an item of media interest. However, many other struggles of equal international significance and longevity — several in the Middle East — fail to command the huge press corps that is freely stationed in Israel on a daily basis. An exaggerated high standard of behaviour is demanded of Israel's Jews — for 17% of the nation's voting population is Arab. Certainly, there is no such expectation of 'civilised' behaviour in the Arab world. If this were not the case, the numerous incidents of internecine Arab butchery such as in Syria, Lebanon, the Mahgreb and Iraq, would not elicit the degree of media indifference it does.

While Clyde Holding's perceptions are as acute as they are profound, they give no answer to the question as to 'why is this so?'. Why is the critical eye of the media so selective? Is it the 'Jewish Problem' in national drag? Nathan Rotenstreich once defined 'the Jewish Problem' simply as "the relationship between Jews and the surrounding world".[2] It is a rubric which is concerned with the fate of "the Jews" in the nations of their domicile, and which relates to the state and quality of their physical, metaphysical, communal, and national existence.

J.L. Talmon has observed that the Jewish-Gentile relationship under Christian civilisation has been bedeviled "by the burden of history" that has made it extremely difficult for "both Gentiles and Jews to begin to treat each other just as individuals, let alone brethren".[3] This tension certainly did not disappear with the reluctant granting of political emancipation to Western European Jewry in the 19th Century. Indeed, the Jews' successful entry into the Gentile world on an equal basis exacerbated 'the Jewish Problem' rather than ameliorated it. In the politically backward and more traditionally Christian Eastern Europe, uneasiness regarding Jewish equality ran deep.

Theologically, this state of political normalcy turned the age-old Christian story of Jewish perfidy on its head. Yet, if this was extremely difficult for many in the West to digest, the establishment of a Jewish state was plainly revolutionary. Though long before 1948, the West marched to the beat of a secular drum, it was still culturally beholden to a memory in which the symbol, if not the person, of the Jew carried with it a kit-bag of oft unpleasant associations. Thus, the question must be asked, to what extent has 'perfidious Israel' in the religious sense, replaced by the 'perfidious Israel' in the national sense, been a fundamental

though often an unconscious factor, that has contributed to the excessively blanketing media coverage of the Jewish state?

Michael Foucault has argued that discourse is not only the means by which the struggle is expressed; it is "the thing for which and by which there is a struggle, discourse is the power to be seized".[4] Perhaps the Arab/Israel conflict is an example *par excellence* of this. The attack on language and semantics has been rigorously and deftly waged by both anti-Semitic *cum* anti-Zionist forces of late, and this has been reflected in media presentation. This is not to argue that anti-Israel critique is necessarily anti-Semitic in orientation. As a nation, like all other nations, Israel must bear the heat of political criticism from outside as it does from its own citizenry.

The emotional fall-out from the Holocaust, suppressed, at least in the years immediately following it, overt anti-Semitism in the West. To some extent this genocide led to an examination of racism in the lives of nations. And yet, even today, a major section of the Christian Church has not, or perhaps is theologically unable, to face its role in the slaughter. Whether, because of the expiation of guilt, as Clyde Holding suggests, or for other reasons, in the two post Holocaust decades there seemed to be a sympathy towards Jews, both in the mystical and physical sense, not previously encountered. There were, of course, intense anti-Semitic objections in Australia against Jewish immigration in the years following World War 2, and polls taken in these years rated the Jews below the Germans who had only recently been the nation's enemy. But a strong well of positive sentiment did exist. With the passage of time, however, and the emergence of generations for whom the Holocaust is merely history, it was inevitable that such attitudes would change.

If any particular event was to prove critical, it was the Six Day War of 1967. It demonstrated that military attempts to dismiss the Jewish State from the geography of the Middle East had failed, and that anti-Israel forces must look for a new strategy. However, it also transformed the perception of Israel in two ways. Israel was no longer a state under siege, but one quite capable of commanding its own defence. Israel was now not projected as the underdog. That role was to be transferred to the Palestinian Arab who had long been used as a pawn in internecine Arab conflict.

The new Arab-led strategy took the form of a worldwide diplomatic and propaganda offensive in major international forums, especially those of the United Nations, the Third World, and the Non-Aligned Movement. It was backed, undoubtedly, for different reasons in Australia and elsewhere, by the racist Right and the radical Left, though it drew sympathy in varying degrees across the political spectrum. The weapon used on this battle front was language. The targeted initial audience was the West. The object was to severely erode any semblance of pro-Jewish feelings still supposed to exist as a result of the Holocaust.

This new linguistic assault demanded three tactical manoeuvres. The first was an attempt to divest the word 'anti-Semitism' of its Jewish associations. The second, was to rob the term 'Zionism' of its ideologically Jewish roots, and to invest it with the kind of slander that Jews used daily to endure. Once these terms were 'dejudaised' they were free to be used in any manner their protagonists wished. Thirdly, words created to describe particular Jewish events or period of suffering, were now directly ascribed to the Palestinian Arab. In the spirit of victim reversal, the title of 'the new Jews' was given yet another twist.

The publications of Australia's leading protagonist of the racist Right, the Australian League of Rights, no longer argue that the world is controlled and manipulated by the 'international Jewish conspiracy'. Today, it is the 'international Zionist conspiracy'. The League's argu-

ment that it is not anti-Semitic is simple and simplistic — how can we be anti-Semitic for we support the Arab against Israel and they are Semites. It is perhaps inevitable that the League should attempt to divorce the notion of anti-Semitism from its Jewish association by defining 'semite' in a racist way. The unfortunate thing, however, is that this very same argument has become extremely popular in the rhetoric of the extreme Left, and has been known to have had an airing in the mainstream media. The League has also been active in promoting the Holocaust as a Jewish-inspired hoax. It has invited to Australia persons who represent this view, such as David Irving. Their views have often gone unchallenged on popular TV and radio programmes, and have thus been granted a certain respectability by media personalities who lack historical knowledge of history, or have deliberately chosen to disregard it.

With the ending of the Vietnam War, the radical Left in Australia, as elsewhere, searched for new causes and found one in the Palestinian issue. Prior to this time it had aroused scant passion. The extent and nature of the Israeli victory in 1967, removed the waning vestiges of sympathy felt by many on the Left for the Jewish state. A new generation of Leftists, schooled either in Maoism or fiercely anti-colonial, embraced the Third World — whose policies regarding the Middle East bore the imprimatur of the Arab states — and anti-American causes. On both of these grounds Israel was adjudged highly suspect. The fractious Palestine Liberation Organisation was romanticised, and the Israelis vilified. Armchair radicals on tertiary campuses imbued their followers with this message, who today are comfortably esconced in significant sections of the media, and also influenced the political progressives in the Church.

Zionism, irrespective of ideological hue, is associated with the creation of Jewish nationhood. Thus, any critique that calls for the disestablishment of Israel, either directly or in stages, is by definition anti-Zionist. For those purist Left ideologues who see nationalism as anathema, one should be able to assume that they would reject not only Jewish and Palestinian nationalism, but also the call for a Palestinian secular state, be it democratic or not. Unfortunately, such ideological virtue is rare. The anti-Zionism of the Left is evident when the demise of Israel is advocated simultaneously with a demand that it be replaced by yet another Palestinian state, Jordan being the first. Soft versions of this are expressed on occasions in the mainstream media, sometimes clothed in twin state proposals. Political solutions which do not have the import of dismantling the Jewish state, even if these are unpalatable to some Israelis, are not necessarily anti-Zionist.

Anti-Zionism passes into the realm of anti-Semitism when there is an insistence that Jews have no right to the national self-determination that is quite acceptable for other people. In the October 1987 copy of *Farrago*, the University of Melbourne's student magazine, its editor, Lauren Finestone, commented on the escalating anti-Semitism on the Left of the political spectrum. She pointed to the fact that often a sophisticated analysis of Israel's role in the Middle East, and its relations with the Palestinians, is used by persons on the Left as a guise for what they will otherwise reject, an expression of anti-Semitism.

The mass media is not a neutral entity. It creates images, impressions, and promotes interpretations, Thus it is neither passive, uninvolved, nor impartial. Distortion in the media is caused by several factors which include cultural dissonance and ignorance, the intrusion of personal political values by reporters and editors, the presentation of events without background comment, and economic constraints on news coverage. Reportage on the Arab/Israel *cum* Arab/Palestinian conflict is undoubtedly affected by all of these except one — there seem to be no economic constraints on news coverage. Certainly, the regular juxtaposition on

television channels of clips of Israel with those of South Africa, are undoubtedly trying to tag Israel with the infamous Zionism/Racism label that even the Australian government has rejected as absurd.

In 1983, the chairman of the N.S.W. Ethnic Affairs Council, Dr. Paola Totaro, was reported to have said that:

> ...it appears that the controversial or unpopular actions of the Israeli government have provided an excuse for many people to bring their anti-Jewish prejudices out into the open.[5]

There is little doubt that since 1983 this trend has accelerated. In an Australian environment in which public statements of racism are not only rejected, but in some cases punishable by law, it has become almost mandatory for the word 'Jew' to be replaced by the word 'Zionist'. As a thumb-nail test as to whether an anti-Zionist comment is anti-Semitic or not, replace the work 'Zionist' with the word 'Jew', to see whether the accusations of old have been reified.

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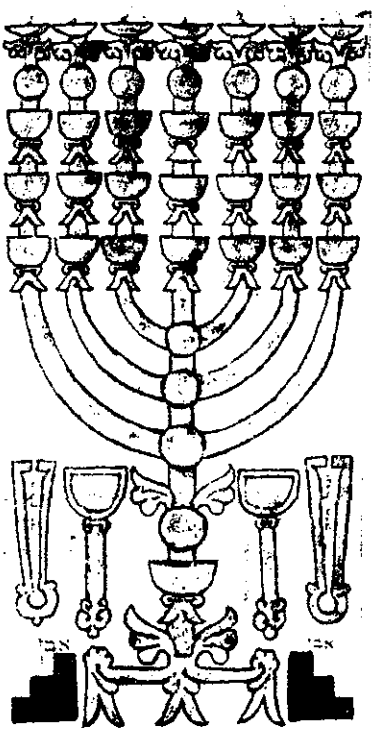


Images of Asia

Shirley Chappel

Centre for Human Resource Studies

Since the Second World War, considerable attention has been paid to the fact that Australia, although culturally different, is geographically part of the Asian world. At the same time there has been a growing awareness of the importance of Asia in the international political and economic arena. Although, from time to time, some enthusiasts have spoken of the need for Australia to know more about Asia, it is only very recently that any kind of determined effort has been made by the Australian Government to ensure a deepening of Australians' knowledge of Asia. In the meantime, a large part of Australia's awareness of Asia has come from the media. The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of the images of Asia portrayed by the English-language electronic and print media in Australia. In presenting Asia to secular Australia, the media at best presents Asian religions as an exotic extra, one of the images but by no means the most important. At worst, the religions of Asians are portrayed as fanatical, irrational and, probably, dangerous. One only has to think of the coverage given to Islamic fundamentalism since the Iranian revolution to be aware of this.

In the mid-1970s the late John Temple presented a series of informative television programs on selected Asian countries for the Australian Broadcasting Commission under the general title *Asian Insight*. In these programs religion was briefly addressed. But the main purpose was to provide a brief historical overview of Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines and to isolate and emphasize key factors influencing the development of those countries. The program on Malaysia, for example, highlighted the communal base of Malaysian politics. The theme running through the program on Indonesia was the concept of power exemplified in times past by the rule in the Kraton and in the 1970s by the generals. From the vantage point of the late 1980s it is interesting to look back at the *Asian Insight* programs to see how insightful they really were. When one recalls the assassination of Benigno Aquino and the subsequent coming to power of his wife, Corazon, one is reminded of John Temple's reference to the important (and dangerous) role of charisma in Filipino affairs. Currently Japan's economic might plays a dominant role in the world's economy and less successful economies wonder what they can learn from the Japanese experience. While they wonder, they may do well to give some attention to John Temple's notion that the Japanese way is not for export. The *Asian Insight* programs had the advantage of providing television viewers with an apparently objective introduction to Asia in a digestible way. They were narrated in the non-emotional, urbane manner for which Temple was famous. They left the viewers with some food for thought.

In presenting Asia to the Australian world, television producers face the temptations of emphasizing the exotic and the scenically beautiful (and in these respects religious activities are often highlighted) to the exclusion of food for thought. This criticism, I believe, can be directed at the series of programs which Keith Adam narrated for the Australian Broadcasting Commission in the 1970s. In a series of program entitled *Journey Into India*, Keith Adam sought to show the "rich fabric of Indian life", the diversity,

the complexity of the sub-continent. In doing so he took the viewer to many parts of India — to Jaipur, to Simla, to Cochin, and to the Kulu Valley. The viewer was left with images of Mogul Emperors, Hindu pilgrims, and the impact of the Raj. The programs did not, however, raise important questions about India. Keith Adam did not see this as part of his brief. His style, far removed form the elegance of John Temple, suggested a fascination with the wonder that *was* India rather than a concern for its contemporary situation.

During the 1970s and 1980s Japan has been a major source of inspiration for the media. A complexity of images of Japan has been presented. At one time viewers are invited to wonder at the technological wizardry of the Japanese (for example, a robot jockey to do early morning training so that the real live jockey can sleep in); at another time the attention of viewers is directed towards the atrocities committed in prisoner-of-war camps in World War II. In the 1970s a compelling trilogy of programs entitled *The Japanese Experience* created a chilling image of the dark side of the economic miracle — exploited day-labourers, powerful *yakuza* (gangsters), pollution out of control. More recently the print media in particular has directed attention to the emotive issue of Japanese investment in Australia with particular reference to the property boom. This matter has been taken up by television comedian Gerry Connolly (with apologies to a Queensland tourism commercial): "Ah, Queensland, beautiful one day...Japanese the next!" In recent years the print media has also given considerable attention to Japanese management styles, the dedication of Japanese workers and the discipline of the examination-dominated Japanese education system. Just as the Japanese in the nineteenth century sought the source of western strength in western institutions, so the West now seeks the source of Japanese strength in Japanese institutions. Romantic evocations of Zen Buddhism (for business lunches?) symbolize this strength. The media plays an important role in that quest through its magazine articles and radio and television programs.

China has also fascinated the media. The very fact of its isolation from the world at the time of the outbreak of the Korean War gave it a mystery which could not but help fascinate the outside world. At first the media sought to portray China as aggressive. China's involvement in the Korean War and its occupation of Tibet helped to establish this image. In relation to the latter event one memorable documentary, *The Lama King*, sought to create sympathy for the Dalai Lama and for Tibetan exiles in India. (In this documentary the image of religion was certainly present. It was used to emphasize the growth crime of the Chinese who dared to occupy the territory of a peace-loving people devoted to Buddhism.) The apparent irrationality of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution also made exciting news and helped to strengthen the idea the China was a nation to be feared. The unique quality of the Maoist experiment in China, however, also invited positive presentation. This was done in a series of films entitled *One Man's China* which sought to explain what was happening in China. The ascendancy of Deng Xiao-ping has led to a new China for the media to explore, a China committed to what the West sees as rational development. A documentary entitled *China Since Mao* explored the new China as it moves into the consumer age of washing machines, Coca Cola and Colonel Sanders. More recently a series of programs called *The Heart of the Dragon*, while acknowledging China's new image, sought to emphasize the continuity of civilization and the significance of religious traditions in China, and the continued presence of the past in the New China.

Australia's nearest Asian neighbour, Indonesia, has also attracted considerable attention from the media. While the Australian Government has been anxious to maintain harmonious relations with In-

donesia, certain elements in the media have provided unfavourable images. Indonesian activities in Irian Jaya and East Timor have led to its portrayal as an expansionist, aggressive nation (and Islam is increasingly associated with these characteristics). There has been considerable conflict between the Australian media and the Indonesian Government concerning allegations of corruption in high places in Indonesia. Such conflict has resulted in the Indonesian Government being pictured as having no regard for the freedom of the press. These then are the images of Indonesia. They are perhaps balanced by the more romantic views of Indonesia found in the travel and tourism sections of the press.

Currently Australia is witnessing signs of a return of White Australia Policy attitudes. The roots of this development may be traced to a speech made by Professor Geoffrey Blainey in Warrnambool in 1984. This speech precipitated what has become known as the Blainey debate on Asian immigration, a debate which is now filling the newspapers and is receiving extensive coverage on the electronic media. Blainey's view is that Australia's Asian immigration policy is not popular with the Australian working class. The ideas of Geoffrey Blainey have more recently been given prominence as a result of the Fitzgerald Report on Australian immigration and by Opposition leader John Howard's call for One Australia.

The current debate is serving to polarise the Australian population and to bring under close scrutiny the concept of multiculturalism. Thus for many Asians resident in Australia, the dominant image of Asia confronting them in the media is the image of an unwanted people.

The religions of Asia, although by no means the major image conveyed by the media, has nevertheless provided a rich visual resource for television productions, while the majority of those focussing on religion are made overseas. These productions have served to emphasize the cultural differences between Asia and the West. In relation to this particular kind of image one calls to mind *The Long Search* series (BBC 1976) in which Ronald Eyre went in search of the truths and rituals of various creeds. Asia was well represented in this survey with programs devoted to Hinduism, Japanese religions, the different forms of Buddhism, and the death rituals of the Way of the Ancestors in the Celebes. On the whole, Australians do not receive adequate explanation of Asian religions in Australian-made programs.

Conflict is another image that the media, both electronic and print, has associated with Asia. Currently, radio and television news programs and newspaper reports are drawing attention to political unrest and violence in Burma, and to student rioting in South Korea which one journalist recently described as the Restless Land of the Morning Calm. The notion of Korea's conflict-ridden recent history is also being emphasized by the ABC's current showing of a series of programs on the Korean War (*Korea — The Unknown War*). Indochina, above all, helped to create, through the media, the idea that Asia is a place of conflict. Nor did the war in our living rooms end when the Vietnam War ended in 1975. Since then television programs have told the story of the conflict over and over again.

In the period since World War II the media has not starved Australians of images of Asia. It would be an interesting exercise to survey the so-called average Australians to see how successful the media has been as an educative force. At the present time there are two major forces at work in Australian politics in relation to Asia. One urges Australians to learn more about Asia so that they may share in the prosperity generated by the dynamic economies of the region. The other seems to be unleashing racist forces unworthy of a land of many cultures. It seems reasonable to conclude that the media as an educative force now faces its greatest challenge.

On Being Peripheral: Senator Evans and the ABC

David Millikan

Head, Religious Broadcasting, ABC

The last two years has been eventful in the life of the Religious Department in the ABC. We have almost doubled the total air time of religious broadcasts. In an arena where even maintaining ones budget at the level of the year before is like a Kings Cross street fight, the religious department has seen significant increases. So in the business of putting to air the material which justify our existence, we have done well. But these things have occurred against the backdrop of several attempts to close down the religious department or at least put it under the authority of another department.

The most serious attack came from the Minister of Transport and Communication. In a report issued in February, *The Review of National Broadcasting Policy*, the place of religious broadcasts on the ABC was addressed. In the context of a review of the ABC's role in the coming years, it was proposed that the ABC's charter be narrowed to provide a more specific brief. The existing charter was seen to be too broad and all-encompassing. They argued that this all-embracing charter obliged the ABC to spread its resources across a range of matters that it could no longer fund.

It was clear that the *Review* began from the premise that the ABC would not receive a higher level of funding than is presently the case. At the very best the ABC may maintain the present level — with some slight concession to indexation as costs rise. At worst (and perhaps more likely) the ABC was facing an environment in which it would find it increasingly difficult to induce government to even maintain the present level of funding. As the *Review* stated:

> Given Australia's economic situation, there will of course be budgetary constraints for the foreseeable future and it will be necessary for all public agencies, including the national broadcasters, to redouble their efforts to contain costs and to rationalize their activities. (para 59)

Whilst this may be true it is the ABC's view that over the past 10 years the ABC has been subject to regular and severe cuts out of proportion to other areas of government expenditure.

The *Review* stated that a *maintenance* level of funding of the ABC was not acceptable, which meant the ABC would not be able to continue the present level of broadcast services. So the *Review* was an attempt on the part of Senator Evans to examine the ABC's role and open the issue of narrowing the range of subjects and program materials that the ABC should be obliged to cover. To this end the proposal was made that the Charter of the ABC be changed in order to bring some focus and limitation to the areas that the ABC should be obliged to cover.

This was to be achieved by the comprehensive nature of the ABC charter being redefined so that three categories of subject matter be established which would provide the basis on which decisions could be made on resources and air time. These categories were described as "charter activities" which were: news, current affairs, drama, the arts, children, educational, information, and political matter. "Non-charter activities" were: light entertainment, sports, family activities, and religious matter. "Peripheral activities" were described as Radio Aus-

tralia, the orchestras and ABC public concerts.

It was clear that this decision was driven by budgetary considerations. As the *Review* stated:

> When program budgets are available, the notion of Charter and non-charter responsibilities can be applied directly to decisions regarding the structure and resourcing of the national broadcasters. (para 50)

The implications of this proposal for religion on the Australian media were serious — religion was now seen by the government as a non-essential aspect of public broadcasting. As a "non-charter" activity all religious programs would be funded from those funds available *after* the "charter" responsibilities of the ABC were met. It was also proposed that non-charter subject matter should pursue sponsorship as a means to meeting funding needs. Where charter programs would have assured funding, non-charter programs would exist on their ability to survive either by raising money from outside the ABC by sponsorship, or by making a case for each initiative.

This of course raises the issue of sponsorship of religious programs, for there are areas where such funding *is* available. I have been approached on several occasions with the offer of significant sponsorship arrangements from religious groups with the resources and desire to have their cause advanced on the ABC. It would be impossible in Australia to maintain the independence we prize if this were to become part of ABC policy. Both philosophically and financially I have been able to resist all such approaches.

The opinions expressed in the *Review* meant that the range of religious programs as we now put to air, would contract dramatically. The funds presently available to religion would go to the first priority areas. Religion would be funded from the remainder. I happen to know that would in a short time mean the demise of the department. It had only one end, namely the idea of a specialist department dedicated to the broadcasting of religious programs would cease. It would become prey to the priorities set out in the *Review*.

What would most likely occur is this — religion as a department would be disbanded, and the task of 'covering' religious matters would fall under the responsibility of another department, such as current affairs. Occasional religious 'events' would be covered — and occasional current affairs reports would be put to air to cover major religious news. But the broadcasting of extended theological discussion would disappear. Programs such as *Encounter, Insights* on radio would also disappear. The extended coverage of religious current affairs in programs like *Forum* and the important new program *Compass* at noon Sunday on TV, would cease.

We saw this scheme of Senator Evans' as the most serious threat yet directed to the broadcasting of religious programming in Australia. There is no place in the Australian media where the questions of belief and faith and church affairs is given such a broad and authoritative coverage as is presently the case on the ABC.

The treatment of religion in the *Review* was dismissive to the point of being insulting. This was particularly so for, the person who wrote the report appeared not to have taken the trouble to listen or watch any of the religious programs which the ABC broadcasts. The definition used in the *Review* to categorize "religious matter" was "All programs originated by recognized religious bodies". To my knowledge, in the history of the ABC no such programs have gone to air. This was a definition from the commercial world where religious bodies such as Robert Schuller, the Anglican Television Association and others present finished programs and series for broadcast either within the framework of the statutory time allocated to religion, or as paid commercial programming. This has never been the case

with the ABC. Such a form of programming would fly in the face of the ABC's programming and editorial independence. None of the programs put to air by the Religious department "originate from religious bodies". It was clear a decision had been taken to exclude religion from the Charter of the ABC on the basis of a misconception and without the actual programs being considered.

Observations

It was astonishing to me that an Australian Minister of Communication could so peremptorily dismiss the world of religion from the national broadcaster. The decision was changed within a week with an admission from the minister that he had made a mistake "of romanesque proportions". He also said "the kind of programming for which you and your department are responsible seems to me to be quintessentially the kind of thing that should be within my list of 'charter' responsibilities". But something had been said about religion which I believe is significant. A group of Canberra public servants and a minister of the Government did not give automatic recognition to the place of Religion in the culture of Australia. In a country which has more than twice the percentage of people attending church regularly than in the UK, which sees many more people at religious observances on a weekend than at sporting events, it was possible for them to make a "mistake" in assigning the content of religion to the same level as "light entertainment". I do not say that the decision to do this was prompted by Senator Evans' own brand of Melbourne University rationalism, for I believe this is something that religious groups will encounter more and more. Indeed it is one of the struggles of religion in the public arena in Australia, that it does not have a self-authenticating and automatic place.

The role of religion has entered a period of some ambiguity. At one level, I have never seen a higher interest in faith, and the search for meaning and the exploration of religious perspectives in life. It accounts in part for why the fortunes of the religious department in the ABC have taken a turn for the better. But on the level of formal social influence I believe the mainline churches are in a period of significance decline. This could be illustrated by reference to an incident which occurred on the ABC on November 11, 1951. Some 6 years after the Second World War a "Call to the People of Australia" was broadcast after the 7 pm news and read by the chairman of the ABC. The message was a statement about danger. In part it read:

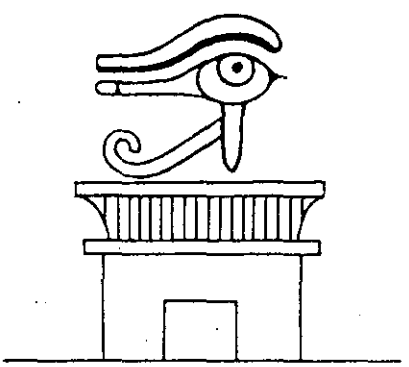
> Australia is in moral danger. We are in danger from abroad. We are in danger at home. We are in danger from moral and intellectual apathy, from the mortal enemies of mankind which sap the will and weaken the understanding and breed evil dissensions.

This statement was signed by the leaders of the Anglican, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, and Methodist Churches, and of the ACC. It was also signed by the chief justices of each of the Australian States.

The relationship between the ABC and the religious community has obviously changed. But so also has the sense of automatic inclusion of religion in the culture of Australia. This became clear to me during the intense lobby exercise over Senator Evans' *Review*. From the main line denominations (especially the Anglicans) there was an immediate concern about the implications of the *Review*. But I was surprised by the lack of political sophistication. On the one hand I heard prominent clergy expressing outrage at the treatment of religion by the present government. On the other I saw men who were uncertain both of their rights and the way in which they could exercise them. By the time I arrived in Evans' office in Canberra there was only one man who had been able to telephone the Prime Minister and several cabinet ministers and put the churches

position to considerable effect. There is no question that the churches have an extraordinary potential to influence Government. It may be that many of them have decided for theological or philosophical reasons that they do not wish to exercise that in a direct way in Canberra. But I am not sure that this is the case. Most of the church leaders I have had contact with in the last 2 years at different times and over different matters have expressed the wish that this government was more responsive to the values and opinions of the churches.

Unfortunately there is no substitute for persistent contact. It was clear that virtually no church leader in Australia was on speaking terms with the government leaders. The future of religious programs on the ABC is not in the end a major issue to the life of the churches. But it did show a weakness in the mechanisms where by the churches express their mind in Australia. I am convinced the time is right to redress that.



Islam and the Australian Media: The Implications of Distorting Mirrors

Dr. Ahmad Shboul

Senior Lecturer in Arabic and Islamic Studies
University of Sydney

It is perhaps a truism to say that Islam and Muslims have had a particularly bad press in Australia. Rather than document or simply lament the fact, this article attempts some historical and sociological appreciation of this phenomenon. Islam as a religious and cultural tradition has a great deal in common with Christianity. There is unfortunately a tendency to overlook the fact that not all Arabs are Muslims: many Lebanese, Palestinians and other Arabs are Christians. In this sense Christianity has been very much an Arab religion since early Christian times, and interaction between Muslim and Christian Arabs has been a historical and social reality for centuries. An understanding of this fact and of Islam and the Muslim communities, as well as the Eastern, including the Arabic-speaking, Christian communities in Australia is of considerable importance, not only for Australia's relations with the Arab and Islamic countries, but more particularly for inter-faith and community relations here at home.

Two years ago I participated in a conference at the Australian National University entitled: "Islam — Current Implications for Australia". The title of that conference, I thought, clearly reflected a preoccupation with Islam as a "problem". This reminded me of an old essay by the German Orientalist, H.C. Becker, entitled *Islam als Problem*. To Becker the issue was Islam as a historical problem, particularly in relation to its Hellenistic heritage; to the organizers of the Canberra conference the problem was Islam's very presence in the modern world as defined by Australia's own geographical and cultural horizons. In both cases, as indeed in many treatments of Islam in Western literature, notwithstanding the important contribution of outstanding Western Orientalists, there is often a disturbing tendency to generalize — to speak of Islam as an abstract whole rather than about specific teachings or about Muslim countries and societies. It is as though socio-economic, historical and geographical factors were irrelevant; as if "Islam" as a label, though seldom clearly defined in such writings, would provide a peg on which to hang all kinds of ordinary problems in human societies. At the ANU Conference there was also a hint of alarm, I felt.

Indeed such an alarm has continued to be raised by the media and by some pseudo-experts. Terms such as the "resurgence", or "rise" of Islam have become common cliches. It would however be most unfair to put all the blame on the "Orientalists" or the prejudiced media, as some Muslims tend to do. Muslim "fundamentalists" and some "Islamic" regimes seem to adopt uncritically imported Western Orientalist interpretations of their own Islamic history. Indeed, it is even possible to speak of a silent conspiracy between the old "Orientalist" school and the new Muslim fundamentalist one.

There is no doubt that Islam as a religion and a way of life is a considerable spiritual, cultural and political factor in the modern world. But Islam is often discussed in an abstract and stereotyped way, both by Western media and pseudo-experts on the one hand and by self-proclaimed Muslim fundamentalists on the other. For example, Islam as a political factor in Iran can only be understood within the context of Iran's history,

including the role of the religious scholars and the specific Iranian Shi'a ideology and experience. Similarly, the oft-repeated statement that "Islam is the fastest growing religion" can only make sense in terms of population growth in traditional Muslim societies in common with the rest of the Third World. Neither phenomenon can sensibly be used as a starting point to understand the situation and needs of the Australian Muslim community. Yet such cliches are often the kind of introductory remark used by the media. Certain journalists seem to imply that Muslims in Australia are some kind of a dangerous tribe or a regional minority. This incidentally fits in with the distorted perceptions of those who are at present raising the false alarm about Australia becoming a "nation of tribes". The reality is that Muslims in Australia, like other immigrant groups, are no more than a cultural "community" of individuals and families striving to be accepted as they go through the gradual process of settlement and integration in a multicultural Australia that prides itself on acceptance of diversity, freedom of religion and "fair go".

Why do Muslims have a Bad Press?

The complex factors which may explain this would include the medieval Western animosity towards the Arabs and Islam, the romantic ideas about eternal conflict between the West and the Islamic world as exemplified by the Crusades and perpetuated in some school textbooks, the Western colonial encounter with Muslim societies, and more recently, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Oil crisis of the 1970s, the Lebanese civil war, the Iranian revolution and the Gulf war. All the above have contributed to the tendency to associate Islam and Muslims with violence, instability and hostility. Above all we need to view the perception of Islam in the media against the background of the venerable Western tradition of "Orientalism" in the fields of mission, politics, scholarship, literature, visual and performing arts. Traditionally, Arabs, Muslims, and other "Orientals" have been often perceived, in an abstract or caricatured way, as the perpetual "other" — so different from the Western "norm", but always judged and often found wanting according to Western standards. In this respect, Kipling's dictum, "...never shall the twain meet", seems to be still very much alive, particularly in the light of the current inflated debate on immigration and multiculturalism, and the "them and us" syndrome of media polls and certain political commentary.

Australia's self-image has been that of a country belonging to the Western World — historically, politically and culturally, though of course never geographically and no longer economically. As such Australia partakes of both the positive and negative aspects of the Western heritage, including the anti-Arab and anti-Islamic prejudice of the Middle Ages and the colonial era. In other words, certain ingredients of Australian attitudes (e.g. towards Islam and other cultural traditions) have been imported as part of the Western "cultural baggage", and are thus not necessarily home-grown Australian attitudes. It must be added immediately that such attitudes are not the monopoly of any particular culture. However, cultures at certain moments of their historical development may find enough confidence in themselves to perceive wider horizons ahead and be more accepting of cultural diversity, viewing it as strength and enrichment.

Both in its political and cultural identity, and in its view of the world, Australia is only slowly emerging from its old status as a derivative culture, some would say its cultural cringe. More specifically, the Australian media are still heavily dependent on the British and US media for reports on World affairs, including developments in Islamic countries. With one or two notable exceptions, there are no professional Australian journalists in the Middle East, for example. What is worse is that articles taken from leading British or

US papers are often badly transmuted for local consumption.

While Australia is gradually re-discovering its geographical and economic realities and adjusting to a new role in the Asia-Pacific region, it has become increasingly preoccupied with East and Southeast Asia. West Asia and the rest of the Middle East would still figure much lower on the list of Australian international interest for sometime to come. Even when the media may come up with reports on "Islamic movements" in Southeast Asia, they use such sensational titles as "Islam on the March: the Revolution on our Doorstep" (David Leser in the *Australian*, 26 January 1986). The presumed implications for Australia are apparently not only because of the relative proximity of Indonesia and Malaysia but also because of the existence of an Australian Muslim community, hence the juxtaposition of a picture of Australian Muslims at prayer in the Lakemba mosque, Sydney, within the text of the article. The supposed "Islamic" revolution in question has not materialized, however. Instead we have had a *coup* (some say two) in Fiji and intensified Kanak resistance in New Caledonia — thus illustrating the fallacy of blindly associating Islam as such with political instability.

Apart from these general historical factors, there are a number of sociological "syndromes" which may explain the negative image of Muslims in the Australian media, and therefore in the Australian popular consciousness.

1. At one level Muslims appear in a bad light because they simply seem different; this difference is often perceived not only in religious, but also in ethnic, linguistic, and other cultural terms. The well known intolerance of difference; the "why can't they be like us" syndrome is a familiar one, except it seems to be burdened with more incomprehension, bordering on paranoia towards Arabs and Muslims.

2. The "blame the victim" syndrome. Muslims seem to suffer from prejudice because some of them appear to be not coping very well with the trauma of migration, settlement, and adjustment to a new environment. They may be accused, even by some of their supposed sympathizers, of maladjustment.

3. Prejudice against "those who hold fast to their old ways" is further complicated by the confusion between adherence to traditions on the one hand and backwardness on the other. What is perceived as un-fashionable must be medieval and therefore backward. Thus Muslims who attempt to assert their religious or cultural identity are seen as "going back to the middle ages".

4. Australia has often been described not only as having freedom of religion but also "freedom from religion". Those who take religion seriously are generally subjected to ridicule in a society which does not always take religion seriously. This becomes more complex in the case of Muslims. The "those fanatics" syndrome becomes more imbued with hostility because such Islamic fanaticism is usually depicted as having political and even violent dimensions.

5. An element of the irrational seems to be often associated with Islam and Muslims; such association is often in fact a reflection of the irrationality of the observer. The image of Muslim irrationality and fanaticism can sometimes be put in quite insulting terms. A person who is seen to react violently to provocation may thus be compared to a "Muslim fanatic", as if fanaticism were a Muslim monopoly. The image of irrationality is graphically projected through media reports of political events in Muslim countries, or of events associated with Muslims generally. TV cameras are, of course, fond of the unusual; gestures, attire, and other aspects of traditional social behaviour of Muslims are often emphasized, sometimes caricatured, although these are in fact cultural manifestations and most of them have less to do with religion than with the customs and general features common to all traditional societies. Other people too may

seem different from the familiar "norm", but non-Muslim strangeness is seldom blamed on non-Muslim religious beliefs; whereas any "unusual" behaviour observed in Muslims seems to be blamed on their religion, even if such behaviour is shared by non-Muslims.

6. The "it is only Muslims who are like that" syndrome. It is often assumed that primitive, or cruel practices must somehow be peculiar to Muslims. Thus female circumcision is common in some non-Muslim, including Christian communities in Africa and Asia, whereas it is virtually unknown in most Muslim countries. Non-Muslims may even be presumed to be Muslims if they appear somewhat strange. Although it is generally realized by educated people that certain (very human) attitudes to sickness, death and bereavement are common to all Mediterranean societies for example, and indeed all traditional societies, it has become customary, as a kind of convenient cultural abbreviation, to single out Muslims for blame.

7. The camera as a distorting mirror. Even acts of worship may be reported to look particularly strange and incomprehensible. It has become a universally accepted cameraman's must not only to photograph Muslims in the mosque during the supplementary prayers, i.e. when the worshippers are scattered, but more especially to invariably concentrate on the backs of the devotees during prostration. The camera of course never invents; but it works as a distorting mirror, literally in this case. To the non-Muslim observer it emphasized the stereotyped notion that Muslim prayer is basically a "bums-up" exercise, as a sympathetic non-Muslim friend has light-heartedly put it to me. It may be argued that there are technical difficulties for a camera crew in a crowded mosque. But even when the main door of the mosque makes it easier to take frontal or side pictures, e.g. at Lakemba, the camera, perhaps after briefly lingering on the numerous shoes at the entrance, would inevitably end up showing the backsides of the devotees! Thus apart from distorted reporting about Muslims in words, they are literally "shot in the back" by cameras. (After the above was written, a typical "bums-up" photograph of Muslims at prayer has somehow found its way into a serious ABC Bicentennial publication on Rites of Passage, edited by a particularly sympathetic and sensitive Christian Pastor, and, ironically, in conjunction with a contribution written by the present writer!).

8. The mystification syndrome. Another distorting mirror of the media is that of giving brief and often mystifying allusions to Muslims, or other groups for that matter. Since many TV viewers often interpret such images according to their preconceived ideas, a brief item or a picture flash, taken out of context, can cause more distortion than enlightenment.

9. The juxtaposition technique. More serious, if apparently innocent, examples of this distortion can be seen in the juxtaposition of pictures of an event with a verbal report of another, hardly related event elsewhere — the only common link being that both are presumed to relate to Muslims. There seem to be two varieties of this technique. One is to show a photograph of Muslims at prayer somewhere in an Australian city in connection with community news. A recent example was a picture of a congregation in Sydney led by a Yugoslav Muslim Imam, in connection with news of a meeting of the Lebanese Community Council (LCC) to discuss the CAAIP Report. The LCC is an all-Lebanese Council which includes both Christians and Muslims. Another, more serious way is to juxtapose pictures of Middle East battle scenes with reports about Australian Muslims; or conversely, to insert a scene on T.V. or a photo in a newspaper of Australian Muslims at prayer within a report about violent events or fundamentalist movements in an Islamic country. Whether deliberate or not this obvious association through the use of imagery is bound to create apprehension

and perhaps paranoia towards the Australian Muslim community.

10. The journalistic tendency to concentrate on conflict. There are indeed occasions when some Australian journalists show great empathy and understanding towards the Muslims in this country, who are acknowledged as "one of Australia's newest, most unstable and discriminated against ethnic minorities". The "peripheral and politically weak position of the Lebanese, and especially the Muslim community" and the "deep-seated anti-Muslim prejudice by elements of the wider Australian community" are occasionally acknowledged by the more enlightened members of the press. (For example, see Peter White, "In the name of Allah, but not in Australia", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15th January, 1986). However, it is often the divisions and turmoil within Islamic communities, and the personal rivalries that seem to be highlighted in the media. Indeed the same enlightened journalist, quoted above, seems to concentrate on such aspects in his treatment of both the Lebanese and the Turkish communities. Such a preoccupation with divisions and rivalries is also reflected in his discussions of other, more well-established ethnic communities, including the Greeks. (See *SMH*, January-February, 1986). Although such reports are on the whole objective and factual, the emphasis on divisions, disputes and maladjustment does not, as a rule, engender sympathy from the wider Australian public towards the ethnic communities. It is reasonable to expect people in a competitive free capitalist society to admire success and self-assertion. It is probably true to say that divisions, instability and certain unique difficulties faced by Muslim communities generate more animosity than sympathy. Here the "blame the victim" syndrome may be operating in the attitude of unsympathetic readers or viewers, although this may not of course be the intention of the journalist in the first place. But this is just another example of the press as an unwitting distorting mirror.

11. The myth of the Islamic threat. Is the Australian press, and also the commercial electronic media, only reporting things Islamic indirectly, by association between the Islamic countries and the Muslims of this country, or in the context of the ethnic communities? Or is there a more subtle kind of prejudiced reporting and commentary? Certain journalists seem to deliberately perpetrate an image of Islam as a potential danger and of Muslims as misfits in Australia. Early in 1986, the *Sydney Morning Herald* published a strange editorial on the controversy over the resident visa of a Muslim Imam. In the summer months many Australian newspapers occasionally publish the odd silly, humourous Saturday editorial. But this one was quite serious. It was full of distortions and its tone of paranoia was most pathetic. It may be instructive to indicate the underlying assumptions of that editorial since it is still relevant to many of the current misunderstandings perpetrated about multiculturalism. The Herald editorial was entitled: "Multiculturalism meets an Imam" and its basic message was that Islam and multiculturalism were irreconcilable.

Although the writer ostensibly is talking about the Imam of a Muslim mosque, a careful reading of the editorial makes it clear that the ultimate message is that any genuine Muslim must by definition be an enemy of multiculturalism. A few verbatim quotations should illustrate my point. The editorial speak of the controversy that "transplants to Australia some of the passions of the fiercest Middle East conflicts, especially Lebanon's civil war." The writer asserts that "Unlikely as it might seem, the great resurgence of Islam has now taken roots in our suburbs"; he adds that "With accelerated Muslim immigration over the last decade, it was inevitable that the endemic turbulence of the Arab and Islamic worlds — a daily feature of our Middle East, African and Asian news — would be reproduced here." Like David Leser's "Revolution on our doorstep", the *Herald's* "inevitable", has not come to pass. The

conclusion to be drawn from such biased journalism is that it was wrong to allow such immigration of Muslims, as distinct from other immigrants from the Middle East. It is difficult to resist reference to the more recent comment attributed by the *Australian*, 4th June 1988, to Dr. Stephen Fitzgerald, that we do not want those Lebanese immigrants who "have been told", he does not say by whom, "you don't have to die to go to paradise, there is a place called Australia where you don't have to work and the Government would pay you". The journalist and the "expert" on immigration thus seem to agree on unwittingly creating feelings of resentment, fear and dislike towards the same group, though in two different ways. It is obvious that the Lebanese, other Arabs and Muslims, particularly recent arrivals, are easy targets for such stereotyping. The editorial writer speaks of Islam's "challenge to Australia"; and concludes with the following pseudo-scholarly revelation:

> In Islamic terms, we are part of Dar al-Harb, the abode of struggle, and must be converted to Dar al-Islam, the territory under Muslim political control. Reconciling universalist Islam with relativist Australian multiculturalism will not be an easy task. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 18th January, 1986)

The notion of "abode of struggle" has nothing whatsoever to do with the situation of the Muslim community in Australia. In fact in my own extensive research into Islamic history and jurisprudence, I have not come across such a notion except in the context of relations between two sovereign states, or a people under oppressive military occupation. Some Muslim Indian leaders used it as a slogan against British colonial rule in India in the 19th century, in the same way as the North Americans used other slogans against the same power in the 18th century. Apart from such examples, the "abode of struggle" may reside in the mind and peculiar ideology of that particular *Herald* editorial writer, who must remain nameless, according to an old journalistic convention. The editorial writer is neither an objective observer of the Muslim scene in Australia, nor a specialist on Islam or on community relations. He appears sometimes as a defence correspondent, or as an "expert" on terrorism — hardly a suitable qualification for writing an editorial on Multiculturalism or Islam, unless such matters are to become under the care of the Ministry of Defence. A further qualification of the writer of that editorial and several other pieces disparaging of Islam and Muslims, is that he reflects uncritical admiration for, and influence of an extremely anti-Arab and anti-Islamic old writer — John Laffin — who is internationally notorious for his crude inflammatory statements. (For comments on Laffin's "mass character assassination" and "racist ideas", see Derek Hopwood, in the *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin*, Vol.13: 94-7, 1986.) It is obvious that the *Herald* editorial writer in question, like Laffin, has a political axe to grind. Unsuspecting readers would be led to believe that what they read is objective balanced analysis of a topical issue. This is all the more serious since the topic has to do with sensitive community relations.

In conclusion, the image of Muslims seems to suffer from a combination of factors ranging from medieval bigotry, to political ideology, to careless stereotyping. The worst distortion results from too much emphasis by certain journalists and other commentators on the apparent "otherness" of people, whether they are Arabs, Muslims, Asians, Jews or "blacks". Is it unreasonable to make a plea for attempting to understand our human situation in socio-economic, cultural and environmental terms rather than racial, ethnic, or confessional ones?

'Kangaroos don't Live in Tents': Mythmaking and the Australian Psyche

Hilary Tabrett

Formerly Aboriginal Liaison, Ayers Rock N.T.
Currently Publications Editor, Aboriginal Studies and Teacher Education Centre, Adelaide

On 17 August 1987, people who knew about the 'Earthlink' gathered in groups at sunrise at various recognized 'sacred sites' throughout the world to acknowledge the time which was predicted to summon in a change in the consciousness of the world. Shirley McLaine was at Lake Baical in the USSR, Jose Arguilles, author of *Earth Ascending* and progenitor of the 'Harmonic Convergence' event, was at the site of the first atom bomb tests in the US to signify that history indeed had ended. Clusters of other New Age pilgrims were at Mt Shasta in California, Macchu Piccu in the Andes, Glastonbury in Britain and at Ayers Rock, Uluru, in Central Australia.

On the night of 17 August, 1983, a loaded road train was driven at 30 kilometres per hour into a crowded public bar at the Inland Motel at Ayers Rock, killing five people and injuring thirty. The week prior to this event, the staff and guests at the Motel had held an 'Accident Party' in which people had dressed up as injured and bleeding accident survivors.

On 17 August 1980, Azaria Chamberlain, a nine and a half weeks old baby was taken by a dingo from her family's tent in the camping ground at Ayers Rock. The baby's body was never found; but some of her partially destroyed clothes were found a week after her disappearance, and the rest, some 6 years later, during the search for the body of an English tourist who had fallen off the face of Ayers Rock. The Chamberlain case developed into one of the best known and most publicised legal stories in Australia. The Australian public followed the story through two coronial inquests, a trial and conviction, an appeal against the convictions to the Full Court of the Federal Court of Australia, and to the High Court, a Royal Commission, and a release from imprisonment under licence — but no full pardon. The media covered all aspects of the case over the years through numerous front page headlines, journal and newspaper articles, several books, a TV documentary and the forthcoming feature film based on John Bryson's book *Evil Angels*.

Connections between these events calls for a consideration of the speculative rather than the substantial, a quality that was never far from the media analyses of the Chamberlain story. Is it in speculation, intentionality, co-incidence or synchronicity that a relationship between these events can be found? Or is it the willingness of the Australian psyche to be influenced by Ayers Rock, a natural feature which has the capacity to draw great attention from state and federal governments, a successful Aboriginal land claim, from international and local tourists, tourist agencies and commercial developers, as well as travellers who seek experiences of another order of reality. Perhaps it was the location of the death of Azaria Chamberlain, that meant that Australians generally felt they could take possession of an event which was genuinely Australian and that they could turn to an authentic occurrence of mythological importance — one in which a certain degree of participation was experienced by people living far from the place where the event occurred. Everybody in Australia, for a time, seemed to have a well-informed opinion, or were involved at some speci-

fied distance from an expert witness, a relative of the accused family or member of their church, a camper who was at Ayers Rock, or somebody who had expertise on a special aspect of the case. The Australian film industry had previously lacked such an event and has been restricted for great movie themes to stories of nostalgia, history, battles in other countries, or events which had as their central significance that inexplicable, mysterious nothingness which appeared to lie at the heart of Australianness, based on the suspicion that Australians are essentially 'lacking'.

Public opinion followed Lindy Chamberlain closely from the first reporting of the disappearance of her child, and was quick to enter into relationship with the media. Many elements of the case based on rumour, gossip, speculation, misunderstanding and imagination were highlighted. Significantly, at the second coroner's inquest into Azaria Chamberlain's death, the media sat in the jurors' seats in the Alice Springs courthouse. Public opinion then branded Lindy Chamberlain as guilty, regardless of the evidence or lack of evidence. Nothing the Chamberlains could do by being open with the media, showing or not showing their feelings, helping the police or not being so obliging, could alter the public condemnation at the time.

A significant aspect of the development of 'veracity' in gossip about the case was the rise of the CB network across outback Australia at that time. Sharing information on an alternative network lent drama to long overland hauls, and a pseudo-authenticity to outback sources of information. Suddenly 'knowledge' came from 'The Centre' and not from the cities, and no one could question its source. The same kind of information that is usually shared in the privacy of conversation became public on the airwaves, and suddenly everyone believed.

Loosely based on uninformed speculation about the Seventh Day Adventist religion of the Chamberlains, a scenario of fanciful religious practices was evolved. Discussion in the media included an erroneous report of the name 'Azaria' meaning 'sacrifice in the wilderness'. A passage from the Old Testament referring to a woman murdering her child in a tent in the desert was wrongly believed to be highlighted in a copy of the bible owned by the Chamberlain family. Diabolic significance was ascribed to black clothing worn by the baby, and to Michael Chamberlain's use of a model of a coffin in his anti-smoking lectures as part of his pastoral duties. A minor accident sustained by the baby prior to the visit to Central Australia, was interpreted as parental neglect due to the religious beliefs of the parents — a confusion between Adventist and other religions' beliefs about blood transfusions. Justice Morling, in his Report of the Royal Commission of inquiry into the Chamberlain convictions, stated of these baseless rumours that it would be inappropriate to dignify them by further discussion (Morling 309). It was, however, all of these assumptions that led, in the popular imagination prior to the trial, to a verdict of guilty.

In addition to an accumulation of exaggerated religious beliefs and practices, could be added a number of descriptions about Lindy Chamberlain's behaviour as a mother and as a woman. Doubt was cast on her caring and concern for her baby despite unequivocal evidence from witnesses to the contrary. Blame was automatically attached to her for the death of her baby, as if such a shocking accident must imply responsibility. It appears as if, in popular judgement, it was a 'crime' for an Australian mother to go on holidays deep into the heart of the 'Outback' — into dangerous territory where only the tough survive. Sexist descriptions of Lindy Chamberlain in the media emphasised the characteristic Australian judgements on women as either devoted mothers and therefore unattractive as women, or attractive and therefore, somehow, implicitly guilty. Many elements of the case and reactions to the case could be

identified as a classic witchhunt. 'They ought to burn the bitch', was a typical comment made by a Darwin taxi driver during the murder trial (Bryson 342).

A third element of mystification served to crystallize popular imagination around a belief in guilt. Aboriginal evidence from tracking at the time of the baby's disappearance was treated with the characteristic over or under emphasis with which Aboriginal issues are commonly dealt in the Australian media. The Aboriginal evidence was, during the inquests in Alice Springs, exaggerated in popular speculation about traditional executioners who left animal tracks behind. Other stories were popularised, including unrelated accounts from the Ayers Rock region about the behaviour of a mythological dingo. Otherwise, Aboriginal evidence which had been specific, concrete and thorough, was totally dismissed.

The prevailing willingness to inflate and to ignore the realities, indicated an Australia-wide intention to impose non-rational causes on the event. These non-rational elements were so general and diffuse, and invited participation and interest from such a large number of people that a general unconscious reference can be seen to have been figured.

In the standard mythology of the Australian outback, the courageous adventurer sets out on a journey which will lead into those familiar generalised assumptions about the Australian character — mateship, egalitarianism, confidence in the face of the unknown, and an innate skill in coping with any situation of drama or disaster. The journey in the outback is generally a confirming of the self-image of 'you've got what it takes', the character of Paul Hogan's Crocodile Dundee.

The traditionally raw confrontation with the non-civilised aspects of Australia is somewhat threatened by tourist development. The challenge for the Australian identity is to sustain the character-forming nature of the journey to the centre, and thus making sure that dangerous physical elements such as crocodile attacks, floods and cyclones, heat and broken-down vehicles remain a potential life-threatening reality. At the same time, the journey must be safe enough to be 'for everybody'. Paul Hogan is after all like somebody we actually know, the image of the egalitarian Australian.

In July 1978, the Northern Territory achieved self-government, and, with a growing and economically important tourist industry, the image of the Territory had to be constructed. The event that happened at Ayers Rock on August 17, 1980 fell perfectly into the pattern, and was adopted by people outside the Territory, supported by the media, as a key incident which sustained the myth. The tourist industry benefited from the publicity.

Lindy and Michael Chamberlain therefore, supported by their firm religious faith and their solidarity as a family could have been seen to have imperilled the Australian myth of the outback. If a secure family and a tiny baby can survive such a journey, then there are no longer any mythological monsters to fight, no sense of the wilderness 'out there' which can be approached in holiday or pilgrimage, but firmly left behind when Australians return home to job, house and family. But the challenging aspect of the journey into central Australia depends on life threatening situations, not actual death from the forces which are in the outback. To a real degree, the belief is that the centre has been penetrated, explorers have 'pushed back' the border of the settled land, graziers, doggers and dingo baiters have colonised the animals and the Aboriginal people's resistance to settlement has long been regarded as passive and consequently overlooked. Therefore the baby, in this mythological view, had to be seen as 'sacrificed'. There had to be 'human intervention'. These two descriptions became slogans in the media accounts of the death of Azaria Chamberlain.

The mythological journey into the 'otherness' provides an opportunity to glimpse the unconscious mind. Such an

experience may be triggered off in a remote and wild setting where dangers can be real. Ayers Rock has progressively become the focus for an accumulation of symbolism about sites of mystery and power, a developing 'pilgrimage site'. Evidence for this argument is presented in Julie Marcus' paper 'The Journey Out to the Centre: the Cultural Appropriation of Ayers Rock' (1988). Any event which happens at such a site develops an inflated status as a result of input projected from the unconscious. The Australian psyche however could not accept a wilderness without human intervention. An even more unthinkable scenario would have been to see the Australian 'wilderness' as it was *imagined* to be before 1788, *terra nullus* a land with no people in it. The tragedy for the Chamberlain family was therefore a serious challenge to the very myth that people live by. At stake is the myth itself. For the myth to be overthrown brings people into the realm of a world which holds no projections, and this involves confronting the imagined fear of nothingness, a seeming threat to individuality. The death of Azaria Chamberlain at Ayers Rock provided all the basic elements for a collective projection of guilt, in this case onto Lindy Chamberlain as a representative of 'the Mother'. With little regard for the specific aspects of the incident, the effect was to expose one unconscious scenario of the Australian response to the land. 'The astonishing notion of unfathomable evil had been around so long that Lindy Chamberlain wasn't judged by the same assizes as everybody else. She inhabited some closet of immortal experience, ancient and unnatural' (Bryson 513).

There is now since the release of Lindy Chamberlain from imprisonment, a seeming reluctance to discuss the Chamberlain case, and the intensity of the media coverage has been lost. The reaction to her release was a vast national weariness as if the event no longer carried the mythological element that sustained involvement. It is as if the national psyche has undergone an intrusion from the unconscious, but 'the patient' has never integrated the experience and can now respond only with boredom. It is preferable and safer to keep the mythological element unconscious and therefore outside the everyday to sustain its potential for inflation so that the commonplace can appear stable. Thus guilt appears to be preserved, or at least a belief in guilt is protected.

The statement 'kangaroos don't live in tents' was made at the Royal Commission by a Pitjantjatjara witness in response to the question of whether dingo tracks at the scene of Azaria Chamberlain's disappearance could have been made by a dingo carrying a kangaroo. The response shows the realism and irony of local response in contrast to the attitudes held by the non-Aboriginal Australian public, and the media through which it speaks.

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Attitudes and Reflections: Radio Journalism in Religion

Robin Weston

Freelance Journalist

'Radio needs to have a good heart and a warmth that radiates.'
— John Fleming, Producer, ABC Radio

There never were many males at services in Holy Trinity Church where I was confirmed. On the other hand, cultural events such as the Golf Club Booze Up and the Buffalo Lodge Chop Picnic complete with kegs were well attended by most townspeople. They were dominated by men, although roles within ritual processes were acted out according to gender and status.

In Church, most men were elderly, but the Minister was young.

In hindsight, I could say that we focussed on the feminine to the extent that we prayed for the Queen in Church. Her presence was a comfort, as were the comfortable words of the service.

At that time I had read about the Holy Grail and other mythic descriptions of human fallibility in the face of the spiritual and I understood that this, like Church and unlike the barbecues, was another, albeit different dimension of the religious perspective.

So grew my early attitudes.

In a post Freudian world, we can say that attitudes to religion, (or to any interpretation of the Source of Life) emerge from the imagination and the degree to which they are challenged probably depends more than anything else on whether the experience of one generation is relevant to the experience of the next.

Neither the pub world of adults nor the Church world of old people seemed able to give a context to questions I found myself asking in my twenties after my own particular world had changed. When later I studied religion I found that no matter how many definitions of That Word we develop, one person's interpretation is bound to arouse fear and loathing in someone else.

Our class discussions inevitably revealed a great deal about our attitudes but we did not find a definition to suit all of us. A definition which is able to describe, for example, an individual's unique redemptive experience, does not necessarily refer to religion as a social organisation or as a philosophy, and of course one religious revelation is not necessarily meaningful to anyone else.

It is worth asking how responsible we are for our attitudes. Early psychoanalysis assumed that a range of attitudes emerge from what is called the unconscious, a part of our mind which we do not access with normal awareness. Attitudes to sex as Freud showed, also arise from strange territories of the mind. That attitudes which we develop about gender capabilities may be also quite irrational was something that Freud was less conscious about demonstrating.

Traditionally, explanations of behaviour and the exposition of correct attitudes have rested upon the authority of religion. Under the impact of a changing world this process does not continue in the same way. In a complex technological society with ever changing parameters, neither our parents nor our parents' religious beliefs are as responsible as once they were for the kinds of attitudes which we develop as individuals.

Many writers in recent times have made the attempt to rephrase spirituality for a post industrial world. The integration of interpretations from Eastern Philosophy and even from primal religions has aided understanding within this pro-

cess, offering different perspectives on time and life.

Carl Jung's challenge to religion demanded that it re-vision its relationship to life and especially to acknowledge what he called 'the feminine' in Creation. Jung did not wish to establish a new religion, but he attempted to develop a dialogue through which science could acknowledge the spiritual dimension of life, a challenge which paradoxically set him adrift from consideration by thinkers from both the scientific world and the religious world.

Jung's work has had the effect of breaking ground for many newer religious perspectives including feminism and to some extent, the popular understanding of a dialogue between Eastern and Western philosophies.

If the time measured by ritual and tradition is transformed by outside influences and different focusses, profound changes in one's deepest perspectives inevitably occur. Following my own process of keeping questions open, I decided to return to a country town Church a few years ago because I wanted to re-discover my child-experience of religion.

This illusion of searching after a secure past was fairly disastrous. The day I attended Church, there were three people in the congregation. (I include the organist, but not the Minister.) As if this was not dismal enough, it had been recently decided unbeknownst to me that the Church of England should be modernised and a new prose service had been introduced. This particular leap forward was but two weeks old at the time and at that stage it involved a certain degree of fumbling. It was disappointing, but after all the world had changed and I was about to change also.

I discovered a Sunday alternative of listening to Kay McLennan's Sacred Music on the Radio at the eleventh hour. After all, we can argue about poetry and prose and where and how the Sacred operates, but music mostly speaks for itself.

It was about that time that I first heard The Science Show program on the forestry work of the late Sir Richard St. Barbe Baker. He spoke vividly of the need for human beings to develop a desire to heal the Earth, and also spelled out some of the practical ways in which he had been doing this for most of his long life.

At least media religion does not fix a sacred event in a single place. It is simply up to a listener or a viewer to discover it.

My decision to work in Radio arose from St. Barbe Baker's program. I knew little of general media processes at that time and it has taken many years to become acquainted with the skills, the imperatives not to mention the difficulties, of scrutinising my own perspectives and directions in the context of making Radio.

During the twentieth century, the media has become a kind of a mass-attitude forum. Religion of course has adapted itself to general media processes in a variety of ways. Like any other media focus it becomes a part of the process of developing ongoing Views of the Moment, particularly in instances where religion motivates or deals with politics. Like any kind of information, the media also changes whatever it touches.

As the chief practitioner of religious journalism in the sound and image media, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation is unique. At its best it represents a free process of inquiry, and an ongoing focus on human culture in an historical sense. At its worst it is bound by Public Service processes which may be less than appropriate. The major advantage of working within the ABC is that it is not bound by individualistic or commercial interests, so that the level of communication is bound only by the capacity of those who work within the organisation to work through it.

According to long time producer John Fleming, the guardian of the history and legend of the ABC's Religious Department, the initial focus of the department was to inspire by opening doors for (mostly Protestant) clergy to present Divine Service. In the early days of the ABC, religion provided the listener with a

Blessing via which programs moved into the day, and departed the airwaves in the evening with a Benediction. Homilies and Devotion were also important, and one could participate in Christian ritual from anywhere close to a set.

Eventually, the Department felt challenged by other programming within the ABC to make high quality programs dealing with religious issues. This resulted in the program Encounter. Sunday 8:00AM had been a low rating timeslot which was offered to religion in the sixties.

Through this program, individuals such as the Rev'd James Peters, then Department Head, focussed for the first time on multifaith activities with the support of producers such as Alan Robson. Universities also widened their perspectives at this time and programming began to cautiously explore strange territory such as Buddhism.

Of course, one is not calling Revelation into question with such a perspective, but is focussing on important questions within the diversity of experience. It was a change in that religion from that time was not simply to be equated with Church.

As producers moved away from public worship programming, and into documentary perspectives of religion, Encounter began to deal with an enormous range of ideas. It was not until the mid seventies, however, that individuals such as Barbara Theiring with the slogan Deliver Us From Eve emerged with feminist critiques of religion.

All individuals who work within the department have their own attitudes to contend with in terms of the work they do. When I first approached this essay I spoke to a number of people (especially women) about their work, about religion and about feminism in the context of religion.

Caroline Jones joined the Religious Department from a background of current affairs rather than religion. Indeed she was initially reluctant even to use the word when I asked her about women and the religious media. She said that the word RELIGION is so loaded for many people that it almost renders itself meaningless, yet if it can be defined as that which binds, then she could say that her program was religious in focus.

The Caroline Jones program focusses on how people make sense of life and what it is that holds one's life together, even after things have fallen apart. Caroline described her program as 'a series on Australian story telling'. Basically, she said, if one is convinced of the sincerity of the storyteller, then it is possible to let the process go because it will make sense to someone. On the subject of women, she said simply that women are more whole if they are able to integrate the 'masculine' within themselves, even as men attuned to the 'feminine' side of themselves are more reasonable beings. This perspective, originating from Jungian thought, was one voiced by several individuals within the department.

Irene Ullman has been involved with the ABC's Bicentennial project dealing with the ritual and musical life of the cultures who live in Australia in 1988. She believes that women do not have a different attitude from men, yet a stage of differentiation has to occur because the experiences of men and women are basically so different. Irene's first insight into the religious experience of Indian women demonstrated a reality so different from casual interpretation that she has since become increasingly interested in exploring feminist perspectives in other religions.

The work she hopes to do eventually will deal with her own religious background of Judaism in a study of the religious perspectives of women in orthodox communities. She asks, to what extent do women desire liberation from Eternal Law, and where does liberation begin?

It is important, she said, to employ women within the Religious Department because women can use other women as a forum for their own issues.

Researcher Louise Ring pointed out that women are still not well represented in terms of policy making. Sydney pro-

ducers are all men, and since the department is organised from Sydney, the female producers in other states are often left out of the process.

My own feeling about working in the ABC's Religious Department as a freelancer is that the department does have an extraordinary freedom to comment on culture, and also to reflect deeply on questions of ethics and tradition. This department has attracted the work of a variety of broadcasters over the years. Gillian Waite and Terry Lane are two broadcasters who started within the Religious Department and have gone on to work in other areas.

Perceptions have shifted a great deal in the most recent two centuries in Australia. In many ways, they have shifted even more in the most recent decades. What does not change is that religion still attempts to speak in terms of Eternal Truths.

But while religion embraces much more than, for example, philosophy, metaphysics or anthropology within its scope it is a worry to many people that the word has become somewhat promiscuous in its use.

The ABC Religious Department has settled on the definition of religion as being that process which connects community with the mystery of Creation. Religion in that sense is the link which we make with the Divine.

There is no doubt that the religious process is dependent on communication. The Source of Being manifests through communication in prophecy and in scripture, in the Vision that is told by the One who knows.

But there is inevitably a folk level to religion too. Often described as superstition, its communication is no less meaningful to the participant than is the phenomenon I have decided to call High Religion. In this scheme, the Golf Club Booze Up could fit into the category of not-so-high religion whereas Evensong at Holy Trinity could fit into the category of High Religion in terms of my township.

So where would we place religious journalism in the context of these categories?

Religious journalism as an expression of religion exists somewhere between Divine Revelation and the folk world of heroes and dragons and is interesting insofar as it assumes that the process of interpreting religion is subject to question and criticism. At different times and seasons throughout history this process has been regarded as heresy. Indeed, an understanding of the integrity and flexibility of any political process can be gauged by its capacity to tolerate criticism. Like any journalism, religious journalism has to integrate a critical focus on society. Through religion, one is able to comment on a great range of issues in society and place them into a cultural perspective.

During my research for this article, a senior male producer in the Religious Department at the ABC argued that the vast majority of Australian individuals for whom religion is important, participate in some form of European Judeo-Christian ritual. To give as much focus as the ABC does on other processes, he said, is more than good service.

This is debatable. After all the media has never pretended simply to focus on the interests of the greatest number of people, but rather to focus on important questions within the diversity of experience.

At this time the Religious Department is dealing with important issues on a number of fronts. The Sleeping Monkey is a series which attempts to deal with the question of drugs and the loss of a spiritual reality in the lives of many people who have become involved in the milieu. Some spiritual solutions to the problem are also considered. The debate on women and their relationship to the priesthood within the Anglican Church becomes stronger through a range of programs. A new series is also proposed which will deal with the impact of New Age Religions. Crucial questions relating to the

environment can also be asked by the religious media.

For example, what of the Goddess, she of the Earth whom men with their machines despise, she who is our birth and our death, she across whom the seasons move and upon whom the spirit draws all life into form?

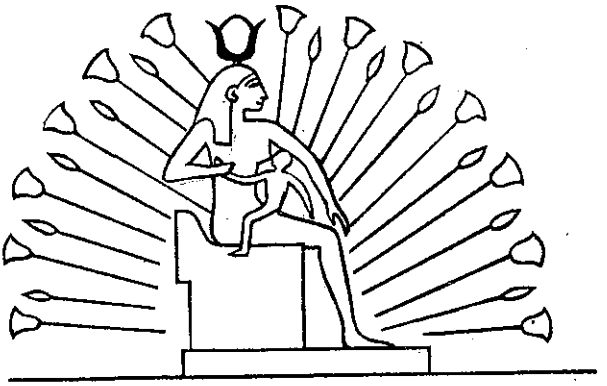
The Goddess is certainly a new perspective on religion, a subject which receives increasing attention from Feminist scholars and artists of both sexes. Gaia theorists say that we are not separate from our environment and that the end result of our great technological leap forward is the active destruction not only of our living planet, but of our own lives.

Father Thomas Berry is an American theologian who prefers to call himself a Geologian. He is prominent among Christians who are calling for a new religious vision as the basis for a set of attitudes "sensitive to our genetic endowment". According to Berry, individuals with a basically "shamanic vision" are emerging at this time as they have done in other times of cultural creativity. Their vision is necessary, he says, to bring to humanity a new understanding of the language of the Earth and her creatures.

Another subject for Encounter!

I think about the alcohol devotees of my childhood who, to coin a Jungian description, preferred to drown their awareness in the seas of the Unconscious, the Great Mother, than to 'raise' their consciousness by going to Church. I think of the despair of the generation who pursue Lilith into the shadows of heroin and of visionaries inspired by Berry to argue for a new vision of Mary, the Mother of God, the Mother of Earth.

Certainly in terms of the greater tides of time, if there is a new vision, it is one which will grow, true to form, from the Shadow, the despised, the rejected, and quite possibly, from the Feminine. It is the religion journalists' challenge to communicate insights which may one day reshape human spirituality.



New Religions and the Media

John Bodycomb

John Bodycomb is a regular commentator on religious matters for the ABC. National Radio recently broadcast his talk entitled "Look out the Cult Busters don't get You", which contains much of interest to those who follow media profiles of 'new' religions. This is the (very slightly edited) script of his talk: as he points out, 'for the ear rather than for the eye'. Read it aloud! (Ed.)

Look out the Cult Busters Don't Get You!
I guess we've always known how the seemingly irregular can titillate something in us; there's nothing new in this. Twenty years or more back, millions of pea-brained voyeurs in Britain said "Tut, tut!" into their tea cups over that naughty M.P., and his girl-friends Christine Something and Mandy Something-Else. They loved every grubby little detail, of course — and the tabloid sales went up and up and up!

There's a breed of radio and TV journalists who make a specialty of sniffing out such material. Then it's dressed up in feigned public spiritedness, righteous anger and smirking piety — to justify the voyeurs' gloatings and the journos' ratings. If you find me a trifle obscure, consider the following example — fictitious, of course.

Heroic news-hound, trouble shooter and honest anchor man closes in on you until his face fills the screen. "We now have evidence of orchestrated plots to destroy family life in this country — masquerading as religious movements."
Wow! Camera swings to well-dressed middle-aged couple. Mother has handkerchief to her eyes. So, what's the story?
Dad unfolds the saga of daughter in third year science who's dropped out, to join crazy cult. Has become subsistence worker with dole-bludging runaways. Out every night — either at indoctrination or exposed to depravity on the streets. No further interest in secure career, has lost weight, rejects parents' values, claims to have found the secret of the meaning of life. Obviously brainwashed. Speaks endlessly of love and sacrifice, but no gratitude for their love and sacrifice. Mother sobs audibly.

Heroic news-hound: "Every generation seems to breed a new menace to family life. Tonight 'The Hour of Honesty' has brought you just one terrible example of an estimated nine hundred and twenty-six insidious new cults — daily gathering momentum in Australia!"

Camera swings to focus on Hank O'Hehir — former seminarian, drug pusher, disco bouncer, Viet Nam vet', pro football player, now born-again true believer. He has a crew cut, a Californian accent, and what could be a Bible in his hand. He is the Pacific rep' of "ENEMAS". The name of the organization is an acronym for "eradicate novel and excessive movements and sects". He's come to Australia (like not a few of his fellow-countrymen!) to show us the truth. He has a successful record as a de-programmer: over three hundred formerly brainwashed by cults have been brought to their senses by him.

Time was when 'cult' was a respectable word. It still is a respectable word among social scientists; not a term of disapproval at all. The main features of a cult are small size, emphasis on some special 'inner light', and what we call a 'charismatic' leader; that is, one who depends not on some institutionalised or inherited status, but on his own inherent personal appeal. A cult also tends to elicit a high degree of enthusiasm and commitment from members, and they advocate its benefits with great fervour.

From the outside, a cult may appear to be quite authoritarian, and to exert powerful control over the thinking and acting of its members. One's also impressed by the strong social bonding between members. All these features are less likely to be found in the commoner, 'mainstream' religious movements.

Of course, from what I've said, you can probably see how it wouldn't be hard to describe that inner group of disciples travelling the countryside with Jesus of Nazareth as a 'cult' — with him being described as the 'cult leader'!

You can also see how the term could easily become a disapproving label for the religious group that worries us because it's a bit out of the ordinary, because we don't understand what it's up to, or perhaps because someone we know has become a member.

Yet, none of those features of a cult that I mentioned necessarily makes it 'bad news'. Well, only in the eye of the beholder. If there is a problem, this may be as much in our *perception* of the particular cult in question as it is the *reality*. But you can see, can't you, how we come to tag as 'cults' those religious movements we feel uneasy about. 'Cult' becomes a disapproving word: a warning sign that says 'danger here!'

In some cases that warning sign can be well justified. There have always been mysterious and magnetic individuals (Charles Manson and Jim Jones to name a couple) who attract the susceptible and submissive: those wanting sure and certain salvation at the hands of a self-anointed saviour figure.

Moreover, under their tutelage some devotees have been tyrannized, have undergone personality changes, and have committed monstrously anti-social acts. All this is a matter of record in the case histories of crazy religions and their charismatic 'Rasputins'.

Given that such movements *are* a fact of life, and one of the facts of life we can do without, it behoves every society to be vigilant — in the interests of its more vulnerable and gullible, and in the interests of its own order and stability.

But in the very name of that vigilance it's too easy for the grossest excesses of suspicion, intolerance and persecution to develop. The most ghastly illustration has to be in the portrayal by Hitler of international Jewry — as being utterly evil and worthy only of total extermination. That should stay with us as an ineradicable memory. It has certainly stayed with the Jews, who want us never to forget — for our own sake as well as theirs.

David Bromley, a sociologist of religion, has made a study of what he calls the 'subversion myth'. He says there are five parts to a subversion myth. First, something (some social group or movement) is portrayed as *a source of imminent danger*. Second, one or more *key conspirators* (that is, evil masterminds) are identified. Third, *an immoral intent* is identified — this intent being the motivation for a subversive plot. Fourth, the group or movement is said to use *physical and psychological coercion* to compromise innocent persons. Finally, the subversion myth includes *a specific remedy* for eradicating this thing.[1]

Bromley shows how subversion myths have been constructed around Catholicism, Communism — and Cults, to name just three. Ever since new religious movements began to proliferate in the Western world, there's been a corresponding growth in subversion myths; that is, the portrayal of these groups or movements as sources of imminent danger, led by evil masterminds with thoroughly immoral intent, and unscrupulously tyrannizing innocents.

Enter the 'cult-buster', who views all new religious movements this way; indeed, who's almost 'religious' about it. Cult-busters are men with a mission; utterly dedicated and single-minded. Cult-busting is the *summum bonum*, the highest good in life. Cult-busters have rigid criteria for differentiating the orthodox, normal and healthy from that which is unorthodox, abnormal and unhealthy — and

these criteria are applied with rigour and ferocity. Cult-busters are angry, passionate and totally uncompromising in rooting out and eradicating what they perceive and portray as evil. They create and they recount the 'subversion myths'.

Some of the cult-busters have been personally hurt themselves by one or other religious group, or they've had close friends or family so affected — and therefore it shouldn't be too surprising that their campaign is apt to have about it more than just the hint of a vendetta.

And this is what makes me at times more uneasy about cult-busting and cult-busters than I am about cults. You see, there can be a savagery in their passion which approaches the pathological — at least equal to the worst excesses they claim a mandate for addressing, and in my judgement potentially more sinister than the ways of those they attack with such fevered intensity.

I am no afficionado of new religious movements, being personally content to stay with the religious mainstream. Indeed, I find some of their ways at best foreign to mine — and at worst, downright antithetical to them. But then I could say that about preferences in food and art and music, and a score of other things important to me. And I'm jolly glad those who are so much at home with other styles (in food or art or music or whatever) don't attack mine, and don't ram their own down my throat. I suspect I owe them a similar kind of freedom of expression to that which they allow me.

The New South Wales Anti-Discrimination board published a substantial report on "Discrimination and Religious Conviction", available to the public on request. Dr. Juliet Sheen, who headed the project, noted how religious minorities in this country can be attacked over practices for which it's not hard to find rough parallels in established religious groups.[2]

A recent case in point, to illustrate this I think, was the Adelaide City Council's restraint on chanting in the streets by the Hare Krishna Movement (since relaxed somewhat). The Adelaide *Advertiser* reported the Lord Mayor saying he would stop *any* religious movement from being able to sell its wares on the streets.[3]

It seemed to me that if chanting were equated with 'selling one's wares on the streets', then consistency suggested there should also be a ban on open-air evangelists and Salvation Army bands. Indeed, that the Adelaide City Council might also consider banning that free promotion of the Christian religion by city stores that start playing carols around October — if not sooner!

Last year Kenneth Cracknell concluded nine years with the British Council of Churches' desk on inter-faith relations. At the time he went public over his deep concern with the widespread and seemingly organised attack on new religious movements — both in Britain and in Europe generally.[4]

He noted in particular a resolution before the May '87 Assembly of the European Parliament, which referred to (and I quote) "the *overpowering and intrusive influence* some of these religious organizations and sects may exercise *on youth and other such people as may be easy to influence*".

Cracknell (who is a Christian minister) observed that although the term 'brainwashing' was not used, quite obviously that was the meaning intended by coupling together words like 'overpowering and intrusive influence' with words like 'youth and other such people as may be easy to influence'.

He went on to say this:

> My own opinion, for what it is worth, as a result of having met personally by now literally hundreds of members of the new religious movements we have just been discussing, is that they show the same range of commitment, intelligence, together with the same range of psychological hang-ups and disorders as a similar range of people in any mainline church. We do have, I am glad to say, some quite seriously un-

> balanced people in *our* local congregations, and I am proud of the support such congregations are able to give them. I am equally grateful that so many people are finding support and solace in new religious movements. But I also meet in the Hare Krishna temples and in the Unification Church headquarters, to take just those two examples, level-headed and highly rational men and women. On their behalf, I think I deeply resent the allegation that they have been submitted to 'overpowering and intrusive influence'.[5]

In other words, the 'brainwashing' charge is baseless and downright untruthful — if not slanderous. But it *is*, as I've indicated, a key element in the so-called 'subversion myth'.

To help counter this widespread assault on new religious movements, Melbourne's "Action Group for Religious Liberty" was founded three and a half years ago — when members of larger, established churches and of newer, minority religions met around common concerns. The objectives of the Action Group for Religious Liberty include:

- helping extend accurate knowledge about the beliefs and practices of religious groups;
- monitoring the media for instances of prejudice, negative stereotyping, and contravention of ethical standards in reporting on religious groups; and
- monitoring legislation for discrimination against particular religious groups or for any effective restriction of religious liberty.

The Action Group for Religious Liberty recognises, of course, that the defence of religious liberty may be problematic from time to time:

> There may be doubts concerning the claims of a given group to be considered religious. And a group claiming to be religious may warrant criticism and censure for actions beyond 'the due limits of civility' [as the group puts it].
>
> The Action Group for Religious Liberty does not argue that groups claiming to be religious should be protected from the normal and reasonable scrutiny and critique to which any groups or association are subject. It argues only that the same definitions and standards should apply to all groups claiming to be religious (i.e. established as well as newer, minority religious groups) and that religious groups be not subjected to harassment and critique based on prejudice.[6]

Article 18 in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that:

> Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice and worship and observance.

Frankly, I see more insidious threats to Article 18 in the cult-busting craze than I do in the cults.

Notes

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3. Adelaide *Advertiser*, 4/3/88.
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5. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
6. A.G.R.L. Statement of Objectives.