

Features

Media Mystique Unveiled!

Guest Editor: Deborah Selway

In this religion and the media feature, academics and media professionals lift the lid on Australia's media industry to reveal the challenges faced when presenting religion to the public. ABC's Vaughan Hinton (Executive Producer - Religious TV) and Paul Collins (Specialist Editor - Religion for ABC Radio) present articles exploring the ABC's history and policies in regard to religious programming. From the aspect of the mainstream press, Muriel Porter discusses the complexities of the women's ordination debate in the print media while Deborah Selway exposes the dilemmas facing religion reporters in Australia's mainstream press. In David Busch's article, we learn of the function of the Christian press industry in Australia and its prospects for the future. Peter Bentley then introduces a case study on the print media's coverage of smaller religious groups. Finally, Robin Weston reports on the significance of CAAMA Radio in the lives of Aboriginal people and highlights the importance of that medium in fostering Aboriginal spirituality. Overall, this feature aims to dispel the mystique surrounding the media and thus allows a clearer view of Australia's religious media.

So, What is and What isn't Religious TV?

Vaughan Hinton

Executive Producer, Religious TV, ABC

A viewer's letter has just arrived on my desk taking us to task for showing in Compass (ABC-TV Sundays, 10.30 p.m.) a program which the viewer thought was not religious. The program in question told the story of a US lawyer who had devoted his life to helping convicted murderers escape the gas chamber. The program

did not mention whether the lawyer had any particular view of God, the nature of the universe, or the source of salvation. It simply revealed a person awesomely committed to subverting the death penalty because he believed the persons sentenced might be innocent. The viewer thought such a program should have no place in a

program put out by the Religious Unit of ABC-TV because he thought it did not discuss religious issues.

Along with the dozens of letters of praise and complaint received by us each week is an occasional one from a viewer arguing what a religious television program is or ought to be. Within the TV Religious Unit, too, that is an on-going debate - one which I trust will never conclude.

Public perceptions of what is and what is not a religious program on television vary enormously. So do viewers' understandings of what is possible and appropriate in religious programming on a public broadcasting network. And so do viewers' understandings of what is possible in religious programming on television. Some want programs that are evangelistic in intent; some want programs that are an aid to their personal spiritual life; some want promotion of the work of religious communities; some want to know what is going on in the field of religious; some find it offensive that religion has any place at all on a publicly funded network.

For those of us whose job it is to produce and select the religious programs ABC-TV transmits, all this hones down to two primary issues: What are religious programs intended to be on ABC-TV? and what is it appropriate and possible to do with religion on television?

The oral tradition has it that there are specialist religious staff in the ABC because a long-ago general manager, bothered by criticism from clergy and bishops, appointed a religious specialist to keep them away from his door and, if necessary, make some of the programs that would quieten these troublesome Christians. For those of us now employed as religious program makers, this is a so-

bering history. If the account is accurate, then the extensive religious programming on ABC networks today may be little more than the result of internal bureaucratic expansionism. In place of Lord Reith's noble vision for the BBC as a Christianising force and moral educator, perhaps ABC religious program makers are simply Corporate troubleshooters, here to fend off errant Crusaders.

More seriously, religious programs are today a part of the ABC's broadcasting policy and are served by specialist staff in both radio and television, although since 1986 the supervision and funding of religious programs have been separate for ABC-Radio and ABC-TV from practical necessity.

The TV Religious Unit functions as a part of the larger Documentaries Department and operates under the same editorial guidelines as does the religious section in radio. For television we both make and purchase, from independent and overseas sources, programs for the transmission times we occupy. Along with all other parts of ABC-TV, we generate a wide range of program proposals each year. For those which are approved, we receive funding to proceed.

Broadly speaking, these proposals fall within two areas of programming: (i) Programs of worship, devotion and teaching and (ii) Programs of reportage, discussion, explanation and analysis. We present about 100 hours of programming in these areas each year, with most of this material being transmitted either at 11 am (**Worship**) Sundays or 10.30 pm (**Compass**) Sundays. Most weeks, viewers exceed 600,000 - this number having increased significantly in recent years. Viewing numbers continue to rise, with the main increases being among viewers below middle age.

It is the relationship of religious programs to Christianity that is most misunderstood. Some viewers believe it is, or should be, our task to promote Christian belief and values. Such goals have long been regarded as inappropriate for a public broadcasting network and for at least three decades, ABC boards have concluded that while the ABC should "explore developments in religion" the ABC should "not promote any particular theology or form of religious expression". It is accepted that, in responding to the needs of Australians, Christianity will inevitably attract a major proportion of attention. However, "the ABC does not see its role to be that of necessarily reinforcing Christian values". Rather, "the ABC attempts to reflect the liveliness of debate and concern which religious issues encourage".

This presents a fairly fine line along which religious program makers must walk. Programs of worship, devotion and theological discussion do assume belief on the part of the viewer and are regarded by some critics as inevitably evangelistic. As Australian religious communities have become more diverse we have had to grapple with the place of Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist worship in our schedules, though Judaism has had an accepted place for many decades. There is, however, a difference between providing Sunday morning viewers seeking a program of Christian worship, devotion or teaching with worship in the Jewish tradition (which is part of their heritage) and providing them with a program inviting participation in worship in an Islamic, Buddhist or Hindu tradition. To date our solutions to this dilemma have been tentative: we have transmitted worship in non-Christian traditions in the place normally occupied by Christian worship and have transmitted some Islamic, Buddhist and

Hindu devotional programs in other timeslots. As worship is the core of most religious communities we see it as important that this significant aspect of life for believers be reflected on ABC-TV. Long ago, we accepted that multicultural Christianity required that we transmit some services from churches using languages other than English.

This need to reflect an ever-growing plurality in worship programs had led us to introduce more programs which viewers may experience as exercises in comparative religious studies; that is, programs in which people from a number of religious traditions put their point of view on a common religious issue. To some, such programs appear to promote syncretism though their intent is to provide a place in the religious output of the network for the diversity of religions which now find expression in the community we serve.

Some critics see this whole endeavour as misplaced, holding that we should keep to Christian worship as that practiced by the majority. Yet, one of the reasons for the existence of a public broadcaster such as the ABC is to reflect Australian life in all its diversity, a diversity which may not normally be seen on the commercial networks.

I do not recall anyone questioning whether these programs are religious. Even those who dislike the plurality accept that these programs, which we transmit on Sunday mornings, to a fairly small audience, are what a religious department in ABC-TV would be expected to produce. It is when we come to programs such as *Compass* that the questions arise. What topics should this program pursue? What should be the program's attitude to religious issues and communities? What point of view should the program put to

its viewers?

Compass has been on air since 1988. In that time it has undergone a considerable number of changes, some in response to viewer needs, some to make better use of television technology, some to broaden its scope. In all this, there have been two overriding aims: first, to take religious issues and religious affairs seriously; and second, to present its subject matter in a manner accessible to viewers who have no special commitment to a religious point of view. We endeavour to cover the significant events, issues and personalities in Australian religious communities and we analyse some secular community issues from a theological perspective. Occasionally, we find ourselves in the midst of controversy which we do not set out to provoke but which is an inevitable consequence of raising some of the divisive issues facing religious communities today: women priests, celibacy, scriptural interpretation, challenges to authority. Because some aspects of religious life are humorous we have covered those too. However, this has led to the accusation that we are not serious about religion - though why taking something seriously excludes humour I do not understand.

What we have not been prepared to do is to confine 'religion' to institutions; nor do we assume that religious perceptions are confined to those of us who can articulate their beliefs. Within the ambit of our program topics we place the world of values, seeking to reveal the underlying sources by which people live their lives and make their commitments. Because it influences people's world views, we cover New Age phenomenon and even, on one occasion, belief in Flying Saucers.

For those eager for me to come, at last, to the ABC's definition of "religion",

I offer only disappointment. I have never discovered an ABC definition of 'religion' and I trust that I never will. (The Macquarie Dictionary tells us what Australians mean when they use the word and this offers us a useful guide). My reason for wanting no ABC definition of the word is simple. Most of the programs we present are designed to raise religious issues, provoke religious ideas in the viewers, and to point to a level of reality which reaches the spiritual. Some programs do this pretentiously, but the very best do it with a subtlety that can be awesome. Many would not pass any definition of religion, yet they are profoundly searching.

In this we are influenced, too, by our perceptions of our audience. For **Compass** in particular we do not assume any belief by the viewer. From the beginning of **Compass** it was clear that the majority of our viewers did not go to church, did not identify with any particular tradition and did not regard themselves as 'religious'. The point of view which we most commonly adopt in **Compass** is one which aligns itself with these viewers: we set out to be well informed and authoritative but in telling our stories we assume little religious knowledge on the part of our audience.

And, often hidden within all this, is the unstated issue of what television is and, consequently, what it can do and what it cannot do. Trite though it may seem, television is not print (as in books or magazines) and it is not sound (as in radio and recordings). As a new medium, television began in emulation of radio: the words spoken were regarded as carrying the essential content, the pictures were regarded as somewhat similar to the photos accompanying a magazine story. A television story is still a ruthlessly lin-

ear tale, but the time has long gone when anyone imagined that the verbal content comprised the most powerful content. Television is most effective at provoking emotions and, in consequence, it is the emotional content of stories which must be addressed. When this dimension is ignored, one is not left with a more rational story but a crudely bland one. Religious communities are not always at ease with the emotions - this applies particularly to faith communities steeped in centuries of pre-occupation with the written word. Television is also at its best when presenting broad impressions rather than precision: indeed, while the content of most programs is quite precise and their formulations of ideas carefully exact, the viewer is most often left with a generalised feeling of being for or against the subject or those who appear in a story. Since television also gives extraordinary weight to appearance, it is a medium which followers of the great religions of the world have approached with considerable caution. Those, such as the US tele-evangelists, who have embraced it wholeheartedly and somewhat incautiously, have generated a form of religion which relatively few in traditional religious communities can embrace.

In the long run, I expect the television medium will be accepted and engaged in as readily as most radio is now, but as a communications medium, television does require a major relearning of many of the processes of communications. In ABC-TV our concern is to provide for viewers programs appropriate to the medium: a somewhat forthright example was last Easter Sunday's worship, entitled "The Third Day", in which Christians in South Australia devised and performed a program which moulded an Easter liturgical form within a peculiarly television frame-

work. By concentrating on image, performance and storyline, "The Third Day" maintained the elements of worship presented in a largely unfamiliar manner. In *Compass*, where our producer and reporters cover the events, issues and personalities of Australian religious life, the possibilities of television must be, for us, an important ingredient in the selection and treatment of stories. For those who see this as a disadvantage, it is well to reflect on the manner in which more familiar media (print, for example) have their own distinctive limitations and so shape what can and what cannot be communicated.

Beyond these current issues for religious programming on ABC-TV lies one which is little discussed publicly, yet is most important of all. This is that the entire face of television in Australia is about to undergo a vast, and probably on-going, change. The introduction of Pay-TV is but the beginning of a technology-driven process which may lead, by the end of this decade, to viewers having the capacity to tune, not to five outlets, but to 20 or as many as 50. In the main, the programming on these outlets will come from overseas, predominantly the US. The religious programs which find a place in this tower of babble are likely to be those generated by the US tele-evangelists who generate, from within their viewers, forms of ecclesial community which bypass local religious communities and who promote theologies which are essentially personal, ethnocentric and strangely materialist. Quite how this will influence the content and programming of religion on ABC-TV remains to be seen. Certainly an ABC Pay-TV channel will include new forms of Australian religious programming in its content. However, unlike existing ABC-TV programs, ABC Pay-TV

will be sensitive to market forces which tend to ignore minority groups and minority points of view, which existing ABC programs are required to treat with sensitivity. The tendency of electronic developments in the coming decade may be to marginalise mainstream religious commu-

nities. Religious programs on ABC-TV may be one place where some balancing contribution to these tendencies should find a place and where viewers' interests in the full breadth of religious thinking are identified and discussed.

The ABC and Religious Broadcasting in Australia

*The Rev Dr Paul Collins
ABC Specialist Editor - Religion*

In terms of both reach and coverage, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation is the most comprehensive 'religious' broadcaster in the country. Of course, the ABC is not, and cannot be, a 'religious broadcaster' in an evangelistic sense, but coverage of religious events and issues is expanding on all ABC networks in ways that could not even have been thought of a decade ago.

Most, but not all of this expertise, is focused in the ABC's religious department. But outside the department, as consistent ABC listeners can testify, religion is becoming an increasingly major item on radio talks programs, in current affairs and in the specialist output that is characteristic of Radio National. The ABC is the largest news gathering organisation in Australia and ABC journalists and overseas correspondents in both radio and television are beginning to realise and report on the potency and importance of religion as a major force shaping politics, culture and economics. On television, a drama series such as **Brides of Christ** demanded detailed research by staff into a specific religious culture that is now past. The extraordinary thing was that they got it almost completely right, down to the last

detail. Moral and ethical issues are increasingly being covered and discussed on programmes such as **Lateline**, **The 7.30 Report** and **Couchman**. The specialist religious program **Compass** covers a wide range of religious and ethical issues. There is also no doubt that religion is a matter of increasing interest in the general media.

However, the ABC is the only media organisation in the country that maintains a whole section that is professionally devoted to religion. Since 1986 this has been divided into two distinct parts: radio and television. The radio section is headed by a Specialist Editor (Paul Collins) and television by an Executive Producer (Vaughan Hinton). Television is centred in Sydney at Gore Hill and is a part of the larger department of TV Features and Documentaries.

The radio department, in contrast, is 'outposted' - that is, it has production staff in five capital cities. The staff is scattered in order to try to maintain an Australia-wide coverage of religious affairs. In Sydney, there are five producers and two assistant producers, plus several support staff; in Melbourne, two producers, one part-time producer, an assistant producer

and the Specialist Editor; in Brisbane there are two producers and one part-time assistant producer; and in both Adelaide and Perth, there is one producer each. The budget of the radio department in 1991-1992 totalled just in excess of \$1.1 million. This is a small amount compared to the \$540 million budget of the ABC, but it is probably more money than all of the churches together devote to electronic media in Australia.

Since the beginning of 1992 the religious department in radio is headed by a "Specialist Editor - Religion". This is a new title. Dr. David Millikan, who left the ABC at the end of 1991, was the last "Hd Rel" - Head of Religion. The Specialist Editor is responsible to the Manager of Radio National (Norman Swan) and through him to the Director of Radio (Peter Loxton). I mention this line of responsibility because it was asserted last year by both important religious leaders and media commentators that religion had recently been "downgraded" in the ABC. (See *The Australian*, 1/1/92; the *Sydney Morning Herald Pink Guide*, 13/1/92; *Eureka Street*, March 1992, p 17; *Catholic Weekly*, 8/1/92). It is true that in the 1991 internal ABC reorganisation that resulted in the stream-lining of Radio National, the religious department administratively became part of the RN network. However, the situation in ABC Radio is still reasonably fluid and religion is clearly and unequivocally recognised as part of the Corporation's output. There is also commitment on the part of the ABC to the fact that religion has a place across the networks and should not be confined entirely to Radio National. In other words, it is clearly seen that religion is a major part of Australian culture and it is recognised that it, therefore, has a place on all ABC networks - on Radio National,

on the Metropolitan stations (for example 2BL in Sydney, 3LO in Melbourne, 5AN in Adelaide, and so on) and on the Regional network (and the religious **Sunday Night Talk** program goes out on the entire Metro and Regional networks - more than 250 stations).

The ABC has had a serious commitment to religious broadcasting for the last fifty years. The commitment began early in the Second World War in 1941 when the Corporation (or Commission, as it was then called) invited the Rev Dr Kenneth Henderson, an Anglican priest and journalist, to join the talks department and to produce programs around the themes of spiritual morale and post-war reconstruction in the difficult wartime period.

Before joining the ABC, Henderson had been a leading writer for the *West Australian* and had worked for the old Melbourne *Argus*. In 1943 he became exclusively responsible for religious broadcasting and when the general manager, Charles Moses, set up a specialist religious department in 1949, Henderson became the first federal supervisor of religion. This lasted until his retirement in 1956.

Certainly, the constraints of the Corporation's charter exclude anyone from engaging in direct evangelisation on the ABC - although it is interesting that Henderson believed that the religious department ought act as an agent for the discussion of what he called "rational Christianity", and as a medium for the broadcast of Christian worship and devotion. For Henderson, the term "Christianity" referred directly and exclusively to the mainstream churches. He had no time for sects of any sort, Christian or otherwise. He did, however, allow the Jewish community air-time on their major feasts.

No other group was heard on air.

Of course, this was before the invention of multicultural Australia. Yet, despite the rigidity of the old monocultural tradition, Alison Healy, who is at present working on a Ph.D. at Sydney University on religious broadcasting in Australia, considers that the ABC religious department has had the most important on-going ecumenical influence of any institution on religion in Australia.

Henderson was succeeded by his deputy, Dr John Munro who, in turn, was succeeded by the Rev James Peter. This was the period of stability in religious broadcasting on the ABC. It was the era of programmes such as **Plain Christianity**, the daily **Bible Reading** (later **Sacred Reading**), **Daily Devotion**, the **Epilogue**, **Community Hymn Singing** and **Sacred Music**. The focus was on giving voice to the churches and churchmen (only a small number of women were heard) and the content was generically, but nevertheless clearly Christian in emphasis. The role of the producer was to facilitate the broadcast of church worship, church activity and theological opinion - all, of course, finely balanced between the major denominations. My own view is that the broadcasts of this period were rather 'Protestant' in texture and tone, even when people from the 'Catholic' end of the spectrum were used on air. The production values embraced by the department at that time seemed to exclude popular, devotional and enthusiastic manifestations of religiosity which were largely to be found at the more Catholic end of the spectrum. Something of this is indicated by the fact that the department has recently discovered that, while there is a wealth of Protestant and Anglican hymns recorded and held by the ABC, there is next to nothing of the pre-Vatican

II Roman Catholic hymnody.

This period of stability lasted roughly until the late 1970s. In the early 1980s the headship of the department was taken over by long-time staffer, Patrick Kirkwood, the first Roman Catholic to head the department. Also, it was from about 1975 onwards that secularist pressures on the output of the department began to build. Those came from both within and without the ABC, and the demand was that the department either adapt to current trends, or face the abolition of religious broadcasting altogether. In the early 1980s there were some unofficial internal ABC plans floated to absorb religion into an augmented talks department. The department had to fight a rearguard action to survive.

But, by the time of the appointment of David Millikan as head in 1986, the atmosphere was beginning to change again. The secularism of the previous two decades was in the process of being transmuted into the crass, amoral materialism represented by economic rationalism. A new current of personalised spirituality and an interest in religious and epistemological (or "meaning") questions had begun to emerge in society at large. These trends were and are reflected in the contemporary ABC. The position of the department is secure, so long as the ABC remains in its present form.

There is no doubt that, in the contemporary Australian media, interest in religion and spirituality is growing. But there is also a dearth of specialist journalists and producers with informed and professional knowledge of religion. As a result, both the reporting and analysis of religious affairs in the general Australian media is very poor. The ABC's religious department is the only place that has maintained a group of specialist religious

producers. The aim at the present moment is to augment this resource further by using employment opportunities to add university trained people with focused specialities to the staff of the ABC - in 1992 two such specialists have been appointed producers.

The form and content of the ABC's religious broadcasting has changed considerably over the last 15 years. It has moved away from providing a broadcast vehicle for the Christian religious communities to express themselves and their worship on air. In recent times the religious department has taken a more pro-active stance. As a result, it is often perceived by listeners as an increasingly active participant in the debates and discussions surrounding the spiritual and religious life of Australia. The task is to balance this with fairness and a sense of objectivity so that the on-air product gives listeners the room to make up their own minds. The fundamental task of the department is to act as a critical medium whereby the religious communities of Australia can give expression to their own concerns, debates, preoccupations and, at a deeper level, to the theology, worship, prayer and faith that motivates them. On the other hand, it is the function of the department to reflect back to the religious communities the critical questions of the wider community about their religious lives and attitudes. The smaller and more self-enclosed communities of faith are often happy to participate in the first step of this process; they are often less happy to face up to outside, critical appraisal.

Producers and presenters are encouraged to take an informed, respectful, yet sceptical approach to religious affairs, but at the same time to see religion as a central phenomenon in human life. Some critics of the department from the religious

communities see this approach as too "sociological" and argue that this focus misses the inner, sustaining life of faith that underpins and motivates all serious religious commitment. Again, for the ABC it is a question of balance and involves the maintenance of production values that 'reveal' something of the inner life of the person or community under scrutiny, while maintaining a sense of objectivity and balance.

At the present moment, the department is looking for a way to present something of the liturgy and prayer life of Australia's religious communities. Contemporary audiences are usually not interested in everyday worship (the old *Divine Service* model is certainly finished). And putting worship to air is very expensive - although exceptional public events, such as a papal visit, or the first ceremony of ordination of women usually attract a big audience response - but there is real interest in more produced and informative pieces that either tell a personal story, or give practical hints on how to do this or that - for example, how to pray or meditate.

The ABC generally, and the department specifically, has a clear obligation to represent the religious diversity of Australia, both in terms of material broadcast and in terms of staff employed. As a publicly funded broadcaster, there is no way the ABC can be used as an instrument of Christian evangelisation. However, insistence on this means that the department may have lost some of its traditional Christian supporters. It is clear from some of the letters the ABC receives that the multicultural religious emphasis is a disappointment to those who think that the "religion of the majority" - Christianity - ought to be given more coverage and promotion on the Corporation's airwaves. As a

rule of thumb, the ABC's policy is to apportion air-time according to the proportional religious make-up of the Australian population.

Australia today is described as a multicultural society. Whatever this might mean in theory, it is clear what its practical consequences are for religion on the ABC. As well as Judaism and the many forms of Christianity, the ABC's religious producers have to cover Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Aboriginal religion, new age religion, secularism and every other form of meaning structure represented in Australia. The religious department has often been criticised by supporters of multiculturalism for being too Christian, and for only seeing other faiths and religions from the outside. The composition of the staff has been described as being "too Anglo-Celtic". Despite the fact that the ABC has made on-going and successful efforts to deal with this accusation, I do think that there has been some justification for this criticism. To try to correct this, the department recently has employed a producer in Sydney who is a leading Australian expert in comparative religion (Dr Rachael Kohn) and an Aboriginal woman in Brisbane whose study has focused on the Aboriginal oral tradition (Ms Christine Morris).

However, while the ABC must eschew evangelism in any form, there is a sense in which the religious department is inevitably involved in a kind of "pre-evangelisation". I think that this term was first coined by Father Alfonso Nebreda, SJ, one of the pioneers of the East Asian Pastoral Institute in Manila. It refers to the attempt to create an ambience whereby religion is seen as an integral part of the on-going social dialogue through which contemporary culture and society sorts

out its ethics and values and goes on to develop and evolve its meaning structures. The very act of having religion on the air - along with current affairs, science, literature, music, art, news, sport and whatever else - means that religion is, in fact, recognised in our so-called "secular" culture as being as worthy of discussion as are all the other elements that make up the Australian social fabric.

Working with the ABC usually forces producers to become ecumenical in the broadest sense. Even among the mainstream Christian churches in Australia - where ecumenism is highly developed with a long history - it is my observation that there is a real lack of comprehension among the communities, and that generally even Christians do not understand each other at anything more than the superficial level. For instance, I used to think that I knew **all** about Anglicans; over the last five years working in the ABC I have found that I was actually quite ignorant because I never saw Anglicans as they saw themselves. At a deeper level of incomprehension, I would argue that the great division in Christianity is really between an evangelical, bible-centric form of faith on the one hand, and a catholic, sacramental-traditional form of faith on the other. My experience is that there is profound ignorance on both sides of this basic Christian divide.

Beyond this there is what Father Eugene Hillman has called the "wider ecumenism", whereby Christians move out beyond their own religious experience and theological presuppositions to come to understand and to value the profound experience, knowledge and response to the God who is revealed in so many different religious faiths. In my view, the job of the religious department is not just to report on this but to begin to mediate it to

an increasingly interested Australian public.

And Australians ARE interested in spirituality, religious experience and ultimately faith. Certainly, the contemporary religious longing ranges across a spectrum from the superficial and self-engrossed narcissism of some aspects of the new age, through the revival of Christian, especially Catholic, spirituality and the influx of Eastern disciplines that are Hindu and Buddhist in origin, to the highly articulated ethics, philosophy/theology and the profound mystical asceticism of some of the best of the environmental movement.

What does the future hold for religious broadcasting in Australia? Besides a couple of organisations outside the ABC, there is clearly little hope that anything other than sectional and quasi-fundamentalist religious evangelism will be produced. Even though the technology now available for setting up radio stations is getting cheaper, there is no sign that anyone except evangelistic groups will have the will, skill base and financial potential to move into the radio media in any serious form. The narrow evangelistic focus

will have an appeal to particular elements of the population but this element of religious broadcasting has nothing to offer to serious, intelligent and critical listeners. The ownership of television will remain far too expensive for even the largest churches to undertake - even if they were to achieve the impossible, and actually agree on a common approach!

As a result, in both media the ABC will probably remain the sole, consistent source for serious, critical TV and radio productions with religious elements. There is no doubt that people will continue to look for religious and spiritual material in the media that is open-ended and suggestive, rather than normative and closed. The on-going breakdown of the influence of the traditional religious communities - such as the churches - implies that a multi-faceted and oblique approach to religion and spirituality will have to be taken. Again, it is the ABC that is best placed to tackle this approach.

That is why the future of religion in the ABC is central to the relationship between the religious communities in Australia and the media.

The Media and the Women's Ordination Debate

Muriel Porter

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology

Sunday, February 2, 1992 is one of the greatest watershed days in Australia's religious history. It is a day famous for something which did **not** happen, when 11 women deacons of the diocese of Canberra and Goulburn did not become the first women priests in the Anglican Church in this country.

Ironically, it continues to overshadow March 7 - the day another group of women actually became the first women priests in a ceremony in Perth. Despite the widespread joy at the final breakthrough in the West, the intense sorrow of the non-ordination persists strongly, powerfully. After all, bad news, grief and trag-

edy, are always more potent media fodder than good news, just as the liturgies and music of Lent and Good Friday are more compelling than those of Easter.

Who can forget the media images of the non-ordination? Television cameras relayed the weeping women, robed and ready for an ordination stopped at the last minute by the NSW Court of Appeal; captured the procession of supporters bearing red roses to the altar; the strained and tired face of Bishop Owen Dowling who had fought to the last to see this day have a happier ending. And earlier, the intensely moving edition of the **7.30 Report** the night before the non-event, when the women were interviewed, tears streaming down their faces. This was what all the fuss was about, ordinary homely women who only wanted to answer God's call.

And not just the television images, or even the graphic photo that filled every front page across Australia the next morning. The ABC's religion department persisted with plans to broadcast the ceremony, the voices of the commentators breaking at points as they described the sad scene in Goulburn Cathedral.

Rarely has any Australian religious institution in recent years received such blanket media coverage as the Anglican Church received before and after the Goulburn fiasco, barring Papal tours. The media interest is not limited to the events surrounding February 2, though that was undoubtedly the pinnacle. The interest in the women's ordination debate has been strong and sustained since the issue first became public in the early 1970s, and shows no sign of abating. It is a fascinating phenomenon, considering that the print media in particular has virtually turned its back on religious news in general.

The media's coverage of the Goulburn ordination event was particularly frenzied because, for the first time in this issue, the church clashed headlong with the state. Opponents of women's ordination had threatened legal action for years, with the long-awaited confrontation coming as three individuals took Bishop Dowling to the NSW Supreme Court. This was high drama in itself, as bishops are rarely hauled before the courts on matters of doctrine. But it was compounded by the fact that the plaintiffs delayed their action until perilously close to the planned ordination, and then immediately - and successfully - appealed against the original decision not to stop the proceedings.

What the public was witnessing was a real fight, ABC journalist Alan Austin explained after the event (*SEE*, March 1992). Bishops were seen to be at each other's throats, "grist to the mill for current affairs journalists", he said. Alan, at the time presenter of the Radio National religious current affairs program **Kronos** (now **Religion Report**) commented that he had never before encountered such widespread interest in a religious issue.

The media coverage in February was comprehensive, ranging from detailed reporting of the court cases and their aftermath to feature articles, comment columns, a plethora of editorials and numerous cartoons. Rare for religious matters, major dailies like *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* devoted full pages to the issue, titled respectively "The ordination debate" and "Anglicans in disarray". This treatment is more often reserved for quite different crises emerging from Canberra!

The feature articles tended to be predictable. A cursory glance through the newspaper files over the years reveals many an article focussing on a particular

woman hoping to be a priest. (The 'stars' of some of the earlier articles are grey-haired grannies now, long retired from formal ministry.) The 1992 debate likewise inspired a rash of interview articles which, if not original, at least served to draw attention to the flesh-and-blood women behind the theological dispute. *The Bulletin* (11 February) even published a lengthy profile of Owen Dowling.

But there were some who differed markedly. Rosemary West of *The Age* reported on recent research claiming that the early church was served by women priests (*The Age*, 31 January). The media's favourite exponent on women's ordination, Dr Pat Brennan, founder of the Movement for the Ordination of Women, was quoted extensively. Pat can usually be relied on for incisive, sometimes barbed comments, and is usually controversial. She was certainly controversial as quoted in another *Age* article, this time by Jan Pearce (*The Age*, 19 February). This article went behind the ordination debate, to the more complex area of the impact of feminist studies on Christian language, imagery, and theology. "If feminist theology means rejecting Christ as a male icon, does it also mean rejecting Christianity?" said the prelude. Nothing in the article was new to the cognoscenti, but it was deep stuff, even for *The Age*. Its publication, at length, was clear evidence of the media fascination with the current debate.

In fact, Pearce's article handled seriously the issues that most 'frighten the horses' in the women's ordination dispute, issues frequently ridiculed by the few columnists in the general press who oppose women priests. James Murray of *The Australian*, himself a controversial priest belonging to the extreme Anglo-Catholic wing, writes regularly, indeed

frequently, against women's ordination. He loves to claim the high moral ground, insisting that the movement for women priests is nothing less than a Trojan horse for hordes of militant feminists intent on destroying the Church. This time, Owen Dowling was opening Pandora's box; the church could only fragment and wither from here on (*The Australian*, 1 February). Within days, in the same paper, P P McGuinness, despite being an atheist, agreed in a pungently-headed column, 'Forget theology, we're witnessing a take-over bid' (*The Australian*, 5 February). Writing in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Frances Sales took a similar line, predicting dire consequences even if General Synod itself (the church's national parliament) approved of women priests (29 January).

Other columnists, however, took a decidedly different view. Quentin Dempster, ABC presenter in NSW, also talked of 'Pandora's box' in an article in the *Sydney Sun-Herald* on 9 February. But this box would open a very different bag of tricks from the box James Murray had in mind. The very act of going to the secular courts on this issue might leave the church open to loss of many of its current privileges, including exemption from discrimination legislation, Dempster pointed out. And going to court may well cost the churches even more, in terms of their diminishing status in Australian life. Don Chipp, writing in *The Sunday Telegraph* of 26 January, was outraged by the very notion of resistance to women priests: "It is not only incongruous, it is outrageous that the notion should persist in a religion based on love, equality and charity that a woman is not fit to perform the duties of a priest or minister."

At an entirely different level, a couple of journalists asked the really hard ques-

tions. The sad demise of the professional religion reporter on too many major newspapers has meant that there are few journalists who understand that the churches and their groupings are political bodies as well as pious institutions. The Anglican Church is, in some places, as faction ridden as the ALP. In Sydney in particular, at least until very recently, certain key people could mobilise determined and concerted action against activities they deplored at a speed and efficiency which would be the envy of any political party.

General reporters, however, who usually belong to the dominant nonreligious ethos of the journalistic sub-culture, feel out of their depth in religious reporting. They tend to accept news from the churches at its face value.

Not this time! Sonya Voumard, writing in *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*. (4 February), exposed the role of the Sydney Anglican Church League in the campaign against women's ordination. She quoted a Sydney clergyman as describing the League as controlling the Diocese of Sydney like a "well-organised political party which does not encourage dissent". She spoke to a variety of men and women in Sydney in what was an admirably fair and balanced article. It was just a beginning at scratching the surface of the political machinations that lie behind the defeat of women's ordination moves over the last decade and a half. But it was a useful beginning.

She was followed swiftly by a stirring effort from one of *The Age's* correspondents in Canberra, Margo Kingston (*The Age*, 5 February). She delved into the workings of the Association for the Apostolic Ministry, a body formed three years ago to mastermind the opposition to women priests, and exposed its role in the court challenge to Owen Dowling. It pub-

licly paraded, for the first time, the close links between AAM and powerful, conservative Roman Catholic bodies which fight women's ordination through publications such as *AD2000*.

Again, there is much more that could be said on this issue. But both articles were a helpful corrective to the naive reporting which had continually claimed that the court case was brought simply by the actual plaintiffs, also described as 'two ministers and a parishioner', a description which suggests they were aggrieved, and possibly eccentric, individuals.

In all the years of media reporting of the women's ordination debate, the two articles were rare for their worthwhile and generally accurate attempts to get behind the 'news'.

Editorials flew thick and fast. Religious issues are rarely the subject of mainstream editorialising, but the women's ordination debate has always been the exception. Since it first came to public prominence, newspapers have chosen to comment on it. Almost always, the editorials have been strongly pro-women, and have chastised the church for its archaic attitudes. It was merely a "temporary setback", *The Sunday Age* of 1 February proclaimed, predicting that it was also a Pyrrhic victory for the opponents. Their action in going to the courts would hasten the day when women were priests, because it had made the resolution of the matter so much more urgent.

The Canberra Times (1 February) was furious. "It is an appalling decision. It is flagrantly sexist," it thundered. "A clearer case of differentiation and discrimination is hard to imagine." It continued that women could no longer have faith in the courts, to which they had looked as "protectors and upholders of their rights to

equality". On two occasions, *The Sydney Morning Herald* (29 January, 1 February) raged against court interference in the church's affairs, warning the church of the grave implications that might have.

Again and again, over the years the editorials have taken the church to task for its outmoded, patriarchal views of women, which are increasingly ensuring that it is out of step with a society which treats women as equals in every walk of life. This viewpoint is quickly dismissed by those who oppose women priests. The issue is not about female equality at all, or justice, and certainly not about women's rights, they claim. "We don't have rights in the church, we have duties, and this thing about rights is brought over from the secular world", insisted the Rev John Potter, Melbourne chairman of the Association for the Apostolic Ministry in Margo Kingston's *Age* article.

Those who argue the case for women's ministry talk of 'rights' in the context of the right of women who believe they are called to be priests, to have that vocation tested seriously, a 'right' that already belongs to men. This, however, is perhaps too subtle for the general press, as indeed it clearly is for those who oppose women's ordination. But the editorial writers are quite correct about the level at which ordinary Australians perceive the issue. They see a church blatantly and persistently refusing to accord women the justice they rightly receive in secular society, no matter how delicate the theological nuances of that justice might be. In those terms, the church is archaic, patriarchal, outmoded, no matter what arguments it offers to justify its position. Many would say, thank God for the editorialists, for their persistence in seeing this discrimination for what it is.

From the evidence of the letters columns and the talk-back shows, the editorials accurately reflect public opinion. Dorothy Roberts, of Caulfield Vic, writing to *The Age* (10 February), suggested that it was about time all women withdrew from the church, "leaving the men to run the show". "Why is the church allowed to be exempt from anti-discrimination laws?" asked Mollie Coleman, of Oakleigh Vic, in the same edition. On the same page was a letter from Kathleen Cranage, of Brunswick Vic, who commented: "It is high time for all concerned to begin to expose the numerous other situations where women are up against church institutions and associations (such as the Association for the Apostolic Ministry) which are, in effect, operating male clergy protection rackets".

The letters also reflected a growing impatience and radicalisation of public opinion. Geoff Smith, of Macleod West Vic, who identified himself as a churchwarden, wrote that he had always believed the ordination of women should only come about by "due process" in the interests of unity. "I no longer hold that view", he wrote. "I urge bishops to act without delay to ordain women The situation is akin to Jesus cleansing the temple." (*The Age*, 10 February).

This community radicalisation had less public manifestations too, it seems. Anecdotal evidence suggests that numbers of Sydney Anglicans, who had not bothered to buck their clergy's opposition to women priests in the past, were appalled at the spectacle of their church leaders challenging the bishop of another diocese in open court. Reliable sources report that they communicated their dismay in no uncertain terms to their rectors, inspiring to some degree Sydney Diocese Standing Committee's urgent search for a

solution.

Cartoons conveyed the essential silliness of the power game. Perhaps Petty won the prize for the most perceptive cartoon this time. A group of elderly, smug clergy hear their leader tell them; "If God had meant women to be ordained, He wouldn't have put men in charge of ordaining people." Outside, a group of women press their noses up against the grand Gothic window (*Age*, 25 January). Tanberg hit the spot as usual with his wry drawing of a self-satisfied cleric telling his all-female congregation that a "woman's place is in the congregation". The women looked decidedly angry! (*The Age*, 1 February). Another Tanberg, on the same day in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, had a clergyman devoutly stating: "It's a time for charity, prayer and contemplation". In the next frame, his real thoughts are revealed: "We'll keep those bloody women out".

And where does the press itself stand on all this? Most of the journalists who have written on the issues, both recently and in the past, are clearly not churchgoers, and some may not even be believers. Their frequent basic misunderstandings of the admittedly complex legal and theological issues involved, make it abundantly clear that they come to the subject as outsiders.

It is only fair to say that they do not come to it as totally impartial observers, however. Like most Australians, they regard the equality of women in all walks of life as natural and obvious, no matter how limited their own practice of feminist principles might be. Like most Australians, they believe in the 'fair go'. They don't like to see an elite with a male club mentality going to extraordinary lengths to keep women out. They don't like to see a minority endlessly frustrating

the majority through questionable legalistic tactics.

So their obvious sympathy is with the pro-women's movement. Some, in fact, have been genuinely puzzled as to why anyone would not want to admit women to the priesthood. On more than one occasion, I have been approached by journalists who want to know what arguments opponents could advance for denying women this role. They are even more confused when they actually hear them!

Leading Australian media figures have expressed privately their sympathy for, and their solidarity with, the women's cause. One told me that she could see no point in trying to be rigorously impartial about the issue. It was akin to being impartial to men beating their wives, she said. Wife-beaters could no longer expect that the community would accord them a right to their own views, no matter how different the community's attitude might once have been. So it was with the women priests debate; there could be only one acceptable stance in modern Australian society.

That said, some journalists have also been rather dismissive of the issue, in the way secular feminists have been. Why on earth would anyone bother to reform such a hopelessly patriarchal institution as the Christian church? Why would any sane woman want a role in it? they argue. However, as they have come to the issue at crisis points such as the Canberra/Goulburn affair, they have usually mellowed their cynicism. Witnessing the anguish of ordinary, decent women, they have sometimes become quite emotional, and decidedly supportive. Some reports suggest that hard-bitten journalists in the court were seen to wipe a tear from their eye when the appeal judges stopped the Goulburn ordination at the eleventh hour. Cer-

tainly, ABC religion department journalists have admitted to real distress over that weekend.

This perhaps goes part of the way to explain why the media has been so fascinated by this issue from its very beginnings. It is a rattling good story, of course, as women pit themselves against a male hierarchy as the suffragists did nearly a century ago. There is controversy, conflict, high emotion, and impassioned argument. There has also been some posturing and public 'baiting' over the years, that has provided some first-rate copy. But more than that, press representatives have often felt themselves drawn to something powerfully elemental happening in this debate.

At heart, the debate is about a lot more than letting women into yet another profession. It is about the nature of the holy, of God, that is at stake. Those that oppose women's ordination know that full well. They have strongly argued for what can only be called a 'male primacy', when they insist they male pronouns for God are necessary, and when they claim that the gender of Jesus and his apostles is critically important.

A full acceptance of women as sacred ministers, perceived as capable of mediating God and humanity, will subtly alter the general perception of god as somehow male (as in the 'bearded old man in the sky'). That in turn will affect the community perception of women, if they come to be seen not only equal, but also potentially holy.

It is at this point that the great unchurched become involved in this issue. Most Australians are affected at some level by the debate about women's role, whether in the workplace, in education, or in the home. It might, in some instances, come down to such basic issues

as who washes up! The women priests debate looks at this universal issue from the perspective of ultimate reality, even eternity. So journalists and their public alike, who might never darken a church door, are nevertheless fascinated by this multi-faceted dispute.

The media's role in the debate has at times been crucial, simply from the perspective of revealing the situation to the public. This has never been so true as it was last February. Committed Anglicans, on both sides of the debate, were inundated by community opinion, even outrage, because of what the public had seen and heard and read through the media. Less involved but devout Anglicans were also made aware of the crisis in the church. In some cases they became vocal in their distress at seeing their church pulled apart in the secular courts. Some were embarrassed, some ashamed, some angry. But nearly all realised that the church now had no alternative but to get its house in order, and quickly. There can be no doubt that that opinion has been made abundantly clear to the bishops and other leaders of the church. The power brokers are now convinced, at a level that is no longer merely cerebral.

To those who support the ordination of women, this is a most gratifying result to an horrendous and deeply distressing episode. At least the church, so often isolated from community attitudes and concerns, now knows that it is firmly in the public spotlight. In the end this may prove to be far more persuasive than all the learned theological treatises and synodical affirmations that have supported women's ordination for 20 years in this country. Well meaning as they were, they perhaps always lacked real motivation. Now, there is the most powerful motivation of all, the fear of complete public

ridicule and disowning. Great and godly changes have happened in the life of the church for less worthy motives in the past; just remember Henry VIII and his divorce.

Has the media, then, been manipulated by the pro-women's forces? Opponents would claim that it has, and cite the few advocates, such as James Murray, they have in the mainstream press. Certainly the Movement for the Ordination of Women has become very skilled and professional in its handling of the media over the years. Its representatives have made good contacts with journalists, and capitalised on them. But that has been a long, slow process and probably a response to initial media interest rather than an instigator of it. There are few James Murrays because their views are decidedly minority, both in the Anglican Church of Aus-

tralia and the wider community. The relative strength of the two positions is probably fairly represented.

The women's ordination debate in the Anglican church may soon disappear from the media. Over the next couple of years, as women are ordained priests in most diocese, the issue will subside. There will be the occasional local flurry, and perhaps another chapter in the saga when the church has to face the notion of women bishops in a decade or so.

It seems unlikely we will ever see again the concentration of media interest we saw in February this year. In a sense, the media will have only itself to blame for the loss of this hardy perennial. For there can be no doubt that it will have contributed significantly to any (relatively) speedy resolution to the sorrows of the women of Canberra and Goulburn.

Religion in the Mainstream Press: The Challenge for the Future

*Deborah Selway
Griffith University*

The mainstream media have often been criticised for the poor quality and quantity of religion news offered to the public. In Australia, a survey of religion coverage in *The Bulletin* 1968-1988, concluded that the magazine's consideration given to religion sold short the public and forestalled serious reckoning with the humanity of its readership¹. Likewise, a study of religion writing in *The Sydney Morning Herald* 1978-1988 concluded that the newspaper fell short in its ability to portray the topic of religion in a balanced and realistic manner². Another Australian study sought the views of the

clergy toward the media and found that, in general, the clergy were suspicious of journalists and uncertain as to how to go about improving the media's handling of religion³. Those three studies indicate some fundamental problems inherent in the presentation of religion news in Australia's mainstream media.

This study attempts to understand why those problems occur and to search for possible solutions⁴. Interviews were conducted in 1990-91 with staff religion writers⁵ in Australia's major metropolitan daily newspapers. At that time, nine out of Australia's thirteen daily newspapers

identified a staff member as a religion writer. Of those, eight writers agreed to be interviewed. Each writer was questioned regarding their background and experience, the nature of their work, the stories they wrote, their personal beliefs, and their predictions for the future of religion writing. The aim of the study was to explore and identify the nature and role of religion writers and the religion round (or 'beat') in the print media. The design of the research was based on similar United States studies⁶.

The Nature of Religion Reporters

Australian religion writers in major metropolitan daily newspapers are typically experienced senior A or B grade reporters committed to their role as religion writers. Most are men, in their late thirties or older, with at least ten years' experience as journalists and three years' experience as religion writers. Half of the religion writers had closer to twenty years' experience or more as journalists. They are more likely to be believers than atheists or agnostics and are just as likely to be Anglicans as Roman Catholics. Most of the writers view religious affiliation as a positive attribute of a religion reporter so long as professional distance in reporting and a critical commitment to faith is maintained. They consider that a personal interest in religion provides a background to, and an awareness of, religious affairs issues. The journalists usually maintain a low level of engagement in their religion out of concern over conflict of interest and/or a general lack of time.

At least half of the religion writers became religion journalists because of their personal interest in the area. For others like Graham Downie (*The Canberra*

Times), becoming a religion writer just happened and his interest developed from there. He said that just after he was appointed as a journalist in 1973 to write the community service column "Voters' Voice", his chief-of-staff at the time said: "Whoever does Voter's Voice does God". Graham Downie is still writing "God" into the 1990s.

With this level of experience and commitment among the religion writers, their professionalism is high. Many have also completed (or are completing) a tertiary qualification but not necessarily in the field of journalism or religion/theology.

Time and Space Spent on Religion Reporting

When questioned about the time available to them to report religion news and the space allocated to them in the daily press, the writers' answers were revealing. Compared to the United States experience, religion writers in Australia are allocated precious little time and guaranteed minuscule space in the pages of our daily newspapers. In the US, for example, 75 per cent of the surveyed religion writers spent 30 hours per week or more collecting and writing religion news. Only 9 per cent worked any less than half-time on the job⁷. Australia's religion reporters spend one-third or less of their time on the religion round. Religion reporting is considered by most metropolitan daily newspaper establishments as a minor round and religion reporting is usually done in conjunction with two other rounds (for example, education and immigration). In fact, there are religion writers who resort to writing religion in their spare-time or in their own time to ensure religion maintains a presence in their

newspapers.

When considering the amount of guaranteed space allocated to Australian religion writers, again a vast discrepancy was identified between the Australian and the United States experience. Ninety two per cent of surveyed US newspapers set aside guaranteed space for religion news. Of those newspapers, almost half allocated two or more pages to religion reporting⁸. In Australia, only two major metropolitan daily newspapers offer guaranteed space to religion news reporting (not to be confused with a religion comment column⁹). *The Canberra Times* allocates a half a page each Wednesday for religion news. Brisbane's *The Courier-Mail*, offers an eighth of a page each Monday.

In addition to the limitation of time and space constraints placed on religion writers, the religion round is treated by most mainstream daily newspapers as a second class round within the newspaper infrastructure. This class stigma tends to remain despite the senior status of most religion reporters. Because the religion round is considered "a bit of a luxury" and has low status, it is one of the first rounds to suffer cutbacks when economic times are tough and staffing is tight.

To report religion well, journalists need both the time and the space to ensure religion news is adequately covered. On both fronts, most religion writers are frustrated in their efforts. These barriers to quality and quantity reporting are further hampered by the low status of the religion round. In actions, if not in words, the mainstream newspaper industry of Australia deems religion reporting unimportant and of minimal public interest by limiting the time and space commitment to the religion round.

Religion Stories that Gain Media Coverage

Religion writers are first and foremost reporters. They think in terms of stories and they write the type of stories they know are most likely to gain press coverage. When asked about the type of stories that gain print coverage they speak of controversy, novelty and the local angle as important news values. One writer said:

The aim of the game is to get interesting news-worthy stories in the paper and whether you think it's good or bad, the controversy and the local angle to a story is what'll get it up front in a newspaper.

It is not suggested here, however, that religion writers purposely set out to cover controversy. Most of the reporters are mature writers who seem more interested in the creative challenge of writing quality religion news than they are in creating sensation. However, it is undeniable that controversy is a news value used in religion journalism just as much as in any other field of journalism. As Graham Williams (*The Sydney Morning Herald*) said:

One of the things I feel about religion reporting ... is that there used to be a kind of holiness, a sacredness about religion areas and that is no longer so. Just because they are religious bodies is no reason, ipso facto, to report them.

Times have changed and it is no longer a case of reporting last Sunday's sermon. Religion news has to compete, and compete successfully, with other types of news if it is to gain space at all in most Australian daily newspapers. One aspect of being able to compete successfully is to be able to produce the types of

stories that will survive the editorial gatekeeping process. Errol Simper (*The Australian*) said: The first battle was for the news to appeal to editorial staff. "No one out there's going to read it (a religion story) unless you can get it through the editor, the deputy editor, the assistant editor, the sub-editor".

Religion news (as much as any other news) must be presented in such a fashion as to fit the news values of our modern mainstream press if it is to gain print coverage. Controversy, novelty and a local angle to a story fit the formula. The writers are aware of that and, in most instances, submit to it - to do otherwise would be to waste their already limited time on stories that would not gain print coverage.

Media Liaison

Religion writers, like other journalists, use a wide range of sources to gather information. Press releases, newspapers, books, magazines and the wire service are used by religion reporters in the course of their work. The source they most rely upon for information, however, is personal contact with people in the religious community.

All the reporters stressed the importance of personal contacts as their main source of news and most commented on how much they enjoyed contact with the religious community. The development of contacts was viewed as an on-going, slow process. Clearly, the religion writers rely heavily on people from within the church and other religious communities to keep them informed on a personal one-to-one basis. To develop a relationship with a religion writer may be one of the most reliable ways of gaining press coverage for

religion.

A few religion writers, though, complained about the general reluctance and inexperience of the religious community in dealing with the media. One writer said:

The churches aren't too good at handling the media in most cases so it's more a matter of getting to know people who provide you with information that's useful.

He said many religious groups were generally very suspicious of the media and had a "medieval attitude" towards the press.

The problems of suspicion and lack of experience were highlighted most when the religion writers were questioned about their coverage of Australia's minority religions (for example, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam). One writer said those types of groups tended not to seek him out to have their point of view aired. He also said that it was not so much that he discriminated against them but rather that he lacked an understanding of them.

A few of the writers admitted their coverage of the minority religions was deficient. One writer went so far as to say that reporting on minority religions was an area that religion writers felt insecure about. He said some background knowledge of the minority religions was an advantage. For instance, he said, one would need to do a lot of reading on Islam to be adequately informed on the topic. Most writers, however, did not hold any concerns about reporting the minority religions. Many religion writers expressed a desire to improve their coverage of the minority religions and some were attempting to become more informed about the beliefs and practices of the minority religions and were slowly developing contacts within those groups.

Developing contacts is an important aspect of a religion writer's task. The writers said that personal contacts were rarely lost through ill-will. Once a relationship with a person in the religious community was built, trust was likely to be maintained over the years. This being the case, there is at least some ground for the religious community to develop trust in religion writers.

Religion Writing for the Future

Without exception, all the reporters predicted a secure future for religion writing in Australia's mainstream daily press. They believe there will always be a place for religion reporting so long as religion remains a relevant force in society. Most believe the newspaper industry has an obligation to report religion news. One writer said it would be remiss of a newspaper not to cover a significant part of a community in which religious expression was important.

This optimistic view was qualified, however, by the underlying concern of some journalists that religion writing was in a slump and that the status of the religion round had been falling for some years. Most agreed they would have to fight harder now and into the future to gain coverage for religion news. Lindsay Tuffin (*The Mercury*) offered this solution to the struggle. He said:

I think it's a case of being creative. I think those with a religious commitment within news organisations have a responsibility to do something about that (religion writing) I think the church itself has a responsibility to keep it there and I am optimistic that it will remain there. I think it's a question of people who have a religious commitment within those organisations acting on that, doing something

about it, saying: 'Why don't you run a column if you're not going to cover the news events, why don't you run a column a week or every now and again'.

Conclusion: The Challenge for the Future

The results of this study highlight the tough challenges the religion writers of Australia face in gaining print coverage for religion news in the daily press. In most cases, the religion writers are determined, in spite of the many obstacles they face, to continue to cover religion in Australia. But, to turn the current downward trend in religion reporting around, the journalists and Australia's religious communities are going to have to work together to secure religion a place in the daily press of the future.

Religion writing in Australia's mainstream press is currently struggling to survive. Viewed in toto, the future of religion writing looks dim if not doomed. Undoubtedly, the reporting of religion news will continue in the pages of the press but what may well be endangered is the quality and quantity of that news. Since early 1990, Australia's mainstream press has continued to reduce its commitment to religion reporting. *The Sydney Morning Herald* no longer has an official religion round and has cancelled Alan Gill's ¹⁰ regular religion column. The religion round at *The Age* (Melbourne), once Australia's only full-time religion round, does not currently support a religion round at all. Muriel Porter's ¹¹ religion column in *The Sunday Sun* was cancelled. Six of Australia's major daily newspapers do not have an official religion round and most of those do not intend establishing one in the future. Without Australia's daily newspapers committing

time and space to religion writing, the quality and quantity of religion news is likely to suffer.

For religion writing to survive and flourish, trust will need develop between the religious communities and the religion writers if dialogue is to flow and potential stories are to gain print coverage. Media workshops for religious groups would assist in overcoming the problems of reluctance and inexperience in dealing with the media. Religion writers, in turn, would gain by continuing their efforts to pursue knowledge of Australia's growing minority religions and by developing contacts within those groups. Efforts in this area would enhance the reporting of Australia's multi-faith society.

The challenge of breaking the expectation that news is newsworthy only if it is controversial is another difficult hurdle to overcome. There is probably little solace in acknowledging that it is not a problem peculiar to the reporting of religion news alone but seems endemic in the media industry generally. This being the case, guaranteed space for religion news becomes more important. When news is guaranteed space it does not have to compete with sensational news headlines and, therefore, the pressure on the journalist to seek out controversial and novel news is reduced. By both providing guaranteed space and allowing religion news to compete with other news in the main section of the newspaper, editors and Australia's religious communities can be assured a more balanced and realistic coverage of religion in Australia.

Finally, within the journalists' optimistic prediction that there will always be a place for religion reporting so long as religion remains a relevant force in Australian society, they have made a poignant point. Religion will not be viewed as rele-

vant by Australia's mainstream media so long as it remains a silent force in our society. Religion, or a belief in God, according to the statistics, is an aspect in the lives of approximately 80 per cent of Australians¹². So long as that 80 per cent remain the silent majority, the depiction of religion in the media will remain limited and the broad history of religion in Australia will go vastly unrecorded in the pages of the mainstream press.

Notes and References

1. Richard A. Hutch, 'Religion as depicted in *The Bulletin*, 1978-1988', *Australian Journalism Review*, Vol.10, 1988, p.42.
2. Deborah A. Selway, 'Religion in the Print Media: A study of the portrayal of religion in *The Sydney Morning Herald* 1978-1988', unpublished Honours thesis, University of Queensland, 1989, pp.105-106.
3. Irene Oliver, 'Clergy's views of the media', *Australian Journalism Review*, Vol.10, 1988, p.43.
4. Deborah A. Selway, 'Religion Writers and the Religion Round in Australia's Major Metropolitan Daily Newspapers', unpublished Master of Journalism thesis, University of Queensland, 1991.
5. This study differentiates between religion staff reporters whose task it is to report religion news and religion comment columnists who are usually (but not always) contributors. Both styles of religion writing play an important role in the presentation of religion in the print media. However, the focus of this research is on the reporters rather than the columnists, although interviews were conducted with Australia's most well-known religion columnists, James S. Murray, Alan Gill and Muriel Porter and a chapter was included in the original report. See, Deborah A. Selway *ibid* pp. 67-70.
6. See, Judith M. Buddenbaum, 'The religion beat at daily newspapers', *Newspaper Research Journal*, Vol.9, no.4, Summer 1988,

pp.57-69; Ernest C. Hynds, 'Large daily newspapers have improved coverage of religion', *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol.64, no.2-3, Summer-Autumn 1987, pp. 444-448; Terry Mattingly, 'The religion beat: out of the ghetto, into the mainsheets', *The Quill*, January 1983, pp. 12-21; and Don Ranly, 'How religion editors of newspapers view their jobs and religion', *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol.55, no. 4, Winter 1979, pp. 844-849.

7. Ernest C. Hynds, *ibid* pp.445.

8. Judith A. Buddenbaum, 'Covering religion news at daily newspapers'. Presented to the Newspaper Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, San Antonio, Texas, August 1-4 1987, ERIC microfilm p.15.

9. Of Australia's thirteen major metropolitan daily newspapers (at the time of the study), six featured a religion comment column.

10. Alan Gill was a staff journalist on *The Sydney Morning Herald* for approximately 18

years. For much of that time he was a religious affairs writer. He left in 1988 but continued to write his regular religion column for *The Sydney Morning Herald* until the column ceased in mid-1990. He said the religion column was a tradition at *The Sydney Morning Herald* which dated back to 1893 and, as such, was "the longest running column on any subject in any newspaper in Australia". Alan Gill continues to write occasional freelance articles for *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

11. Muriel Porter has 26 years' experience as a journalist and for 5 years wrote a regular religion column for the *The Daily Sun* and then the *Sunday Sun* (Melbourne). Her column was cancelled in October 1990.

12. Peter Bentley, 'Tricia Blombery and Philip J. Hughes, 1990, *A Yearbook for Australian Churches, 1991*. Hawthorn, Victoria: The Christian Research Association, 1990, pp.166.

The Christian Press in Australia

David Busch
Editor Religion-Watch

Introduction

Some 30 years after the advent of television in Australia, and over 60 years since commercial radio began, the print medium continues to dominate the communications regime of the Australian churches.

This situation stands, in part, as a commentary on the churches' hesitation in recognising the value of, and applying adequate resources to, the use of 'live' media, particularly in their public communication strategies.

But whatever else it might suggest, the churches' dependence upon the print me-

dium has persisted largely because newspapers and magazines have proven an economical and effective method of reaching audiences within and outside the church.

Today the Christian press is keenly aware that it sits within the context of an ever-developing and increasingly competitive media environment.

The Christian Press Industry

With a long history behind it, the publishing of Christian periodicals in Australia has reached the point where the proliferation of titles, and their variety and scope, makes this sector one of the

most diverse in Australian publishing.

The number of newspapers, magazines and other journals published at least twice-yearly by churches and Christian agencies other than local parishes exceeds 500.

These encompass the full range of formats, from tabloid newspaper to A5 magazine; of circulations, from 250 to 125,000; of frequencies, from weekly to bi-annually; and of publishers, from denominations to institutions, mission groups, theological colleges and welfare agencies.

The industry can be described in terms of three broad segments (though some publications do not fit well into such categories). These are the church press (those publications primarily serving the needs of a denomination or institution); the non-denominational press (serving primarily the Christian market across denominational lines) and the public Christian press (targeted at a general, or substantially non-church, market).

(a) The church press.

Those publications which predominantly serve denominational or institutional interests adopt a primary purpose of nurturing the sense of identity and belonging among the church membership by reporting about events, people and issues pertaining to the life of that church. Some are published by denominational mission or welfare agencies and play a similar role with respect to their supporters.

Most are monthlies, either newspapers or magazines. Some, such as in the smaller Catholic and Anglican dioceses, are less frequent and adopt a more modest production format. Only six are weekly:

three tabloids from metropolitan Catholic dioceses (Brisbane - *The Catholic Leader*, Sydney - *The Catholic Weekly*, and Perth - *The Record*), the independent national Anglican tabloid *Church Scene*, the Seventh-day Adventist news-magazine *The Record*, and the Salvation Army's *War Cry* newspaper.

This category includes many national publications which are geared towards specialised interests within a denomination (for example, those dealing with missions, theology, continuing education or spirituality - the Catholic Church in particular has quite a stable of such publications). But in the production of general interest publications for the church membership, there is an important philosophical tension between state or regional publications and national ones.

While national publications have benefits in economies of scale and centralising of publishing resources, they lack the geographical proximity and more local flavour of state or regional journals. Readership surveys by church publications consistently reveal that a large majority of readers have a strong preference for local news, local people and local issues. On the other hand, the lack of a national membership journal can inhibit a sense of cohesion and identity among church members and foster parochialism.

The smaller denominations publish their primary membership publications on a national basis. Among them are the Lutheran, Presbyterian, Churches of Christ, Seventh Day Adventist, Assemblies of God, Reformed, Congregational, Wesleyan Methodist and Apostolic Churches, the Salvation Army, and many of the Orthodox Churches. Generally, this is more a result of economics than communication philosophy, and within these churches there are state-based publica-

tions where resources permit (such as the Presbyterian Church in Victoria which has its own newspaper).

Of the larger denominations, only the Anglican Church is served by a national news-and-issues publication, *Church Scene*. It began in 1971 as the church was developing a national identity foreshadowed by the national Constitution of 1960 and later to be celebrated in the new Australian prayer book in 1978. Significantly the paper is published by Church Press Ltd which, while having bishops and leading Anglicans on its board, remains structurally and financially independent of the Anglican Church. While its circulation is not huge (4000) its readership undoubtedly embraces most of the church's clergy and leading lay people. It has earned an important niche for itself because of its immediacy as the only weekly Anglican publication, and its respected reportage and perspectives touch on the many issues which affect the life of such a diverse and far-flung church. Its interest in major non-Anglican news also has extended the breadth of its readership.

The Catholic and Uniting Churches remain without a national journal of this kind. In the Catholic Church, the matter historically has been redressed to some extent by the selling of the various metropolitan diocesan weekly newspapers across state borders, so that, in the time when the *Advocate* was being published in Melbourne, attenders at Mass at a capital city cathedral would have the option of buying at least the *Catholic Leader*, the *Catholic Weekly* and the *Advocate*. However this situation has diminished somewhat. With the demise of the *Advocate* in 1990, only the *Leader* and the *Weekly* assert a strong national thrust in their reportage of Catholic affairs (while still necessarily retaining an emphasis on

their home diocese). The other metropolitan dioceses (Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth and Canberra - which only started its monthly paper in 1988) have strong publications but their focus is more clearly within their diocesan family. Jesuit priest Fr Paul Duffy, in his 1987 report to the Australian bishops on communications within the church, affirmed the vigorous history of diocesan-based publications but suggested ways in which they could link together to better serve the church's national interests. The establishment of a national media office for the Australian Bishops' Conference was one result of his report.

At its inauguration in 1977, the Uniting Church in Australia inherited a stable of state-based Methodist papers. Despite various explorations over the past 15 years of the feasibility and desirability of a national journal - either instead of or in addition to its state publications - the Methodist legacy remains. However, various models of cooperative coverage of news and features have been devised. Most significant was the joint publication of a monthly magazine, *Journey*, by the Queensland, New South Wales and Northern synods in the late 1980s. The venture ended when the NSW synod withdrew in favour of launching its own every-member magazine. Currently the network of Uniting Church editors is probably at its strongest point ever, facilitated in part by the appointment in 1986 of a communications director in the national assembly office and the subsequent development of a national communications unit. The denomination has major publications in five of its six synods: three magazines and two newspapers, all monthlies.

The tension between national and more local denominational publications was highlighted in December 1991 when

the *Australian Baptist* folded. The subscription-based monthly magazine - which had served the national Baptist market for nearly all of this century - had struggled in recent years to lift its circulation beyond 3000 and in the end it was judged unviable. A significant factor in its demise was that each of the state Baptist Unions has significant monthly periodicals, and a glossy magazine, the *National Baptist*, is given free to every Baptist family in Australia each quarter.

The content of the denominational press typically encompasses news, feature articles, letters, reviews (most often books, sometimes film, rarely TV or videos), columnist and noticeboard-style information about coming events. Many include a column from the bishop, moderator or other church leader. Some (including the Presbyterian, Lutheran and some Catholic press) include answers to questions about the church's doctrine or practice. Most of the news coverage is of local church or state/diocese happenings; national news mostly is that which pertains to the particular denomination (due perhaps to the limited availability of fresh news from outside one's own church). International news, when it does appear, most often is in a special section and presented in brief digest form.

Of course there are exceptions to this recipe. Two, in particular, suggest that new paradigms are possible for the denominational press. *The Catholic Leader* has adopted a vigorous approach to its coverage of major national and international news using key Catholic figures as its sources or commentators. Its front page stories and inside features often could hold their own alongside similar coverage in the daily press. It is a rare but significant emphasis for a religious newspaper to adopt. The second noteworthy

exception is *Crosslight*, the Uniting Church magazine for Victoria and Tasmania. Since its beginning only last February, the monthly has adopted an editorial line aimed not so much at an audience firmly entrenched in the church but more at those seeking to make a clearer connection between life and religious faith. It covers Uniting Church-related news and issues, but mostly in a way that speaks less about structure and process and more about underlying spiritual values. It also covers a lot of general-interest religious stories.

(b) The non-denominational press primarily serving the Christian market.

The range of non-denominational, trans-denominational, para-church and independent Christian agencies is huge - be they mission, welfare, pastoral ministry or special interest - and most of them publish a periodical of some kind.

In many instances their market is defined by the readers' involvement in, or support for, the agency or group concerned. The publication might be for information and stimulation - groups such as the Christian Research Association, Festival of Light and the Australian Evangelical Alliance (and its state counterparts) publish such periodicals. Or, it might tell the story of the agency's work in order to solicit giving or other service from supporters. Many mission agencies have publications for this purpose.

This category also includes a significant number of publications dedicated to particular areas of Christian interest or practical ministry - titles cover such fields as children's and inter-generational ministry, creative Christian writing, mission in

the community, chaplaincy, Christianity and the arts, rural ministry, spirituality, and vocational resources for clergy and others engaged in pastoral ministry.

Finally, there are publications which are not linked to any broader institution or movement and whose market is defined by theological interests. Some are out of an evangelical persuasion (most notably the *New Life* weekly newspaper, but also others such as the *Biblical Fundamentalist*); some out of a pentecostal persuasion (such as *New Day* and *Renewing Australia*); some out of a social justice persuasion (for example, *Adelaide Voices*, *National Outlook*); some out of a feminist persuasion (for example, *Women-Church*, *Voices from the Silence*).

Identifiable for its uniqueness in this segment is *On Being*, a monthly magazine which began in 1974. Dealing with a wide range of issues in a variety of styles, it seeks to encompass a broad Christian market beyond any limitations of theological persuasion or practical interest. With a circulation of 7500 and a readership of four times that across the spectrum of denominations, it appears that the formula is working - undergirded by a sustained and creative marketing campaign.

(c) The public Christian press.

This group comprises those periodicals which self-consciously seek an audience wider than the Christian market, usually for evangelistic purposes whether overt or covert. These are relatively few in number but present interesting models of communication which seek to bridge the gap between traditional faith and the community.

Very few come from denominational stables. One of significance is *Signs of the Times*. This Seventh-day Adventist magazine recently was revamped into a format similar to that of the *Readers Digest*. It is an attractive, highly readable A5-size magazine with articles of general interest on health, personalities, financial matters, lifestyle and some Christian topics. Church members are encouraged to buy quantities for distribution in their neighbourhood.

A significant denominational-based newcomer to this field is *Eureka Street*, published by Jesuit Publications as a monthly magazine of theology, politics and culture. With an emphasis on current social and political issues and a high standard of presentation, *Eureka Street* is aimed at an educated (but not necessarily church) readership, and is sold by subscription and at newsagents.

The War Cry is well-known as the Salvation Army's newspaper. While it contains a sizeable element of corps news it does feature items for non-Christians and is marketed in hotels and public places as an evangelistic tool. The Uniting Church magazine, *Crosslight* (mentioned in segment (a) above), is also striving, at least in part, for a non-Christian audience.

On the non-denominational side, the most widely distributed publications are *Challenge: The Good Newspaper* (a monthly tabloid out of Perth), and *Tell* (a monthly magazine for teenagers, from Fusion Ministries). While *Challenge* is overtly Christian in its featuring of testimonies and commentaries, *Tell* prefers to emphasise Christian values and provoke God-consciousness through articles on personalities, music, television, relationships, current events and other items of interest to young people.

Encounter, styled as "the magazine for busy people", provides real-life stories and general help articles in a slim, A5 monthly magazine which is designed to be given out at prisons, in surgery waiting rooms, and so on. Key articles are re-published as four-colour brochures designed for letterbox evangelism by local churches. Two publications addressing family concerns from a Christian perspective are *Above Rubies*, and *Family Issues* which began this year. Also worth noting is *Creation Ex Nihilo*, the glossy quarterly magazine of the Creation Science Foundation designed to show non-Christians the scientific veracity of the Bible.

Industry Trends

What changes have been unfolding among the Christian press in recent years?

The face of the Christian press industry has been changing. These days the faces of church press editors are more likely to be those of women, lay people and persons with professional journalistic experience, than in the past when such jobs automatically went to clergy whether or not they were trained for the task. For example, currently eight diocesan Anglican newspapers (five of them metropolitan) are edited by lay professional women.

The faces of the publications themselves have been changing. A high standard of presentation and design have become recognised as essential if Christian publications are to be accepted by an increasingly discriminating readership. A large number of Christian publications have undergone radical redesigns in the past few years, and the use of high quality paper stock and multi-colour printing are increasingly commonplace.

Related to this has been the rapid introduction of desk-top publishing. In the infancy of computerised publishing about seven years ago, churches took to the new technology faster than almost any other user group. Now, more than 75 per cent of major Christian publications are desk-top published.

Growing attention is being given to market research, as editors seek to gain a clearer picture both of their readership demographics and reader responses to their publications. In the 1970s, the *Central Times* (South Australian Methodist fortnightly paper) was one of the first religious publications to undertake a professionally-based market research survey. In the past three years more than 15 major Christian publications have done so. Most are in the form of reader questionnaires, but some have engaged outside firms for both quantitative and qualitative research of subscribers and non-subscribers.

Perhaps most significant of all has been the strong development in recent years of the Australasian Religious Press Association (ARPA), the industry body which embraces almost 100 major Christian publications in Australia and New Zealand. ARPA has provided a focus and an impetus for much of the professional development and networking among Christian editors, particularly through its annual convention and the ARPA awards judged each year in 19 categories for publication excellence.

ARPA also has spearheaded combined Christian press initiatives which are breaking new ground. Among them is Religion-Watch, a national fortnightly news service covering religious affairs in Australia; and a cooperative advertising package in which ARPA acts as an advertising agency to solicit and process advertise-

ments from prospective national advertisers.

Problems and Possibilities

The Christian press face a crucial period through the 1990s. One significant threat is the dramatic rise in postage costs which religious, charity and other publications will need to shoulder from 1994 when Australia Post's Registered Publications Service is withdrawn. The rises will average between 50 to 100 per cent for many publications. Cost increases of such magnitude pose grave problems for the non-profit, non-commercial religious and charity press, particularly the smaller publications. ARPA has mounted a major protest on the issue to Australia Post and the Federal Government.

The broader question of economic survival is ever-present, particularly for the denominational press. Many church publications remain dependent on annual subsidies from the denominational budget. This exposes them both to rigid denominational cost-cutting exercises in the wake of income shortfalls from congregations, and to the risk of political control being exercised by policy makers who hold the purse strings. In addition, the advent of desk-top publishing in offices has led, in some places, to a reduction of demand for the church's publication unit to take on 'outside jobs' (typesetting, and so on) which previously brought in extra income. The need for a greater measure of financial independence for many church publications remains. Initiatives such as the ARPA national advertising package may tap new sources of income.

A factor in economic viability is circulation. Common with publications in every other area, religious periodicals con-

tinually struggle to maintain subscription levels. Some Christian publications have undertaken imaginative and, at times, very successful promotional drives. Others have abandoned subscriptions and are distributed, either free, or for sale, through local churches. However, changes to such broad market exposure are not always accompanied by appropriate changes to content and style.

Current trends suggest that, in the mainline churches at least, church membership is ageing (church press tend to be read most by older people) and contracting. Further, people in their 20s and 30s tend not to hold to denominational loyalties as strongly as previous generations have done. This holds some serious implications for church publications in terms of their content, style and marketing if they are to gain a readership for the future.

Five years ago at an ARPA conference, the Rev Dr Dean Drayton of the NSW Uniting Church Board of Mission said that he had given up on the church press as an agent of communicating with "people in the pews" because it did not speak about their lives, their faith questions or in their language. There was little evidence, he said, that the church press was anything but peripheral to the religious interests of most people in the congregations. His message was a sobering reminder of the need to be attuned to the interests and needs of the market.

In the same way that the mass circulation publication industry has moved towards increasing specialisation for discreet market groups based on interests and lifestyle, so too the general interest denominational publications will face a similar challenge. Already one major denomination is planning to replace its one national membership periodical with three publications aimed more specifi-

cally at particular segments of its membership market. Other denominations have recognised both the desirability of addressing at least two markets within the church - the general membership and those (such as leaders and clergy) more interested in theological and internal structural news - and the difficulty of appealing to both in the one publication.

For their part, while the trans-denominational publications have established their market segment on the basis of particular interests, donor support or theological persuasion, they will need to sustain significant marketing activities to retain their circulation base without the benefit of readily available internal church processes which open many promotional doors for their denominational counterparts.

The content-market matrix touches on an underlying dichotomy which may inhibit a publication's capacity to address its market with greatest impact. This is the tension inherent in the role of the church press. To what extent can a church journal raise the hard questions or report the unfavourable news that the church leadership would rather not see published? Should the paper reflect the agenda, style and priorities of the denomination (or at least its head office)? Should it serve as a public relations vehicle for a certain style of ecclesiology, or a certain expression of the faith? How should it allow expression of a contrary view? The situation is more problematic when the editor is also media officer or public relations officer for the church - a common alliance which, under some circumstances, is incompatible.

This matter is given new urgency when one considers that with the increas-

ing centralisation of ownership of the mass circulation dailies and weekly magazines, the Christian press remains one of the few independent avenues by which news and issues ignored or poorly canvassed in the mainstream press can be raised to the public agenda. Can the community expect that the churches will set aside their in-house agendas sufficiently to provide opportunity in their publications for pace-setting reporting and discussion on matters of public importance? To fulfil such a role will require resources for research and interviews. While this may be beyond the capacity of any one publication, it should be possible for several publications to collaborate on a given topic for publishing a major article simultaneously in their respective editions. ARPA's Religion-Watch news service may represent a start towards this.

Such a vision presupposes that publications can move beyond their institutional or theological domestication and pursue a Christian vocation defined more in terms of the pursuit of truth, justice, integrity and advocacy for the dispossessed and voiceless. This may be too much to expect to any significant degree from publications which already are burdened with the need to serve a multiplicity of in-house denominational or theological agendas.

Whether or not the Christian press can figure more prominently as an independent social conscience in the vanguard of ethical, moral, political, social and economic debate in Australia remains one of the greatest opportunities and challenges leading Christian editors into the 21st Century.

Seventh-day Adventists According to the *Sydney Morning Herald*

Peter Bentley

Religion and religious groups have rarely received coverage in Australian media circles in proportion to their numerical significance and wide influence in health, education, welfare, social justice and society in general. Certain topics receive regular mention but they are usually topics related to controversy or scandal.

One of the reasons for the scant coverage is the lack of journalists with knowledge of, experience with and interest in religious issues. The degree of knowledge of religion is particularly important because of the possibility of simplification and misrepresentation. This point has particular reference for small groups in Australia, like the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

This article provides an overview of the media coverage of the Seventh-day Adventist Church during this century, with particular reference to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the main Sydney daily newspaper. The *Sydney Morning Herald* seems to provide the most extensive newspaper coverage of the SDAs in Australia, possibly because of the church's high density in the Sydney region (for example, the presence of Cooranbong, Avondale College, various offices and the Sydney Adventist Hospital).

In the first decade of this century, the most common item of publicity was the Seventh-day Adventist annual/regular camp or meeting. In its brief mention of the camp in early January 1905, the *Sydney Morning Herald* also provided a short history of the development of the church,

noting that its membership at that time was about 3000, served by 20 ministers in 60 churches. The article mentioned that the Seventh-day Adventist Church had a focus on health and social reform, particularly relating to temperance and that the various addresses at the camp focussed on "The Signs of the Times" and their relation to the Second Advent (S.M.H., 2/1/1905).

In October 1905, it was reported that another camp had been held which featured very "methodical arrangements" and a "perfect calm and quietude". The article also suggested that: "The air of freedom about such meetings as well as the novelty connected with them makes them, it is claimed both inviting and interesting" (S.M.H., 16/10/1905).

In 1906, the *Herald* noted that there were 106 Seventh-day Adventist churches in Australia and provided a brief profile of the Wahroonga Sanatorium (S.M.H., 24/10/1906).

There appeared occasional references to the camps held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church during the next twenty years in the *Herald*, but usually the reports were brief - 50 to 200 words and mainly descriptive, without interpretation.

In 1934 and 1935, the church achieved some coverage due to the continuing question of employees working on Sunday, which the trade unions complained gave the Seventh-day Adventist companies an unfair advantage (S.M.H. 17/7/1934). The Church, through the Assistant Manager of Avondale Industries, Carl Ulrich, had

lodged an application with the Industrial Commission on behalf of various employees to vary the award conditions. The employees were members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and were paid award wages and observed normal working hours, except for Saturday. The Church and their employees wanted to observe Saturday as their officially recognised day off, thus leaving the Sunday (then the day of National Sabbath in Australia) free for normal work practices (S.M.H., 20/6/1935). The question was decided a few months later and the *Herald* reported that the concept of a 'notional Sunday' had been granted for the company because the people involved in the work were Seventh-day Adventists. For the purposes of the award, Saturday was regarded as Sunday (S.M.H., 12/2/1936).

Interestingly, twenty years later the question of Sunday work arose again, but from a different angle. The Theatrical and Amusement Employees' Association put pressure on the Greater Union Association to stop the Seventh-day Adventist Church from using the Capital Theatre (Sydney) for Sunday night services/evangelical meetings. Although only voluntary labour had been used by the church, "The union's attitude was that if theatres were operated for religious services on Sundays it might prove an excuse for opening them for non-religious purposes". Similar refusals were made to other bodies (S.M.H., 3/11/1954). This dispute flowed on to the suburban cinemas and other venues had to be used (S.M.H., 23/6/1954).

Just after the end of the Second World War, Pastor J.B. Conley, Australian delegate to the New Zealand Conference, was quoted in the *Herald* as condemning the keeping of greyhounds. The reason pro-

vided in the article was that they ate "edible beef". Pastor Conley estimated that 30,000 greyhounds ate 60,000 pounds of beef daily, while Australians were eating less meat in order to send supplies to a "hungry Europe". He also said that if something had to be done with the ashes of the greyhounds they could be used to grow runner beans. The greyhound authorities rejected his claims, saying that the dogs ate horse meat. The article ended implying that this meant a shortage of horses for farms and milk delivery (S.M.H., 15/12/1947).

One year later Pastor Conley defended the Church against (incorrect) reports that there was a mass exodus of people from the cities due to Seventh-day Adventist teaching about the return of Christ and the end of the world (*Daily Mirror*, 2/7/1945). Questions about this aspect of the Church's teaching were taken up some thirty years later with the visit of Dr Pierson.

The building projects and expansion plans of churches are a common area of media interest. In 1952 *The Daily Telegraph* (5/5/92) first reported on the plans for developing a health complex at East Hornsby (Wahroonga). It also reported on the launch of the an appeal for £100,000 for missionary work in the Pacific. (*The Daily Telegraph* 16/2/1953).

Avondale College received some publicity in 1967 with the opening of a new building (S.M.H., 12/6/1967) and the plans for the \$5.5 million dollar hospital at Wahroonga also aroused interest (S.M.H., 19/5/1970).

The hospital was also linked to the Adventist focus on health, which provided a popular media reference from the beginning. The public plans to stop smoking were begun when it was not as popular a health cause as it is today (S.M.H.,

10/12/1967).

Indeed, an article about Adventist health records was headed "How to live longer and be more healthy" (S.M.H., 16/9/1980). This article noted that a university study had found that "The Adventist lifestyle is conducive to less sickness, longer life and less call on health services compared with the general community".

Numerous articles about the Chamberlains during the 1980s contained references to health matters, including the various products of the Sanitarium company and the use of props like coffins in anti-smoking lectures.

In 1973, the President of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Dr Robert Pierson, visited Australia on a seven-week fact finding mission of Adventist work in Australia and the South Pacific. He was interviewed for the *Herald* by Alan Gill, one of the few religious affairs specialists in one of the longest articles to appear about the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Australian press.

Dr Pierson provided a brief description of the Church, outlining that it was a small church with a membership of "ordinary middle-class people". The article noted that members were known for their regular giving to the church (tithing) and their missionary activity in the South Pacific, though Dr Pierson rejected as "absolutely without foundation" allegations that his church used American dollars to buy the allegiance of individuals in developing nations.

The article highlighted their health orientation and hospitals, mentioning that the church had recently opened the Sydney Adventist Hospital, a 309 modern bed complex in Wahroonga at a cost of \$9 million and that the Sydney-based non-smokers' clinic was arousing increasing

attention.

On the question of the second coming of Christ, Dr Pierson commented that "the present state of world unrest and increasing moral laxity indicates that the second coming is imminent, and that Christ will return in a manner both visible and audible". Gill concluded by noting that Dr Pierson refused to forecast a date for Christ's return, however (S.M.H., 15/11/1973).

The briefest reference and perhaps one of the more intriguing concerned a report that Edward John Eastwood, the 34 year old convicted kidnapper, was baptised into the Seventh-day Adventist Church in a "makeshift pool" at Pentridge Prison, Melbourne. Eastwood had kidnapped a teacher and six students from Faraday Primary School in Victoria in 1972. Five years later he escaped and repeated the action at another school in Gippsland, Victoria (S.M.H., 10/1/1985).

In 1988, Alan Gill, in the *Herald's* religion column, wrote that "In the 1970s the church began a quest, which still continues, to be considered part of the mainstream. A minister almost hugged me when I included his sermon in the *Herald's* now defunct 'From the Pulpit' column. There was joy verging on delirium when an Adventist service was broadcast by the ABC (S.M.H., 12/10/1988).

In another Alan Gill article (one of the best articles about the Seventh-day Adventist Church, it was written just before the trial of Lindy Chamberlain), it was commented that: "In recent years, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, one of Australia's smaller but more interesting religious groups, has tried hard to gain publicity. Thanks to the Azaria Chamberlain affair it has succeeded, though not in the way intended" (S.M.H., 14/8/1982). This article had one of the more interest-

ing titles - "The Seventh-day Adventists make Weet-Bix, nurture Lindy Chamberlain and think Christ will come again".

This survey of articles relating to the SDA church illustrates Alan Gill's point above. Until 1980, there was little media coverage of, reference to, or interest in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Australia. After August 1980, a family who happened to be Adventist, arguably became the major determinant of the public image of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Australia.

It is difficult to determine how much media coverage there was of the Azaria Chamberlain affair in the 1980s, but it is possible that the number of articles alone would number in the thousands. The topic was not limited to articles in papers and magazines, but letters to the editors of city and local publications. Alan Gill, who was Letters Editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald* for the first five years of the Chamberlain saga said that during the trial they were receiving an average of 100 'Azaria' letters each day (S.M.H., 12/10/1988).

A survey conducted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church before the Azaria affair found that the church was not well-known and that people often confused it with other groups, notably the Jehovah Witnesses and "unusual-sounding sects, generally seen as radical and peculiar" (S.M.H., 14/8/1982). This general lack of awareness and understanding about the Seventh-day Adventist Church was a characteristic displayed by the media as well as the general public. It meant that there was an environment in Australia in which sensationalism and irrational discussion could flourish.

Most of the articles written during the 1980s did not contain any explicit reference or detailed analysis of the Seventh-

day Adventist Church, but it must be remembered that they were written in the context of a stereotyped and hostile environment. It was possible in this case to create a negative image of a group by emphasising certain characteristics of the individuals involved, juxtaposing emotionally sensational photos and illustrations, including "academic" comments and references. If you looked at a headline which read "Lindy: It was God's will that my daughter died...", what would you conclude? If an article about the trial of Lindy Chamberlain for the murder of her daughter was on the same page as a discussion about the acts of ritual infant sacrifice among cults, what could the average reader conclude?

The authors of the report about discrimination and religion for the NSW Anti-Discrimination Board concluded that there had been "prejudicial reporting" in the Azaria Chamberlain case and that media sensationalism was "tantamount to religious persecution". This style of reporting "had deleterious effects on its [Seventh-day Adventist Church] image in the eyes of the general public. Before these events, the Church had had a rather benign image, which it will now take some years to regain"¹

Dr Norman Young's book about the involvement of people in the campaign to overturn Lindy's conviction, *Innocence Regained*, also provides a perceptive examination of the role of the media and its substantial bias. It should, however, not be concluded that all media reports were sensationalist. Some reporters like Malcolm Brown of the *Sydney Morning Herald* made the majority look like cadets out for a journalistic kill.²

Media presentations changed significantly after the early release of Lindy Chamberlain and the subsequent Morling

Royal Commission which found that Lindy should have been acquitted.

The two main changes were:

- 1) A loss of interest in the case and a vast decrease in the amount of reporting.
- 2) As the 'poor' Chamberlains sought compensation for their trials, there was a more sympathetic presentation, though most of the media did not perceive any need to apologise.

There was a brief resurgence of media interest after the release of the film made by Australian director Fred Schepisi, *Evil Angels* (in the USA, the film was titled *A Cry in the Dark*). Again, what was most interesting was the absence of references to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Chamberlain's involvement in the church. This is perhaps not surprising since the film portrayed the media as "vultures picking over the carcass of a sensation" (*The Sunday Telegraph*, 6/11/1988). The sensationalist cultic murder theories were no longer popular and the image of the Seventh-day Adventist Church was again becoming "benign".

Church leaders, members and researchers have often commented on the spasmodic and idiosyncratic approach

which the secular media appears to take when reporting religious affairs in Australia, but as this study has demonstrated, the inability of the secular media to seriously examine religious beliefs is highlighted when the beliefs are those of the less established and smaller religious groups.

The secular media usually cannot adequately cover the large well-established religious bodies, but when they try to cover the smaller religious bodies, the results are often a tragic farce. If good reporting does occur, it is usually because a religious affairs specialist has been assigned to the task or the general reporter is unusually sensitive.

Notes

1. Anti-Discrimination Board of N.S.W, *Discrimination and Religious Conviction*, NSW Government Publisher, Sydney, 1984, pp 196-97).
2. See Norman Young's interesting assessment of Malcolm Brown in Norman H. Young, *Innocence Regained: the fight to free Lindy Chamberlain*, Federation Press, Sydney, 1989, pp 12-14.

Culture, Music and Aboriginal Media ¹

Robin Weston

*Every morning
I wake up.
I turn to 8 KIN FM
and listen.*

*Rock 'n Roll, Reggae
Country Western.
CAAMA gives you a variety.*

*CAAMARadio,
CAAMARadio,
CAAMARadio,

CAAMA!!!!!!*

(by Buna Lawrie)

In Aboriginal² culture language, in the sense of original Aboriginal language, has the same value as cultural reality and Knowledge of Language is essential to Aboriginal identity, lost as it is for many people.

In the old ways Language was not a mutable process but, through processes such as the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) which began to broadcast in 1980, Language now exists through new media. This paper considers culture as expressed by the music of CAAMA.

Poets and song-writers have an unusual freedom with language as we can see from Buna Lawrie's song quoted above. In song lyrics, as in poetry, language can be forged anew. Buna Lawrie's song with its unique grammar is the first sound from most CAAMA Radio morning programs and it is also heard frequently throughout the day's programs.

The CAAMA process has been inspirational for its listeners with its large catalogue of Aboriginal music offering a variety of almost everything. CAAMA Radio's name 8 KIN FM is an apt one. The word created by the letters of the radio station call sign is important to Aboriginal society.

Family exists first in a local sense, that is in the sense of being related by blood although a second meaning has grown out of increasing political and cultural activity by Aboriginal people. In terms of extending cultural consciousness through music, through the arts and through the media, many Aboriginal people also extend the sense of family to all individuals of recognised Aboriginal descent.

Certainly in its earliest days, when it existed as a half hour program on the local Alice Springs ABC, CAAMA was a family concern operated by the remark-

able Freda Glynn and her children.

The stated purpose of an Aboriginal Media Service was to extend kinship throughout the Aboriginal community in a political sense so that realities important to Aboriginal people throughout Australia could be expressed in ways most appropriate to them.

At the outset it was agreed that the most important issue to deal with was the Language, the loss of which has also meant the loss of Culture. The problem here has been that in the experience of many Aboriginal people, loss of Culture is loss of everything.

For this reason, CAAMA's broadcasting in Language is an important part of the station's work. Broadcasting in Language has the effect of both preserving and restoring Language and thus Culture. There are at least 8 languages (including English) broadcast throughout the Northern Territory and into large areas of New South Wales, South Australia, Queensland and Western Australia by 8 KIN FM.

CAAMA also shares a shortwave signal with the ABC so that at certain times of day, the signal from Australia's first Aboriginal radio station becomes part of the world's radio signal.

Most importantly for CAAMA, Aboriginal people in remote places are able to hear many of the major Languages of Central Australia on the radio. And if it is not their own Language, the possibility of one day hearing one's own Language on radio is, nonetheless, present. This possibility has already inspired several other Aboriginal Media Services in Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland.

An early priority for CAAMA was the recording of the music of Aboriginal musicians. There were no facilities for recording music locally in Alice Springs in

the first days of CAAMA (back in the early 1980s), so Aboriginal musicians travelled to Adelaide and recorded there in ABC studios.

The earliest recordings were of Gospel, and Country and Western music. One can speculate that these forms of music, which are sometimes combined, could have been the first non-Language music which many Aboriginal people in remote places encountered.

Gospel, of course, extended itself to communicate through the spread of missions and it cannot be imagined that many outback communities could have escaped the perpetual travels of Country and Western troubadours.

CAAMA's first Gospel cassette was recorded by Herbie Laughton, a musician who, in his youth, suffered greatly as a result of racist attitudes. He later became a famous footballer in the Northern Territory. From his early days he was a devoted church member and when I worked at CAAMA in 1990 Uncle Herb worked as a part-time presenter on CAAMA's Sunday Gospel Show. There have been several CAAMA Gospel recordings since that time, notably Auriel Andrews and the Ernabella Choir.

I saw no conflict between Gospel and Culture when I worked at CAAMA. Both ways of looking at things were respected and the Sunday Gospel Show was one of the stations most popular programs according to a survey carried out at the time.

Country and Western is the sound of the road, the rodeo, the pub, the station, work or lack of it, and love or lack of it. Country and Western music, above all, is approachable music when distance, travel, work, love, sorrow and abandonment are life themes. Inevitably both Gospel and Country and Western were able to be sung in Language.

Bill Davis, who helped to produce a great deal of the finest CAAMA music, named The Old Man as the first to sing and record in Language, and The Old Man, it is said, had a voice like honey. The Old Man passed on before I arrived at CAAMA and his name cannot be spoken or written or his voice heard on CAAMA airwaves. In one song on the CAAMA compact disc "From the Bush", he is called only Kunmanara Yamma - Kunmanara being "nameless" and Yamma being the surname of his family. Singing in Language has rapidly caught on since The Old Man first began to record in his Pitjantjatjara Language.

When I worked at CAAMA, a sixteen track studio was kept busy recording the music of Aboriginal musicians from many places. The studio releases were, generally speaking, on cassette on the CAAMA label. The previously mentioned compact disc featuring various CAAMA artists is distributed through Polygram.

The first great Aboriginal Rock band was called the Warumpi Band. The Warumpi's early recordings were through CAAMA and their songs include an injunction in Language to children to eat good food. As with much of the music which came from the Warumpi, the songs are often didactic in intent, the didacticism relating to the good life of strong Culture and the power of Land and Place.

Through satellite access to popular culture through television and radio, the appreciation of the technological folk music - otherwise known as Rock 'n Roll - has since spread through many communities. Rock 'n Roll is an expensive process which requires complex technical knowledge in addition to music sense. Basically the musician needs knowledge of the public address systems available for stage

shows as well as an eventual understanding of sophisticated recording techniques.

Sadly, for the time being, with training programs suspended, CAAMA has not been recording or running workshops in performance or studio techniques.

In 1990 the music studio and the work around it formed a hub of activity for both radio and television. The following are examples of the lyrics of the music released in that year.

From the Top End or coastal parts of the Territory, Casso and Reggae Dave released a cassette called "Love is the Only Drug" - sophisticated reggae music which included reflections on the world environment crisis, the spiritual problems of drug taking, and the tragedy of Tiannamen Square. One of my favourite songs about Aboriginal Cultural priorities from this band is **Treat Her Right**:

*Black is the mother of this country
Giving birth to black humanity,
From her will come future generations
Of black, of black, of black Australians.*

Chorus:

*So brother, treat her right.
For she holds the key.
Treat her right.
For she holds the future of our race.
So brother treat her right.*

*She's been used and abused by society
She's taken the anger, frustration and loves
From the men of this nation.
Without her we are nothing, we would be no more.*

Chorus

*So give her credit where credit is due
And show some respect, it' the least we can do.
'Cause if she disappears, if she disappears*

So will our race.

(by Greg Castillon & Reggae Dave)

Another Top End band, the Wirringya Band from Milingimbi, completed an album featuring a dramatic and beautiful rock track called **Dreamtime Shadow** which is sung partly in Language and partly in English. The lyrics of this song dramatise Dreaming as true connectedness with life.

*Standing out in the lonely wilderness
Stood a figure of the serpent man.
Dark black clouds are covering the timeless land
Ochre red spreads across the unknown skies
Light reflects of dawn shows the spirit of the serpent Man.*

Chorus:

**WAY WAY WAY MA GO GANGUN
NGARRANY RONGANMARANGUN.
GO GO GO BALAN NGARRAKIYIN-
GAL WAGALIL.**

*(Hey hey hey come over and take me back
Come on come on come on come take me
back to my home country.)*

*Dreaming times all begun ever since the
white man knew.
Yolngu are all the people that knew about the
Dreaming time.
It doesn't matter today we are living in the
civilised world.
Take me back to the Dreamtime
Faraway into Yolngu land.*

Chorus

(by Keith Lapulung)

The song opens with the notes of a didgeridoo, an Aboriginal instrument which originated in the Top End. The yidiki or didgeridoo is now featured not

only in the music of many Aboriginal bands, but features also in a range of other contemporary music.

From Alice Springs Amunda, another Rock band, released a cassette which included lyrics about the tragedy of abandoned old people who drink to dissolve their pain, about the Treaty, about petrol sniffing, about the concrete horrors of certain changes to Alice Springs over the years.

Alice Don't Grow So Fast

*I grew around her and I watched her grow
Went away for a few years came back yesterday*

*But what have they done to her
They've torn her apart
They're dressing her up in concrete and iron*

Chorus

*So Alice don't grow so fast
Let your young days last
They're dressing her up in concrete and iron.
They're dressing her up in concrete and iron.*

*Soon there will be tall buildings
Blocking out the sky
Couldn't see the hill for the fog in the
Couldn't see the hill for the fog in the*

Chorus

(by Danny Plain)

While I heard women Gospel singers and at least one women's choir while at CAAMA, there were still not many Aboriginal women musicians from the Rock, Country or Reggae genres recorded by CAAMA. Amunda had a woman lead singer, Rachel Perkins, and the North Tanami Band featured women as backup singers. The exception was the recently recorded Womawanti, a women's anti-grog song.

Music is a strong part of women's politics, and radio programs about women's issues often featured the background sounds of powerful singing about things important to them. One such example occurred when women demonstrated outside a roadhouse with a twenty-four-liquor licence. Women travelled from as far as South Australia and bot Gospel singing and Language singing were featured in the demonstration. Likewise, demonstrations in Alice Springs about the dam which was to be built on a women's Dreaming site, many women took to the streets with song.

It is hoped with recording operations under way, more Aboriginal women will join the ranks of contemporary recording artists. Eventually the process must include women's music, but since men's business and women's business is usually separated, a degree of separate development could well be implied.

The movement towards Rock 'n Roll by young people is a strong one. The success of Yothu Yindi, who are not a CAAMA band but who frequently offer CAAMA a first airplay of their music, has no doubt inspired many musicians.

Music is beyond ordinary language which may offer confusion and distraction. The communication of music is simpler and more straightforward, being primarily through the emotions. Lyrics particularise these emotions, and the inherent poetry of Language provides power and simplicity in a great deal of Aboriginal music.

Bill Davis says that while he was in the process of recording Pitulu, the petrol sniffing song, by Punch Thompson, he was visited by two German ethnomusicologists on separate occasions and on separate missions. Both were reduced to tears by the song.

Pitulu Song (Petrol Song)

*IRITIYA TJAMUNYA TJANAYA
 PUKULPAYA NYINAPAAI NGURA
 NYANGANKA
 A long time ago
 In the time of our Grandfather
 The people were happy in their country.*

*TJANAYA WIRURA NINTILPAI
 TJITJI TJANAMPA TJAANANYA
 KULINTJAKU
 Years ago they were taught well
 The children could listen - the children
 learned well.*

*KUWARI NGANAMPA TJITJITJUTA
 PUTUYA KULILPAI MAMANYA
 NGUNYJTJUNYA PULANYA
 But now they don't listen to Mother or Fa-
 thers.*

*MAMA! TJITJI PALA NYANGAMA!
 MUNUNKU PURKARA NINTILA
 NYUNTJUNYA KULINTJAKA
 Father!
 Look at that child!
 Make him sit down and listen to what you
 know!*

*KUWARI NYANGATJANA WALYTJA
 NGARAPAI
 NGULU WIYAYA RAPA NGARAPAI KUNTA
 WIYA ALATITU
 And now!
 All of our people are standing around
 The children are not frightened
 They are cheeky
 They are completely without shame.*

*NGALULU MAMANYA KULILPAI
 MAMALUNI NGAYUNYA WIRU TJUTA
 NINTINU
 And I
 I listened to my dear Father
 he taught me the old stories well.*

*AWARI! YAALTINJINGARALA NINTILKU
 NGANANA WATARKU NYINANYANGKA*

*PUTU KULILPAI
 Look!
 How do we reach them?
 We are vague doing other things.*

*KULATLU TJUKURPA WIRU KANYINI
 KUTA WAANYA TJANAYA WIRURU
 NINYINMA!
 Older brother holds the good stories -
 Why not teach them?*

*MANANGKU NGUNYJTJUNGKU NINTILA
 NGANAKUN PATANI NGANALUNTA
 NINTIRA UNGKUKU?
 Father, Mother, teach them
 Who are you waiting for, who will teach these
 stories?*

*KUWARI WATARKU NYINAPAI
 KUTALU WAINA TJIKINI; MALANYTJU
 PITULU PANTINI
 KUTALU WAINA TJIKINI; MALANYTJU
 PITULU PANTINI
 Now!
 Sitting without thinking
 Older brother drinking wine
 Younger brother sniffing petrol.*

(by Pantiju (Punch) Thompson)

The music of Language is intrinsic to Culture and Language and as such, belongs to a time a place and its participants. As a non-Aboriginal, it is not for me to try to spell this out, but from my work in the Aboriginal media, I feel that I can at least say that contemporary Aboriginal music is strong and vivid. In choosing cultural vehicles, Aboriginal musicians have used a variety of modes to express new versions of spirituality, a viable critique of the problems of society and some wonderful sounds.

Notes

1. This paper was written to extend information about CAAMA music into the wider community. More information is available by calling CAAMA on 089 523 744 or by writing to CAAMA Music, PO Box 2924, Alice Springs NT 0870.
The local call sign for CAAMA is 100.5 FM

On short wave try 4.835 MHZ or 4.910 MHZ in daytime or 2,310 MHZ or 2.325 MHZ at night remembering that 8 KIN FM still has limited broadcast time.

2. In Central Australia people do not call themselves 'Koori'. It is a term from Southern Australia. Aboriginal is the preferred Central Australian term.

