

LOUKASLUCANUS

LUCAS

An Evangelical History Review

No.2 March 1988

FEATURES: PHILLIP NEWMAN, 'Are there no prophets in Australia'?;
MALC ANDERSON, "Historiography and Nineteenth Century
Evangelical Social Concern in Britain"; PETER BENTLEY, 'All are not
historians, are they?'; PLUS: REVIEWS, NEWS AND INFORMATION,
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL MATERIAL.

In Christo in Tempore

ISSN:

1030-4428

"Christian history can ... take two forms, with or without metahistory. This is not merely an escape clause, trying to have the cake of metahistory in a specifically Christian history, and trying to eat it away in revision. Rather, it is an instance of the proper use of Occam's razor... The historian can see God at work in the past without necessarily writing of him there. What is essential is for the historian to cultivate that vision as he writes. Christian history will be the result. This is nothing other than a Christian attitude to living carried over into historical work. In ordinary life, believers do not (and should not) make Christian claims explicit to all times; but they do so when appropriate, when speaking from faith to faith or in apologetic and evangelism. The Christian historian must be totally objective in the face of his evidence; but if ... he also conceives history as the story of the acts of God, and therefore both discerns the ways of providence and makes moral judgements, can he be himself. Only then can he fully apply his Christianity to his academic work; only then can he live life as a whole, testifying to the salvation he has been given in Christ." [D.W.Bebbington, "The Vocation of the Christian Historian", UCCF Assoc./HSG, Leicester, n.d.]

us, and a focussing (sic) on that, not on our weaknesses and failures. Christians need to share these visions, these divine dreams, with each other, and then offer what God gives us to our fellow-citizens. So often even Christians seem to want the country to be run according to human wisdom, and our prayers are like Bandaids, focussing on areas of need.

There is a National Goals and Directions body, and a number of Christians are working through it. However, each parish, each prayer group should be, in this bicentennial year, a sub-branch of the National Goals and Directions Body. The greatest service we can do for our country is to allow the Spirit to work among us, and through us, as we look ahead; envisioning the future that God has planned for us. Then, having shared this vision, and having understood our role in it, to work towards it, keeping it always in view.

It is so easy to look back, and while that is important, without the past being seen through the eyes of the future, it will say nothing to us. It is easy to look around and see the faults, the sin, the evil - it is sometimes harder to focus on and affirm the good, the beautiful, the countless signs of the incarnate Christ. It is easy to look to the future with human eyes, and see human solutions and human goals - but in our bicentennial year we are challenged to look to the future with the eyes of the Holy Spirit.

Phillip Newman

Book Reviews :

Feature Review :

All are not historians, are they?

Mal Garvin, *Us Aussies: The Fascinating History They Didn't Tell Us About at School*, Haydon, 1987, pb. 175 pp., RRP \$7.95

In order to appreciate Mal Garvin's very Australian title choice, it is necessary to provide the story from which it came:

"A young teacher at a Perth school with a large percentage of Vietnamese recounted the story of a youngster saying, before a soccer game, 'Hey miss, do you think its a good idea for us Aussies to be one one side , and all the Viets on another?' She blinked her eyes as she looked down at the face with Asian features. This 'Aussie' kid, only here 18 months, had been one of the feared boat people."

The West Australian.

Mal Garvin wants to tell "us Aussies" who we are. He believes that if we define and clarify the specifics and makeup of the Australian character, we can achieve a greater personal and collective understanding of what it means to be an Australian today.

Before I begin this review, I should point out that this work is not meant to be a scholarly examination. *Us Aussies* is also not a history of "us Christians" in Australia, or of God's actions. What is important to the context of this lengthy review is that *Us Aussies* is an historical treatise written by a prominent Australian christian. This christian background is only hinted at in the brief biography at the start, but occasional references in the book make it clearer¹. This book provides an excellent example of confused callings. There may be prophets, teachers, preachers and etc., but not every christian is called to write history.

¹ eg: see *Us Aussies* , p.140

Mal Garvin has had extensive experience in Australian radio ministry, counselling and the training of youth and social workers. He founded and nurtured Fusion Australia, a non-denominational outreach to youth and the community. The short biography in this book notes that "his regular interface with the Australian soul from Geraldton to Sydney and Cairns to Hobart has culminated in the writing of this book". John Williamson, in the foreword, writes:

"Sure, we've all read history books, but who before has devoted a lifetime to searching for the golden link ... This is the true story and a blessing to us all."¹

Unfortunately, I have to disagree with the last two points.

Garvin's approach to telling the Australian story is to select "...key people and events which have shaped 'us Aussies'"², and to follow his thesis of the 'true Australian' through them all. These people and events are outlines in three sections, which are further divided into twelve chapters.

The first section is entitled "The Rise of the Bare-Toed Children". The opening chapter, 'The Blind Spot in Australian History', is subtitled 'why our history has been such a bore'. Garvin writes that history at school "was not our story"³. It was the story of other countries or about other Australian events which were important to England and English History. He asserts that we must move away from this

¹ The last two years have witnessed a proliferation of soul-searching articles and books concerned with the "true Australian" and "true Australian values". The bicentennial focus has promoted this outpouring, and undoubtedly there will be during this year (1988) an even greater number of similar works produced. An early article in this debate worth examining is Alan Attwood's "Our Elusive Soul" (*Time*, July 21, 1986). Attwood includes comments about the Australian identity from a wide range of Australian figures. The creation of "The Dinkum Aussie, the embodiment of a mythologised character", is the central point of this article.

² *ibid.*, p.13

³ *ibid.*, p.17

old story and go back in time to the first white Australians (the Aborigines are briefly acknowledged here, but they are largely dealt with later in the by now orthodox device of a separate chapter). Garvin's first white Australians were not the first fleet cockneys. They were the currency lads and lasses. Even at this early stage, Garvin's historical thesis and framework is questionable. He states that "Australia began somewhat more pragmatically [than America] as a result of the London bureaucrats' dilemma of what to do with the rotting hulks of convicts, once they had lost the American colonies"¹. There is no room allowed for debate. Garvin's thesis is hackneyed - out of the 'rotting hulks' comes new life and a new character. This is the base for the new currency, cornstalks and cabbage tree hats of chapter two.

The author believes that the currency children are the initial custodians of the true Australian character. Features of this character already include such facets as mateship, being willing to have a go, and having a practical outlook on life. Unlike others, the Australian children were "... open to what the black man could teach them about the bush"². They learnt the bush from the black man and yet still had the education of a white man. It seems that Garvin looks back on this era as the origins of a perfect 'race'. He ignores the fact that, by 1830, commentators were suggesting that the average Australian new about as much about Aborigines as an English country vicar, a fact which flowed from the already heavy concentration of the population in the towns. By that stage, aborigines were already fringe-dwellers of the urban concentrations, and hunted and harassed in the country side.

The currency children, interestingly enough, are depicted as becoming equal with the indigenous Australians. Garvin states that as currency children became more recognised in the community, they faced a collective discrimination. "Like the Aboriginal people fifty years earlier,

¹ *ibid.*, p.23

² *ibid.*, p.23

those first white Australians felt powerless to do anything but watch as others came in and claimed their homeland¹. This parallel is patronising and belittling for the aborigines. Some currency children may have learnt from the blackman, but they were still separate, much better off, and inclined to be patronising and racist themselves². Garvin does touch on some important questions in relation to the stereotype of the Australian character. The characteristics of cutting down tall poppies, despising hypocrisy, and having a sardonic wit, are vividly illustrated. But why do these features become the base for the 'true Australian'?

We move from the currency children to the days of gold and revolution, where "campfire camaraderie threatens an empire"³. Garvin believes that the bush life (which gold digging was to promote) led to the new society. The attitude of anti-authoritarianism developed on the goldfields. Interestingly, he postulates that the police who collected fees and checked licences were 'as popular as the tax collector in Jesus' day'⁴. The chapter ends with the glory of Eureka, which he paints up to be our American revolution.

Chapter Four, "The Selectors" ("the demand for a home in the Australian bush"), draws together the bush society and the Australian dream. This chapter is especially indebted to Russel Ward's *Australian Legend*. The Australian born of this period build on the character of their parents, the currency generation. The special national character now includes a quick mind and a "special sensitivity to injustice"⁵. Not only are 'Dad and Dave' included in this category (the "Aussie battler") but we are informed that Red Kelly (Ned's father) was 'the classic Australian born type'⁶! Chapter Five, "The

¹ *ibid.*, p.35

² see the currency lads description of 'Old Joe' quoted on p.31

³ *ibid.*, chapter 3

⁴ *ibid.*, p.51

⁵ *ibid.*, p.59

⁶ *ibid.*, p.59

Shearer's Strike", consolidates this stereotype of the Aussie battler. The shearers, for Garvin, were "the sons of the currency lads"¹. It is a pity, in passing, that Garvin could not make some more worthwhile point about the christian-based morality of W.G. Spence. Spence was the President of the Australian Shearer's Union and a "Sunday School teacher for much of his life"².

The final chapter in this section is concerned with World War One, where we are treated to such poetic highlights as the "mates from the bush lend a hand"³, and the "brown-toed children ... come of age"⁴. He notes the lack of monuments in Australia and the dominance of war memorials, especially in country towns. Aussie soldiers become immortalised in this chapter. All quotes used centre on the uniqueness of these special Aussie battlers (though at least Garvin notes the nature of the defeat at Gallipoli, unlike the Swan Lager bicentennial commercial which promotes myth in all areas of Australian history). For Garvin, at least our character has made it! We are able to "catch a glimpse of the meaning of ourselves reflected in the Aussie digger grin"⁵. From here, we proceed to the second section, which examines "other aussie attitude shapers". This are subsumed under the people groups of "aborigines" and "migrants", and in the categories of "sex" and "sport".

Concerning the Aborigines ("those who taught us to see"), Garvin writes "when we hear the word "Aborigine", there is immediately a great twinge of guilt at the back of the Australian mind - and justly so too. The Aboriginal people have been conspicuously absent in the Australian world of

¹ *ibid.*, p.69, an assertion that really requires a rigorous sampling of the shearer's background.

² *ibid.*, p.67

³ *ibid.*, chapter 6

⁴ *ibid.*, p.79

⁵ *ibid.*, p.79

"fair go" and equality"¹. I would suggest that for most Australians the Aboriginal question hasn't even been on their minds (though the spotlight afforded Aboriginal concerns by the Bicentennial may be helping to change this). Garvin emphasises the positive side in this chapter. He particularly notes several currency lads and comments on their working relationships with the Aborigines. Is he suggesting thereby that the Myall Creek massacre would not have happened if we had all grown up as currency children.

It is interesting to note Garvin's views about Aboriginal spirituality. He laments that the white man did not "listen to the natives ... (and) discover that in many ways he had, in fact, landed in the Garden of Eden"². This aspect of the Australian dislike of formal religion is linked with the Australian appreciation of the spiritual side of the Aborigines and the creation story (which the bush and land exemplify). Garvin comments that this "led to a feeling for a creator who showed himself more clearly in sunsets than cathedrals"³. This idea certainly deserves more examination. Unfortunately, the Crocodile Dundee version of spirituality and land rights is alluded to as Garvin continues this point. The aborigines do not just own the land, they belong to it - it owns them and by intimate connection we presume that the currency children are supposed to have the same spirit of ownership.

The chapter on the migrants examines "what they brought and how it acclimatised"⁴. Garvin examines the influence of the Irish ("how we inherited our stubborn streak"⁵) and then discusses "multiculturalism and all that"⁶. He postulates that the post-World War Two ethnic migration would have been a "quiet strain to the average Aussie whose

-
- 1 *ibid.*, p.85
 - 2 *ibid.*, p.92
 - 3 *ibid.*, p.134
 - 4 *ibid.*, chapter 8
 - 5 *ibid.*, p.100
 - 6 *ibid.*, p.105

sense of identity was already a bit thin"¹. "However, fears of loss of identity are a little misdirected because they fail to recognise how subtle, deep and all-pervading is our sun-tanned culture"². Garvin concludes that "it is unlikely that people coming from other cultures and countries are going to do anything other than temper the characteristics that are already there"³. It is obvious that Garvin favours assimilation rather than the current moves to self-determination. In the christian context it is worth noting the theological history of this development, which Don Carrington relates as the 'Ruth versus Esther debate'⁴. As in much of Garvin's book, he uses sporting examples to prove assimilation has happened and is obviously the best policy. Jeff Fenech (the son of Maltese parents) "is the classic currency kid"⁵.

The chapter on "sex" is subtitled "the land of the absent father"⁶. Though the male character of the Aussie is still the main focus, there are some interesting observations about the changing position of women. Another point worth considering is Garvin's thesis that the absent father promoted many women to direct their "quest for emotional satisfaction to their young children or religion"⁷. Sociologists are still postulating reasons behind the greater female commitment to the institutional church and the absence of the male⁸.

In contrast to some of the offerings already described, the chapter examining sport in Australia is certainly worth

-
- 1 *ibid.*, p.105
 - 2 *ibid.*, p.105
 - 3 *ibid.*, p.106
 - 4 Don Carrington, "Bicultural Persons and Multicultural Churches: Paper delivered at the 1986 ANZATS Conference, New Zealand".
 - 5 Garvin, *op.cit.*, p.107
 - 6 chapter 11
 - 7 *ibid.*, p.116
 - 8 See Dean Drayton, "The Australian Male: A Roadblock to Revival", *Zadok*, Series no. 1, (S15).

reading. The subtitle proclaims sport as "Australia's War of Independence"¹. It is "probably the only history we have had permission to call our own"². We became victors over the British in sport. It became, he suggests, our sacred pastime and provided the Aussie with an opportunity "to see the best characteristics of ourselves in identification with local sporting heroes"³. This reflection on the prominence of sport in Australia was also the subject of a recent paper read by Professor Robert Linder before the EHA in December 1987, who linked its prevalence to the civil religious structures of our society. There was a lively discussion about many of the points he raised, particularly about the view that sport has a functional religious base.

Section Three, "Taking Our Place in the Sun", contains the final two chapters of the book. In "The Gumleaf Tapestry" (chapter 11), Garvin reiterates his main thesis about the development of the Australian character, while in "Facing the Third Century Together" (chapter 12), he projects this thesis into the future. The section detailing the development of the worth noting. An epilogue explains the development of the Australian nation within the context of Maslow's now ageing theory of developmental motivation. There is a reasonable amount of popular psychology used as a framework for the thesis he expounds. Garvin includes a photo of Paul Hogan, who he believes "captures instinctively the Australian national (sic) self-concept that has been shaped by our unique history"⁴. The parable of Granny Smith and her apples concludes the evidence for the Aussie battler.

An appendix follows in which Garvin explores the shaping of a national consciousness and the nature of myth within the context of the American myth. For Garvin, myth is

¹ *ibid.*, chapter 10

² *ibid.*, p.127

³ *ibid.*, p.127

⁴ *ibid.*, p.153. For a reflective contrast, see the comments about the Hogan character in A. Attwood, *loc.cit.*, p.49

the "true reflection of things as they are"¹. The Aussie character is subconscious and must now be brought into consciousness. "Currency kids and bush orphans have been running and playing in our minds for decades"², he suggests, and then continues:

The Australian dream is not a red brick veneer on a quarter acre block in the suburbs, but a five acre block with chooks, a garden, a horse for the kids and the vague promise of subsistence living, a place where you're free to be your own boss. Dave and Mabel may have become more sophisticated, but their aspirations live on.³

The appendix provides a fascinating and bemusing end to the myth which he is trying to keep alive with this book. And in the end, this is also the verdict that the reader of *Us Aussies* must come to. This is a charming and interesting myth that Garvin pursues down through its two-hundred year existence, but in the end it is only a myth. For Garvin to treat it as a wholistic explanation of the truth is, moreover, to act as a mythologiser. In ignoring the dynamic input of generations of migrants coming to this country, for instance, is to place artificial constraints on what we can consider as "Australian". So defined, the term does *not* include the majority of people who actually worked to build the colonies, but *does* include people (like W.C. Wentworth) whose heart really lay in England⁴. It is doubtful that the important influences on the

¹ *ibid.*, p.158

² *ibid.*, p.134

³ *ibid.*, p.133

⁴ Portia Robinson suggests as much in her study of the first generation of white, native born Australians, in *The Hatch and Brood of Time*. On a different tack, Roger Bell also effectively demolishes the idea of an entirely self-generated Australian persona in his study of "The Future America: American influences on Australian Political Culture", to be published this year in a collection edited by Neville Meaney, dedicated to demonstrating 'foreign' cultural influences on Australia.

currency generations were Aboriginal - unless there is other substantiation, we must conclude that there have been few conscious attempts to learn from the Aborigines, though Rex Ingamells and the Jindyworobak Club were a later exception. Rather, the growth of many of the early protestations of colonial nationalism must be seen with a jaundiced eye as a by-product of the struggle for political power in the colony. All interests were attempting to identify themselves with the past of the colony in order to monopolize its present¹, and to choose the evidence from one side only in order to support the myth of the Australian legend is to warp history. After noting the problems that the book presents, I still recognise that *Us Aussies* has a part to play in the popularization of history. But it must be read with the restrictions of myth and/or part truth in mind.

Peter Bentley.

Russel Ward, in the debates following his seminal *Australian Legend*, also took up this stance - that the pursuit of the Australian bush-based persona is to pursue a myth, even if it is a persistent one.

¹ See Mark Hutchinson's post-doctoral study of G.W. Rusden's *History of Australia*, nearing completion at the University of NSW. This indicates that such historiography was an attempt to shape the past in order to support a particular colonial elite.

"CINEMA IS THE CONTEMPORARY MEDIUM FOR MYTH
AND SYMBOL MAKING"

Peter Malone, MSC, *In Black and White and Colour: A Survey of Aborigines in Australian Feature Films*. Nelen Yubu Missiological Unit, Series No.4, 1987. 136 pp. text + . Available from NYMU, 4/17 Jersey Ave., Leura, NSW, 2780. RRP \$9.95 plus \$1.00 postage/handling.

This is the latest book in the Nelen Yubu Missiological Series, which aims to produce publications which examine black and white relations in Australian religious and social life.

The author, Peter Malone, is a well known film reviewer and commentator. In this publication, Malone is primarily concerned with the feature film produced in Australia up to 1986. The survey is intertwined with a commentary concerning the role that these films play in the depiction, development and reflection of white attitudes about aborigines in the community. It should be noted that in this short study Malone does not concentrate on themes of racism or the half-caste/black dimension which more polemical critics have elaborated on. There is a brief chapter and some interrelated comment about the documentary film. Overall, some two hundred films are mentioned.

Malone's survey is essentially a chronological history, though there are three distinct parts and thematic breaks. The first part surveys cinema from 1900-1970. In this part, Malone examines the silent period (1900-1930), sound (1930-1960), and major films of the pre-1970 revival period. Part Two is entitled "Transition: Walkabout". This chapter is dedicated to the Nicolas Roeg film *Walkabout* (1971). Malone notes the changed portrayal of aborigines within the context of this film and the new Australian cinema which had such an impact on the film industry. There is a more sensitive and positive depiction of aboriginal culture and life. The third part, "New Australian Cinema: 1970-", is divided into functional chapters including Children's films and Telemovies, Small Budget