

Finding peace in Wilcannia

S K Kim, Nigel Heywood, Chris Lancaster, Cheryl and Rob Wood, and Clara Cheong have recently returned from Wilcannia, a town two hours away from Broken Hill. Clara writes:

Come in, sit quietly and listen to the soft music, be still and leave your troubles outside.

Each morning in Wilcannia we found a sense of peace in St Therese's Mission School where a sacred space is created for the (primary-aged) children through soft music, meditation and prayer before the day begins.

This was a welcome start for us in this predominantly indigenous Australian community, where much healing is needed. Problems of petrol sniffing, drug and alcohol abuse are very apparent. The local indigenous dialect is in danger of disappearing completely with only one person left in the town fluent in the language.

We were well taken care of by Sereima Vuakatagane and the Sisters of Mercy – headed up by the spritely Sister Flo. It was a time to reconnect with old friends and support those working within the community.

The program filled up with two presentations at Wilcannia Central School, a presentation for the Mission School, and encounters with inspiring people such as indigenous elders, those working in the youth drop-in centre, on the night patrol bus, on community building through art, and especially interacting with the youth of Wilcannia.

In Wilcannia, problems are not masked or glossed over like they are in many of our big cities. It is a place where there is so much pain staring you in the face, a place to learn about how to care for another individual, a place to return to.

Get connected

For those who have access to the Internet, check out the international *Initiatives of Change* website: www.iofc.org

You can download a 16-page colour report of the 2004 *Agenda for Reconciliation* conferences in Caux, and there is news of a recent International Communications Forum meeting in Le Touquet, France, as well as stimulating weekly commentaries on the news.

UNESCO conference looks at shared values

Mike Lowe recently attended a UNESCO conference in Adelaide on "Education for shared values for intercultural and interfaith understanding". He reports:

It has been inspiring and uplifting to meet with educators, curriculum designers and religious leaders from the Asia-Pacific region on this theme. Delegate after delegate has stressed the need to teach the shared "core values" of humanity as a response to the growth of incivility, religious intolerance and violence.

Some countries, such as the Philippines, already have well-established values-education programs in place in the national curriculum. Others, such as the Solomon Islands, are just starting in response to civil unrest. Australia is just about to launch a national values-education program which will make Federal Government funding available to every school to help implement it.

Mary Joy Pigozzi, from UNESCO in Paris, opened the conference by saying "When we educate or teach, we communicate values. But which values do we transmit?" She distinguished between two frames of reference: the frame of "humanistic values" as found in the Declaration of Human Rights; and the second, more difficult frame, which is the "vision of values common to all faiths".

Beyond tolerance

Peter Vardy from London, a well-known writer on theology and ethics, helped us understand the historical context for this work when he talked about the see-saw that swings between two unhealthy alternatives: on the one hand is the trend towards a value-less "anything goes" culture where tolerance is the new god ("I call it a god because gods can't be questioned. Anyone who questions it is accused of intolerance!"). On the other hand is the reaction to this rootless moral vacuum – the trend towards retreating into old certainties. He started by quoting

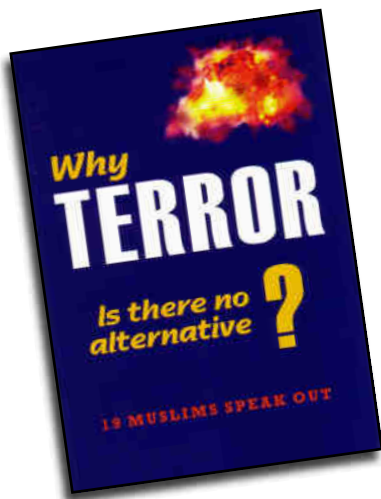
the prophetic words of the poet W B Yeats:

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and
everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the
worst
Are full of passionate intensity.*

and ended by saying that Yeats was wrong; the centre could hold – though balancing on the see-saw was challenging and demanding. "Values education cannot just be about teaching people which acts they should and should not do. It needs to be located in a broader educational setting... the search for human wholeness and the development of human potential."

Many voices at the conference questioned the appropriateness of using the word "tolerance", preferring words such as "acceptance" and "respect". Also questioned was the use of labels such as "fundamentalist", "extremist" and "moderate" as this language signals that religion is the problem rather than an answer. Those who believe passionately in values such as compassion, love and unselfishness need to be more extreme and fundamentalist about this instead of just "moderately" moral!

For me a highlight was the chance to meet so many people committed to the same vision and ideals that I have found expressed in *Initiatives of Change* – indeed many times it felt as though I was at an academic version of an IofC conference. Several of these new friends are based in Melbourne and I look forward to reconnecting when I get back.



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Book Talk

Why Terror? Is There No Alternative? Caux Books 40 pp \$6

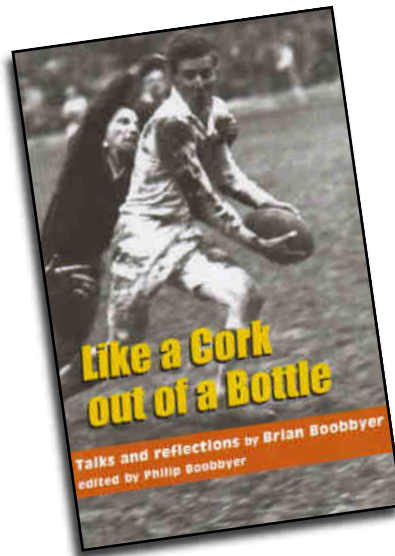
Some thoughts by 19 Muslims collected by Imam Dr Abduljalil Sajid, Chairman of the Muslim Council for Religious and Racial Harmony in the UK. Millions of people in Western countries don't know what to think about Islam. In this extremely stirring and readable pamphlet Imam Sajid has collected thoughts from 19 prominent Muslims in 15 countries. What they say provides very hopeful perspective.

John Williams

The Sound of Silence How to find Inspiration in the Age of Information Caux Books 10 pp \$2

Searchers for perspective often find silence their best tool. British writer Michael Smith comments: "We are more aware of the great social, moral and ethical issues the world faces than any previous generation." But where do we find the life skills to "tell us what is harmful and what is healthy?" We need "our daily information space" in which we can "make silence our friend". In this freshly written pamphlet Smith emphasises that "a condition for receiving spiritual information is to run our own personal virus checker. We need to be sure that the information we receive from the still, small voice from within is not corrupted by our own suspect motives and delusions." And he adds: "When downloading spiritual information, it helps to print it out rather than leaving it unattended on the hard disc of our minds..."

John Williams



Like a Cork Out of a Bottle 137 pp \$20

I remember being thrilled at the way Brian Boobbyer jinked his way past two huge opponents to score a try for England at Twickenham, holy grail of rugby. It was this ability to blind side the opposition that had a commentator writing "Boobbyer exploded through the centre like a cork out of a bottle". The title of his book also captures the infectious way he makes the spiritual journey one of adventure and joy rather than of slog and duty. He may not have gone to many lectures at Oxford, but he developed a gift for picking out the eyes of classics of literature and also spiritual treasures. Each chapter is illuminated by these gems he has gathered through a life of reading enjoyed to the full. There are vignettes of a wide variety of characters including Eric Liddell, hero of the film *Chariots of Fire*, and "Bunny" Austin, a

star of Wimbledon, along with fresh insights into the lives of St Francis of Assisi and Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Brian Boobbyer's fascinating potpourri comes together as a faith-giving, uncynical but shrewd view on the world we all share.

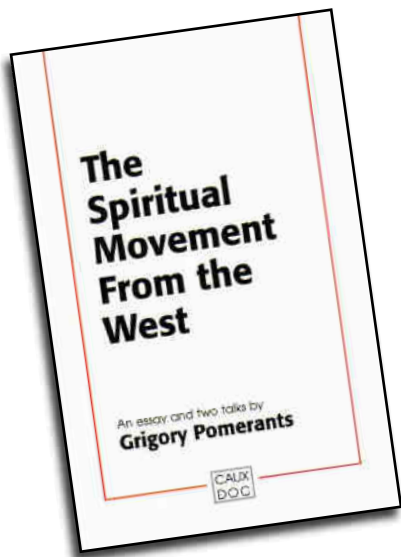
John Faber adds:

Miracles seemed to surround the publication of *Like a Cork out of a Bottle*. We were living in an apartment in an historic country house as this book was being prepared for press. Suddenly we heard that the house had gone into liquidation and we were given six months notice to move! At the time I was busy collecting photos and drawings to accompany each chapter of the book. So not only were we searching for the pictures, but also searching for somewhere to live.

A couple, Michael and Bunty Morrison from Wahroonga, Australia, arrived to stay in one of the house's guest rooms and became good friends. One day I saw Bunty sketching the view around the house. I asked her if she would consider helping me with the publication of the book by illustrating two of the chapters with a drawing of a singing thrush and Brian on his desert island, surrounded by his much loved books. She said she would be delighted to help, and fell in love with the book when she read the text. Her excellent drawings were a great addition.

A few weeks later we found our new home. The timing of our move coincided with the date of publication of *Like a Cork out of a Bottle*, with our new address inserted as publisher and distributor.

The day Bunty was flying home to Australia we were able to present her with the very first copy of the book, hot off the press!



The Spiritual Movement from the West

Caux Books 87 pp \$20

An essay and two talks by Grigory Pomerants, who lived through the traumas of Soviet life and scholarship, including five years' imprisonment for "anti-Soviet agitation". Today he is a Member of the Academy of Natural Sciences, of the Writers' Union and of the Pen Club. In recent years he has made several trips to the international centre for Initiatives of Change in Caux, Switzerland. Sydneysider Peter Thwaites gives us a brilliant translation of this book. It is an arresting book, simply and profoundly written. For instance: "All over the world the gap is growing between the technological and intellectual power which has fallen into human hands and our lagging sense of responsibility. If one simply drifts with the current, change leads to a loosening of moral norms and to moral decline. We must not only sail but be concerned with reinforcing our little boat, mending its holes, repairing its oars and rudder."

John Williams

And last but not least . . .

A String of Pearls

40 pp \$7

Collected by Ethel Roberts, edited by Jeanne Faber.

A lifetime's collection of quotations and thoughts with some favourite humorous anecdotes.

A wonderful small gift.

Clean Election Campaign piloted in the Solomon Islands

The Winds of Change are blowing through the nation again with the launch of a Clean Election Campaign aimed at cleaning out the corruption in the nation's political processes. The following is taken from a press release issued by the group:



The launch of the campaign

The campaign, which focuses on grassroots awareness, is being piloted in the two constituencies of North Malaita and Ulawa-Ugi where next month voters must vote for new members in two by-elections.

"We want to help Solomon Islanders realise that they have the power to choose good leaders if the elections are clean and fair and people think carefully about whom they should vote for," said Christine Mitini, one of the organisers of the Clean Election Campaign.

The Clean Election Campaign is being organised by the *Winds of Change Solomon Islands* group, formed after the *Winds of Change* conference in June, which explored ways the nation could be healed and public and private integrity restored. It is affiliated with the international *Initiatives of Change* network, which believes that change starts with individuals' commitment to change themselves.

The Clean Election Campaign is one of the first major actions of the group and is modelled on the highly successful Clean Election Campaign in Kenya, which over two elections radically changed the face of Kenyan politics and the fate of what was until then one of the most corrupt countries in Africa.

A team of 15, mostly young students and youth members of the *Winds of Change*, volunteered to go to the people of North Malaita to conduct a face-to-face awareness campaign on what is a clean election in the run up to December's by-election, and then stay to observe the conduct of the election.

"We are going to talk with the communities and encourage them not to

waste their votes," Ms Mitini said.

"We will be asking them to refuse bribes, to reject false promises and for them to encourage candidates to do the same."

A training workshop for the awareness team was held in Honiara with the assistance of officials from the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission and other members of the *Winds of Change* core team.

A separate radio campaign on holding a Clean Election was broadcast over two weeks on the national SIBC broadcaster, including special messages to voters in the languages of the two constituencies.

The British High Commission, who also supported the original *Winds of Change* Conference in May, has generously funded this part of the pilot project.

Nationwide campaign

The *Winds of Change* team will use the lessons learnt from the pilot project to formulate its strategy for a nationwide Clean Election Campaign next year in the lead up to the general election.

"*Winds of Change* believes that only by each and every Solomon Islander committing to cleaning up their own conduct can we hope to clean our nation," Ms Mitini said at the launch.

"For too long the silent majority have stood back and not made clear publicly that we reject the corrupt practices of many of our so-called leaders.

"We hope the Clean Election Campaign will help ordinary Solomon Islanders come forward and work together to get our beloved nation, Solomon Islands, back on the right track."

Music – food for the spirit

Internationally renowned pianist Penelope Thwaites is a foremost authority on the Australian composer Percy Grainger. The following is taken from a talk she gave at the Initiatives of Change centre in London last month. Her recorded illustrations ranged from Rachmaninov to Keane, from J S Bach to Michael Tippett

To me, the question of excellence in music is bound up with how we see ourselves as human beings. We are spiritual beings, and we need food for the spirit as much as for the body. All have a right to excellence. Elites may be socially unfashionable, but we need them, just as we need a vanguard in any field. The hideous example of China's "Cultural Revolution", where a pianist and former Tchaikovsky Competition prizewinner had his fingers broken, is a perversion of "equality".

Musical excellence may also be regarded with suspicion in religious circles, wary lest devotion to music should supplant devotion to the religion itself. Fortunately for us this wasn't a problem for Johann Sebastian Bach. Despite bad eyesight, huge family commitments, endless wrangles with tiresome local officials, he poured out the most astounding body of musical masterpieces. And he drew in the ordinary congregation through his wonderful use of the best well-known chorale tunes.

Outreach into schools

In my (Western Christian) tradition hymns and folk songs form the foundations of good singing. The best of them teach us something about good structure. They are good work-outs for the voice. And through our hymns and folk songs, we are reconnected to our roots. This is important for our sense of identity and therefore our sense of confidence.

There are so many truly great hymns in our Anglican/Methodist heritage. I long to see them part of our whole culture, and not just the province of *Songs of Praise*. It is

our heritage and, provided the words do not attack other faiths, we should be singing them with all our hearts and sharing them. We would not expect to go to India and for the Indians to cease their praise of Shiva, in case it hurt our

feelings. Religious intolerance and fanaticism should be answered with the true riches of our religious heritage: hymns that (like folk songs) have come out of real, life-changing

experiences. When you have grown up on them, they never leave you and often come into your mind as a source of strength and encouragement. Let all our children have access to that. Perhaps the start could be a collection for everyone of all faiths? How about a national hymn-singing competition for different age groups?

Hymns and folk songs

Among the most valuable and necessary initiatives now taking place are the outreach programs into schools by players from major orchestras. An orchestra is a miracle when you analyse what it represents, yet there is serious doubt about whether our orchestras can survive more than a

generation or two. Experiencing the orchestra in a live performance can be one of the most thrilling things ever.

Children (and adults) enter a whole new world when they experience listening as a complete experience, not as a background or accompaniment. The more you put into listening, the more you get out of it. Wholehearted listening, listening as

'We need food for the spirit as much as for the body'

'The more you put into listening, the more you get out of it'



Music in schools has benefits across all areas of the curriculum

a completely absorbing experience, needs to be taught and practised. And not just old music. We have to be prepared to open our minds and ears to new sounds!

Despite much wonderful music-making in many genres, it is sickening to see that "music" in popular culture has been taken over by the money-makers as a product to be sold by as much crudity and coarseness as the censor will allow. Classical music is not entirely guiltless either, but alas it is being marginalised. Great music can open magic windows onto new worlds. Each of us has a right to discover that. The weight of materialism, and perhaps our own

laziness, threatens that heritage, and I am concerned with the poverty of spirit that in general permeates our culture, and to

which any of us can fall victim.

So let us embrace the great gift of excellent music! Let us make sure that all children have the chance to discover the joy of singing. Let's support the brave and brilliant young (and not so young) musicians who scrape along on a shoestring in pursuit of their art. Let's support all moves to bring composers and their audiences fruitfully together.

Above all, let us thank the great Creative Spirit and Life Force which is always there to inspire us, if we listen and if we dare.