

Listening to the Stolen Generations

'Blown away' but not depressed

In the first week of March Sydneysiders had four opportunities to hear from a group involved in the Journey of Healing, the continuing program connected with National Sorry Day. These occasions had been planned before the recent tragedy and unrest in Redfern hit the headlines. Rosemary Thwaites writes:

The theme was "Healing the Stolen Generations, where next?" The group included MRA-IC worker John Bond in his role as Secretary of the National Sorry Day Committee, and Aboriginal colleagues from Redfern: Ray Minniecon of Crossroads Aboriginal Ministries; Cecil Bowden, Chair of Kinchela Boys Home Inc; Colin Davis, whose story recently featured on ABC TV's *Compass*; Val Linow and Pastor Bill Simon.

At an evening with the dynamic Lane Cove Residents for Reconciliation, Colin asked the audience: "What is the most powerful word, 'sorry' or 'forgive'?" He then described forgiving three people and asking others for forgiveness himself. Val Linow also shared her experience of healing from

bitterness as she walked over the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 2000 and saw "Sorry" written in the sky. One of the Lane Cove group said afterwards that hearing the sad stories of the Aboriginal speakers they invite often leaves them depressed, but not this time.

John and Cecil addressed the North Sydney Boys/Girls High Public Speaking club. A Year 11 boy giving the vote of thanks said: "Thank you Cecil, for telling us things we would never normally have known. John, you have a passion for these issues, we can see it in your eyes." The teacher who has been responsible for the Public Speaking Club for 14 years commented afterwards, "I think Friday was one of our all-time memorable guest speaker days."

At a discussion and information night at the MRA-IC centre in Mosman 38 people active in the local community crowded into the sitting room. When asked what more they could do to help, Ray Minniecon said: "You have to do a lot of listening before you know what to do." "It's great to meet people with such passion," he said. The evening was a revelation to a young Sydney lawyer. He is now giving time to investigate the possibilities of compensation for people removed as children from their families.

"Phenomenal"

The group were the featured speakers at Cafe Church in Glebe for two hours. This was attended by about 40 people, mostly young. The sign outside the church reads: "Tired of organised religion? Try disorganised religion!" Bill spoke of his own change of heart and discovery of faith after many years of hurts, violence and addiction.

At the end of the evening, a journalist visiting from Germany said that she had enough material to write five stories for her publication. A young man said to John: "You have blown me away", and another remarked that the evening was "phenomenal". A university student, there for the first time, has started volunteering in the Police Citizens Youth Club in Redfern as a result - helping kids where needed, and an MA student has offered to write up and document Cecil Bowden's story.

Pacific support for Samoa

Ideas for the Samoan conference in October are beginning to bubble. It will deal with the themes of "Clean hands and open hearts, Families as Peacemakers, and the Partnership of Races".

Fetu Paulo, the conference organiser, has requested support from Australia and New Zealand. Nada Bond and Patricia (Trish) Brice will go from Canberra in mid-April for three weeks. Nada has recently resigned from paid job commitments, and Trish, who works in after-school child care, is using her holidays for this trip. Nada and Trish are providing their own fares and expenses, and are fundraising in Canberra.

Meanwhile the Rev Ian and Karin Parsons return soon to Melbourne after three weeks working with Fetu and her team.

"Many greetings from paradise!!" they write.

"Life goes at a different pace here. Worldwide climate change is affecting

the Pacific too. It is hotter here than normal. The beauty and colour of the surroundings strike you as does the friendliness of everyone. No road rage here in the traffic chaos. Family life is very important. We have been overwhelmingly welcomed into Fetu's extended family. We are around 30 at mealtimes, and there is always room at the table for strangers at any time of day or night. We are surrounded by people, dogs, cats and chickens, all very natural and uncomplicated.

"A week ago, Fetu, her sister, a nephew, and ourselves were received by Rev Oka Faiolo, President of the Samoa Council of Churches, and his wife So'o. He had the thought to take

the 2003 Sydney Conference Report to the April meeting of the Council. On Tuesday Cardinal Pio Toafinuu graciously received us, despite being unwell, and gave us his blessing. We have met up with a number of the Samoan students we used to know in Adelaide. Many are in significant positions in construction, the university and the public service. Friday, we met the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Prime Minister, without being asked, said "I would like to open the conference."

The wife of a senior public servant has offered to help with the printing of the conference invitation. Tonight we have the weekly team meeting and all will stay for food in Fetu's home. Last week we were about 20."

Donations for the Samoan campaign can be sent, payable to MRA, c/o The Treasurer, MRA-Initiatives of Change, 226 Kooyong Road, Toorak VIC 3142.

"We met the Prime Minister"

More action & more life

A big journey of interaction with India is drawing to an end, and in April Action for Life heads for East and South-East Asia. The group have visited cities and towns all over India, given workshops and seminars, volunteered in orphanages, spoken in schools and colleges. They learned from, and have often been inspired by, those they met. From the wealth of contacts and conversations in their newsletters we quote a few paragraphs by Australians with AfL:

Natasha Davis:

Our group has had a few experiences which remind me there is an amazing force at work in the universe. In Rajasthan we had planned a visit to the Ashram of *Tarun Bharat Sangh* - the not-for-profit group who support community efforts in water harvesting and environmental restoration across more than 70 villages. An impromptu phone call to the Ashram led to a conversation with the elusive and multi-award winning Rajendra Singh who spearheaded this campaign 20 years ago. He insisted that we join him that very day and offered to take us in his vehicle. Still rather stunned at this turn of events, I rapidly consulted the team... and about 40 minutes later

(having thrown our wet washing into bags) five of us piled into a van with Rajendra, his wife and a journalist.

Once we had arrived, we immediately set out on foot. We were all immensely inspired by the community-driven projects... the once arid landscape is now an abundance of healthy crops and native vegetation and many of the young people who were streaming out of the district earlier have returned.

Christina DeAngelis, Nigel Heywood and Chris Lancaster, part of the Southern group who put on a final 'follow-up seminar' in Coimbatore:

The seminar was due to begin at

10am; only two people had arrived. We all kept busy so as not to look too worried. We practised our songs, prepared tea, and waited at the registration desk. By 10.30am we had five people. We had booked lunch for 60. At 10.45am we decided to begin with the seven participants who were there. Miraculously at lunch our number was exactly 60!... At the end of the day we broke into small groups and looked at two questions: Where do I need transformation in my life? And what steps can I take today?

Mike Brown:

One AfL principle is to support initiatives undertaken by the IC team in any country we visit. [At] a conference on "Better governance - from fear to opportunity" (Asia Plateau, 10-14 March) as well as running databases and service shifts in the dining room, we added our special AfL touch to the weighty discussions through input into "Inner Governance" sessions at 7.15am each morning. These proved to be the highlight for many who came with years of experience in administration. One expert shared that he had been so inspired by this spiritual and moral sharing that he had stopped smoking for three days - and phoned his wife to tell her. They both want to volunteer at the IC centre.

Open Homes Open Hearts – an invitation

The first Sunday in June (6 June this year) is the National Open Homes Open Hearts Day. This day provides an opportunity for all Australians of all backgrounds to reach out to people from another culture, faith or ethnic background by inviting them into their homes to share a cup of tea or a meal. The ancient practice of sharing a meal together is a universal tradition that signifies hospitality and openness to the other and may have unexpected results. Pari Sanyü writes:

On 28 March a group of 19 women met together under the shade of an apple tree in a Melbourne home. The women were of different faiths - Muslim and Christian - and from a wide range of cultures and backgrounds.

Two of the Muslim women told moving stories about the challenges they faced in being a Muslim in Australia and wearing the hijab. They shared about their fulfilment in their faith, and of the initiative they had taken to reach out beyond their faith community.

One of the women, a geneticist and mother of five, is part of a group of Jewish and Muslim women who meet together to build understanding and trust. "For me peace is everything," she said as she recounted the stark details of how her family had been displaced and had to flee to three different countries in turn due to war. The other, a teacher, related how touched she was when her Anglo-Saxon colleagues

refrained from eating during a lunch-time staff meeting in solidarity with her fast over Ramadan. Others in the group shared of experiences of acceptance, listening and understanding gained through the *Creators of Peace Circles* held at Armagh last year.

That women from such widely divergent backgrounds were able to share so openly came about through a series of events where different people in the group had been ready to reach out to discover "the other". This had included a visit to a Muslim fashion show, reciprocal *Open Homes Open Hearts* morning teas, more invitations and visits to homes, and, for a good number of us, a nine-month involvement in the *Creators of Peace* circles as a response to *Open Hearts Open Homes* last year.

More information on Open Homes Open Hearts from the national coordinator, Joyce Fraser, ☎ 02 9559 2301, email: <fraserjm@optusnet.com.au>

Zimbabwe connection

After a visit to Zimbabwe last July, I wrote in *Newsbriefs* about the needs of the IC team there. There was a response, and we have been able to send nearly A\$500. This enabled friends in Bulawayo and Gweru to set up email connections, and to print news and documents to distribute.

Two of them, Abel and Angie Katito, emailed last week with news of three field days for local farmers held at Coolmoreen, the MRA-IC farm in Gweru. Abel outlined the role of the farm as a place where Zimbabweans could come together to find answers to national problems through honest dialogue and a search for God's direction. Angie, a nurse, spoke on the importance of moral standards to health. Also speaking was a fourth-generation white dairy farmer who, despite losing much of his land by Government order, has decided to help new farmers with agricultural skills.

John Bond

Cardinal König: man of faith, man of dialogue

Cardinal (Franz) König, who died in Vienna on 13 March aged 98, was one of the most influential Church leaders of the late 20th century. Hella Pick, writing his obituary in *The Guardian* (London), reckons him among the "outstanding individuals whose ideas and actions make a real difference to their age". *The Times* wrote: "His far-reaching ideas will survive him." *The Tablet's* Vienna correspondent says he was "Austria's conscience".

The key to König's influence can also be seen in his warm and open spirit. His reputation as a "liberal" stemmed not from a fiery radical agenda but from his interest in all people, including people from backgrounds other than his own, making him a man of exceptional moderation.

In 1978 König played a decisive part in the election of Karol Wojtyła, Archbishop of Cracow, as Pope John Paul II. John Paul's subsequent role in the peaceful demise of communism in Eastern Europe is now part of history.

König was a great encourager and reconciler. On the ABC's *Religion Report* (17 March) Hans Küng, the creative, unorthodox Catholic theologian, spoke of König's action in writing a preface to one of his books at a time when Küng's views were under suspicion by some in the Church hierarchy.

Caux

In his post as Archbishop of Vienna (1956-85) König began to reach out to the churches of Eastern Europe, then behind the Iron Curtain. Such visits were not easy at the height of the Cold War. He was one of the intellectual leaders of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and was asked at that time by Pope Paul VI to head a new Secretariat for Non-Believers. König's interest in dialogue with non-Christian religions dated from his early years in academia and never ceased. In 1965 he was invited to visit and lecture at the famous Al-Azhar University in Cairo.

In his later years König became a strong friend of Moral Re-Armament (today Initiatives of Change). In 1972 I was working with MRA in Vienna with a senior Swiss colleague, Heini Karrer, and we met His Eminence several times. Then we discovered he was on holiday in Switzerland and invited him to the nearby Caux conference. (The Archbishop of Malta had just been in Caux and this also sparked his interest.) Karrer and I drove up the Rhone Valley to fetch him. Caux so captivated him that he stayed for an

extra day. Over the next years there was a growing sense of common cause, with frequent meetings and actions and travels undertaken together, including a three-week speaking tour of the USA. He returned to Caux, enjoying the community and joining a dining room service team. Personal friendships grew between König and a number of MRA's leadership, including West Australian Gordon Wise and his Scottish wife Marjory. (Wise profiled König in *For A Change*, July 1988.) Some of these friends were at his nationally televised Requiem Mass in Vienna's St Stephen's Cathedral, where he is now buried in the crypt.

East-West dialogue

During the 1980s König accepted the Wises' invitation to Britain for speaking engagements in Oxford and London. At an Oxford reception Garth Lean, Frank Buchman's biographer, who had not met König asked me to introduce him. When the Cardinal heard about Lean's biography he immediately said: "Oh, Buchman was a turning point in the history of the modern world through his ideas."

A special memory is König's speech in Caux in 1986 in which he challenged MRA/IC to use its spiritual assets to overcome East-West tensions in Europe through more active dialogue. I was translating his speech from the German and could not help feeling that

the Cardinal was perhaps a little over-optimistic, despite the glimmerings of a thaw in the Cold War since Gorbachev's accession as Soviet leader. "I know that it is not easy to develop a dialogue there with people who have grown up in a system completely different from our own, a system where words like truth, good and evil often have a different meaning," König conceded in his speech. But he continued: "I believe that in this area too, a discovery made by Frank Buchman will prove to be correct: that people in the East as well as the West need the courage to look deep inside themselves and to discover the conscience that the Creator implanted there: in other words, the source of spirit and truth..."

Post cold-war

"We must have faith that these people have the strength in themselves to find an appropriate way of changing their own thinking and living. At the same time we must also re-discover in ourselves that truth of the Gospel that will help us to alter our own life in an appropriate and lasting way."

One could argue about the chances of such hopes in Cold War conditions. But with the amazing collapse of the European communist regimes just three years later, König's words were borne out. One of the most important aspects of IC work in the 15 years that have followed has been the new dialogue with Eastern Europe, in and from Caux, and the emergence of young teams there working for a civilisation based on moral and spiritual values.

Franz König had a bigness of spirit that saw beyond intellectual analysis to the human being. He put his faith in God and in the humanity that God had created. He spoke modestly and simply but time has shown the wisdom in that simplicity.

Peter Thwaites

Absolutes: a UK experience

In Britain one often hears complaints about the National Health Service. There is also talk about the enormous costs and lack of money for the Service, which is paid for by taxes and is free for all at point of need.

My 90-year-old mother has been unwell in recent years, with two stints in hospital and a major operation. We have been impressed and grateful for the care given her. My mother and myself have both received weekly allowances from the Government, as carer and the one who is cared for.

When she was in hospital for 4½

months last year I realised later that we were no longer eligible for this allowance during this period, and it was up to me to inform the Authority. I thought about Absolute Honesty and with difficulty rang and told them. I found I had to pay back several hundred pounds!

Veronica Craig (London)

A basis for creative partnership-building

As we go to press a Global Consultation (31 March - 5 April) is in progress in Lebanon, bringing together 30 people from MRA-IC teams in some 20 countries on every continent. The subject for deliberation is: "The basic intuition (central insight) of Initiatives of Change / Moral Re-Armament, as a basis for creative partnerships across the world's divides." Advance papers have been written and we quote here from two of them:

MRA-IC is rooted in a number of basic intuitions or insights. It is not an abstract system of thought, but a tradition with a number of strands, a fellowship of diverse people who have certain experiences and aims in common. Yet it would be wrong to suggest that it has no specific philosophy.

Buchman took the vocabulary that we apply to the life of the individual soul and applied it to communities, nations and states. Individuals face challenges, temptations, trials, victories and defeats, and can find liberation from sin, pride, lust and hatred etc. So can nations. "As I am so is my nation." There is in this leap from the individual to the global an attempt to look at the world in terms of the activity of God's Spirit.

MRA originated in a world that was generally confident that history has a meaning. We now live in a world where people, including many religious believers, have lost confidence in the idea that human history has a meaning at all. Many moral and spiritual signposts have been challenged and taken down. At the beginning of the 21st century, MRA-IC's fruitfulness may depend on us rediscovering the confidence to express (and to re-express) the thought that God has a plan for the world, and that the great challenge for humanity is to respond to it.

The emphasis on absolute moral standards is something distinctive to MRA-IC, even if other groups emphasise these values too. Something inside us is deadened by little compromises. Absolute moral standards make it possible to hold out for God's biggest and best vision for our lives and the world. The loveliness of

the Holy Spirit shines through when honesty, purity, unselfishness and love are present.

I have devoted part of my life to getting to know Russia and Russian history. I started out with an idea of what I could give. Then I came to see that the things that God was asking me

In a confused and polarised world, people everywhere find it easier to proclaim what and who they are against rather than what they are for. The war of ideas rooted in the injustice and failures of the past exploded upon the world on 9/11. It has since given way to a war on terrorism, which unwittingly gives credence to a predicted clash of civilisations.

What is missing is a positive vision rooted in the shared values of the great civilisations and faiths caught up in the current clash. Essential elements of any uniting vision must be a deep inner quest for divine inspiration, and a commitment to work in partnership across the world's divides. These are strengths of IC.

Can the forthcoming Global Consultation in Lebanon develop a unifying vision that could inspire and mobilise positive forces across the world?

- from a statement by the Initiatives of Change International Council, India, December 2003

to do were also designed to help me to grow. I was being richly fed by all that I learned from the other society. Seeing another culture and its problems gives me perspective on myself and my own country.

I hope the consultation will challenge my own ways of thinking and expose the parochialism of an often British-centered or Euro-centric mentality.

Philip Boobbyer

MRA-IC is about people. It is about the way people decide to live. It places the emphasis on what unites not what divides.

It is about

- selflessness - no ulterior motives;
- honesty - integrity, a sense of what is right, doing right by others.

Trust is not automatic. It has to be created, earned, proven, given, shared. Trust is a way of being, first and foremost, before it is a course of action. That has always been the core of MRA/IC. Trust can come down to a decision, initially, to trust someone's motives even if their ways of expression differ from my own.

And then there is the unquantifiable - the divine, the inner voice, the obedience, whatever words one wants to give it. This makes everything else possible, as it goes beyond all personal, national, religious or cultural attributes.

Picking out the nuances in the vast centre ground between the extremes of right and wrong is also where the "basic intuition", the divine, applies. There are the subtleties connected with daily contact or relationships with other people; the almost unconscious "put-down" of someone whom you feel superior to, or the fact that if you "let something go" once without challenging it, it becomes much harder the next time a similar issue arises.

It is easy to think stereotypically in our satellite-television world. Come to think of it, it is as easy to have uninformed, "instinctive" and divisive views about people who live two streets away, or even next door, as about people who live two continents away.

Anything that divides MRA/IC's essence into convenient, bite-sized chunks which have a particular appeal to a specific target-group is not, to my mind, a brilliant long-term strategy. MRA/IC should be an interconnected, seamless whole, both global and personal, based on the way any individual decides to live. MRA/IC is supra-national, recognisable in any culture, because it springs from something timeless, constant, difficult, challenging and unselfish, requiring all of everything a person is.

Ginny Wigan