Funerals, Frigidity and Fanaticism

The representation of religion in Australian feature films.

by Peter Bentley

The author is a researcher in the field of religion and Australian society

IF YOU TRIED TO GAIN an impression of what religion in Australia is like by examining its representation in Australian feature films,[1] you would get a very distorted and stereotyped picture.

Generally you would see the representative of the Christian religion, the minister, (male of course) officiating at funerals and weddings. Some scenes would involve the minister in ridicule because of the portrayed ineptness, bigotry and fanaticism. Occasionally there is a portrayal of a reasonable religious figure. Even rarer though, is the portrayal of a woman with religious beliefs (especially if the woman isn't a nun).

During the ninety years of the Australian feature film industry there have been about thirty films which have contained a major religious dimension. As well as these key films there have been many others in which religious scenes and dialogue have featured. Probably over two hundred films contain religious references and characters (mainly Christian ministers).

These films may also contain dialogue using Christian terms in the form of cursing, but generally a more significant citation is needed to indicate a religious dimension. Since the 1970s there has been a proliferation of the use of the Christian expletive and it is beyond the scope of this short survey to list what would be the majority of Australian feature films since 1969. One classic example will have to suffice. In *Mad Max* (1979), near the start, the two pursuit drivers get into their car. One says 'Christ's sake, move over'. The other replies in an agitated manner, 'You're blaspheming again—I don't have to work with blasphemers'.

Australia is at least nominally a Christian country. In the 1986 census, 73% of the population indicated that their religion was Christian (the next highest religious affiliation was Islam at 0.7%).[2] With this religious make-up, it would be reasonable to expect that Christianity world make a significant contribution to the portrayal of religion in Australia. And indeed, this can certainly be seen as true for Australian cinemas. It seems however, that the dominance of the Christian religion has prevented any serious portrayal of other religions. Interestingly, there has been a growing recognition of the impact of eastern religion. The bizarre portrayal of New Age movements in *Luigi's Ladies* (1988) provides an example of this trend. One must question the significance of this however, when few film-makers from other religious traditions emerge to challenge certain stereotypes. At present most film-makers in Australia have only explored the tradition of Western and European Christianity; the tradition which they were exposed to.

Though there has been little representation of world religions in Australian films, there has been a growing presentation of Aboriginal religion and spirituality.[3] Since the 1970s several stimulating films have been produced, including, *The Last Wave* (1977), *Journey among Women*, (1977), *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978), *Manganinnie* (1979), *Backlash* (1986), *Initiation* (1987), and *The Dreaming* (1988). One of the main themes which has emerged from these films has been the relationship of Aboriginal spirituality to Western/European culture and religion. Not all differences have lead to conflict, unlike the important Schepisi film, *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*.

During the first three decades of the Australian film industry several significant religious films were made. Indeed, the film *Soldiers of the Cross* (1900) is regarded by some historians as the first major work to be produced anywhere in the world and the fore-runner of the feature film.

Soldiers of the Cross was made by Joseph Perry, who at the time was a major in the Salvation Army. Perry was involved with the Salvation Army's Limelight Department, a division founded to spread the Army's message with the new medium of cinematography. The son of the founder of the Salvation Army, Herbert Booth provided the script for the production and preached (lectured) at the screenings. The production was essentially a compilation of film, slides, music and Booth's lecture. The theme of early Christian

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martyrdom proved the basis of a captivating production. Unfortunately Perry produced only two more films with the short-lived company Biorama Studios which was founded in 1909. The studios were closed in 1910 by worried Salvation Army officers. The belief that cinema was really the Devil's camera proved too much for conservative elements. Perry subsequently resigned from the Army.

Other early films did not take the sympathetic standpoint of the Salvation Army films toward religion. Indeed some films enraged Christian groups by portraying clergy in scandalous situations. *The Silence of Dean Maitland* (1914, also remade in 1934), *The Church and the Woman* (1917) and *The Monk and the Woman* (1917) were perhaps the prelude to the real life clergy scandals of the American tele-evangelists in the 1980s.

Two significant films in the 1930s were the Charles and Elsa Chauvel film *In the Wake of the Bounty* (1933) and the Beaumont Smith classic *Splendid Fellows* (1944). *In the Wake of the Bounty* followed the mutiny on the bounty to the arrival of the mutinees on Pitcairn Island (actually, of those who had chosen to go with Fletcher Christian). The last part of the film was a documentary about the descendents of the mutinees in the 1930s. The Chauvels filmed on Pitcairn Island expressly for this purpose. There is a major religious dimension to the film. The conversion of John Adams, who was the sole surviving mutineer when the community was discovered twenty years after the mutiny, is indicated by his interest in the saving power of the *Bounty* bible. Adams is depicted as the preacher/ patriarch of the community.

This is important because later the documentary section shows considerable details of the contemporary religious scene, including church scenes and a dramatised account of the difficulties of life on the isolated island. A sick baby provides a testing of faith for the overtly Christian father and the worrying mother. When they cannot raise the nearest ship (for the ship's doctor), the child dies. In this scene, though there is the depiction of grief the father knows that 'God's will is done'.

The most important religious details in this film are ironically absent. There is no indication of what particular church the Pitcairners belong to. The discerning viewer is left to conclude that the Pitcairners would belong to a form of puritan Anglicanism, because Adams and the other mutineers were from the then dominant English/Anglican cultural milieu. However, Adams' descendents had all been converted to Seventh Day Adventism in the 1880s and have remained so down to the present day. The absence of any denominational detail is linked to the questionable position to which small groups were assigned before the 1970s (a situation which still continues for some.) Interestingly, fifty years later, the denominational position of Seventh Day Adventism, while by now quite established, was subject to scrutiny as a sect during the Azaria Chamberlain affair. The death of this baby also raised the question of God's will being done.

The other film from the 1930s, *Splendid Fellows*, provides fascinating historical material for the cultural historian. The film celebrates the great Melbourne Centennial air race from London. One of the major characters is the 'flying parson', the Reverend Arthur Stanhope. (The flying doctor service, which had a Christian basis, was founded about the same time as the film was made).

The parson does not compete in the air race, but arranges for the construction of his dream plane, which is used by the other major characters. These pilots become 'Splendid Fellows' for their heroic actions in saving the parson and another man (who receives his sight back from God), who had crashed in the outback on their way to Melbourne to welcome the flyers.

The parson had been a fighter pilot in World War I, but gave away all the 'slaughter and the shooting down of human souls' in order 'to save instead of destroy'. He is depicted in a series of short scenes travelling throughout the Australian bush performing the rites of passage and providing material comfort. He is always ready to provide moral counsel and is the supreme confidant. Like many ministers, he is depicted as sexless or at least uninterested in affairs of a romantic nature. (Perhaps he was rendered a eunuch for the Lord in World War I!)

The parson is the ultimate functional religious character. He does not complicate any script with sexual possibilities. He performs his tasks and allows himself to be rescued by the hero. It is worth noting that this film was shown at the Lyceum Theatre in Sydney where the owners, the Methodist Church (and later the Uniting Church) tried to promote the screening of morally responsible films.

From the end of the 1930s until the late 1960s the Australian film industry was in a depressed state. The only important religious film made during this time was the World Wide Pictures film *Shadow of the Boomerang* (1960). World Wide Pictures is the film department of the Billy Graham Organisation. It made the film as a follow-up to the Billy Graham crusade in Australia in 1959. This crusade was the most successful numerically and perhaps spiritually which Australia has witnessed. The film was widely advertised in church circles, but it is difficult to evaluate what impact it had. The central characters were Americans, a brother and sister. The brother's racist attitudes toward Aborigines is dispelled after listening to one of Graham's sermons. He is soundly converted!

The 1970s and 1980s produced some very significant films with religious themes. One of the earliest films introduced a multicultural dimension to the Christian religion. *In Squeeze a Flower* (1970) Walter Chiari continued his Catholic persona from *They're a Weird Mob* (1966), but expanded it as a member of a religious order.

The dearth of multicultural religious representation is a prominent area of neglect in Australian films. It would be another fourteen years before the diversity of the Catholic experience was shown in *Silver City* (1984). This time the Polish Catholic migration was the focus. Not all priests and Catholics are Irish, though this is what is usually depicted.

The most overtly religious film of the 1970s looked at school/seminary life for Catholics in the 1950s. *The Devil's Playground* (1976) followed on from the director's (Fred Schepisi) earlier short film *The Priest* (in *Libido*, 1973).[4] The themes of repressed and anguished sexuality, enforced celibacy, strictures of Catholic morality and clerical life are potentially sensationalist, though Schepisi handled them with artistic skill.

During the 1980s there was a proliferation of written material about Catholic childhoods and religious lives. Schepisi's film provided an impetus for many people to embark on their own stories.

In the important film *Newsfront* (1978), a rare appearance is made by a religious woman. Fay is a Roman Catholic, though not a nun. Anyway, she is still depicted as fearful of sex. Her first marriage collapses because she neglects St Paul's advice (1 Corinthians 7:4–5) to come back together after praying. The portrayal of Catholic ritual and life in the 1950s is austerely impressive. Anglican appearances in the 1970s revolve around various ministers. The clergy in *The Getting of Wisdom* (1977) are cold religious figures. No love is depicted and certainly none is available for Laura Rambotham. At least the Methodist minister, Mister Neville, in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978) has a modicum of Christian character, but his worries about his role in the creation of Jimmie's troubled spirit are never fully developed. Only those people who have read the Kenneally novel would be aware of the conflict.

In the 1980s several films highlighted the role of religion in Australian Society. In *Hoodwink* (1981), the subject of Christian witnessing in prisons becomes entangled with a love affair between the minister's wife and the hoodwinking prisoner, who is pretending to be blind.

In *Hoodwink* there are some unusually well-developed Christian scenes and the conflict is well acted, though the affair does seem to develop a bit too quickly. Perhaps not all minister's spouses are the victims of such profound sexual activity and have to take the opportunity of 'knowing' a man when the possibilities arise.

The dramatised story of the 1936 Korumburra mine strike, *Strikebound* (1984) provides a wealth of religious scenes and references. The key people involved in the strike are both depicted as having faith. Wattie Doig's faith is in communism. His wife Agnes is a member of the Salvation Army. She had been a Presbyterian, but left over a disagreement and then joined the Salvation Army, probably because they are more socially active. Agnes is depicted as an Army officer (without explanation being given as to how she was allowed to marry a non-Salvation Army person, or indeed become an officer)., who is actively involved in the regular meetings, the teaching of Sunday School and outreach events. When Wattie becomes involved with the strike, Agnes does all she can to help. For the latter part of the film Agnes does not wear her uniform. Is this meant to symbolize the conflict between Christianity and Communism? The film does not make this clear, though committed communists would have been quite aware of the conflict in Spain which began in 1936.

Earlier in the film, there is a significant scene which perhaps illustrates to Agnes the distinction between the aims of their different faiths. Wattie is at a meeting to found the local branch of the Communist Party and Agnes is in the (nearby) Salvation Army hall for the weekly praise meeting. The following scenes cut from communism to Christianity, culminating in a battle between the two groups to out sing each other. The Salvationists sing *'Onward Christian Soldiers'* and the Communists sing *'The Red Flag'*. The Salvationists look the more disconcerted and Agnes tells Wattie the she was 'embarrassed', but doesn't really appear worried.

It is the communists and the strikers who are depicted as the agents of real change in a real world. It is a pity that the Christian tradition of support for social justice is not highlighted, unlike the strike themes in the foreign films *Comrades* (Britain, 1986) and *Matewan* (USA, 1987). Instead an open Christian commitment is seen by Australians to conflict with social causes which have structural foundations.

Probably the most enigmatic religious film this century is the controversial and widely acclaimed feature *Bliss* (1985). The film is based on the novel by Peter Carey, whose most recent novel (*Oscar and Lucinda*) also contains a fundamental religious theme.

In *Bliss*, the viewer is left to ponder many questions about life and death. Is Harry really in hell? Did he die and was he sent back to earth for some task? Is hell really like having an elephant sit on your car? Certainly Harry's discussion with the Reverend Des provides a scene of torture worthy of hell. The Reverend Des ranks alongside all the classical figures of religious ridicule in Australian films. Des is not the raving preacher of *The City* (*Three in One*, 1957) or *The Mango Tree* (1977), rather he is the inept, faithless minister of religion—worthy successor to the Reverend Petersen (*Petersen*, 1974).

Another hauntingly enigmatic film *The Tale of the Ruby Rose* (1987) also has a religious dimension. The director Roger Scholes is an acknowledged Christian film-maker, though he does not present overtly Christian messages. Ruby is a young woman with a fear of the dark. Scholes tells her

4. See also Peter Malone, Images of Religion in Australian Film, *Bulletin of Christian Affairs*, No. 127, 1982.

story about how she overcomes this fear and finds hope in life. Perhaps some viewers would make an analogy with faith.

Four recent films contain interesting religious elements. In *Those Dear Departed* (1987) most of the film is set in a type of purgatory, in which actors and performers wait until they have resolved all their earthly problems. When everything is bliss again, they are allowed to travel to heaven, 'where every show is a success'.

The *Navigator* is a fascinating story about a group of fourteenth-century miners in Cumbria, who embark on a quest at the instigation of a visionary child. If they succeed in placing a spire on the top of 'the great cathedral' they will (by faith) avert the plague.

In *Mull* (1988) there is an examination of religion as a crutch. The father with the dying wife finds comfort in his new religion. His son has embraced this religion (a type of fundamentalist Christianity) with an unhealthy fanaticism. Unfortunately, the wife dies and the husband returns to his former God—the bottle. *Mull* is unusual in that it depicted an adult baptism ceremony (the father's). Presumably the church is the Baptist? It lacked the dynamism generally to be found among Pentecostals.

Celia (1989) provides an interesting look at the moral world of the 1950s. Prayer is said in schools and ministers deliver pulpit tirades about the Australian Peace Council which they see as a communist front. Morality, anti-communism and Christianity are all equated. A film with these themes has no room for the portrayal of the radical Christians of the time.

Undoubtedly the film which encapsulates the religious dimension for the 1980s is *Evil Angels* (1989). This is a triumphant film for all people but especially for Christians and the maligned Seventh Day Adventists. *Evil Angels* has appropriate measures of doubt and questioning, as well as genuine expressions of faith and church commitment. It is reassuring to hear that the truth does matter. *Evil Angels* has at its centre the Chamberlain's religion, unlike *In the Wake of the Bounty* where their particular denomination was not even mentioned.

A feature common to many Australian films is the use of what I will term the 'general Christian', the 'general minister/priest' and the 'general church'. It does not seem to matter what denomination or Christian tradition is depicted; the important factor is that Christian religiosity is displayed. This is particularly true of the functional funeral scene; (any man in a flowing garment will do) though the trained observed can make out important details. For example, in *Winter of Our Dreams* (1981) the minster's robes display the symbol of the Uniting Church. He is officiating at the funeral of Lisa, a 1960s society drop-out who had committed suicide. Lisa's home was Kings Cross, an area in which the Uniting Church has a major presence through minsters like Ted Noffs.

There is also the 'general religious' or 'spiritual' film. Some of these deal with the dark side. *Thirst* (1979) is about ritualistic blood drinkers and *Razorback* (1984) is about a gigantic, evil, death-bringing boar. *Picnic at Hanging Rock* was advertised as a 'recollection of evil'.

Other films present the conflict of good and evil, with the good emerging triumphant. The *Mad Max* trilogy provides an excellent picture of this theme. Perhaps Max is the true representative of religion for the Australian people. He has suffered and conquered. We feel safe with Max and we join in the ritual command'pray that he's out there . . . somewhere!'

Max is not the God of the ministers and religious, he is the God of the people. Many Australians have a secular materialistic outlook with privatised and categorized religious elements, but generally Australian films have tended to be overtly secular. Religion has been used in mainly functional ways—religious themes have not usually been integral to the story.

With the exception of Fred Schepisi and Peter Weir Australian film directors have shown little serious interest in religion. In other countries, however, religion has been the central concern of many films. The United States has had a religious film tradition from Hollywood biblical epics to the recent apocalyptic film *The Seventh Sign* (1988).

European directors Andrei Tarkovsky and Ingmar Bergman (son of a Swedish Lutheran pastor) are noted for their spiritual intentions and Italian director Federico Fellini has revealed his religious obsession in *La Dolce Vita* (1960), *Roma* (1972) and *Amarcord* (1974).

Australia has also lacked any significant institutional religious involvement, unlike the United States where the religious film industry became established with and grew from the evangelistic crusades of the 1950s.

Religious stereotyping has become quite established in the visual media in Australia. Though there are some exceptions (for example, the minister figure in *E Street*), most Australian television serials have stereotyped Christian characters. The English vicar-type who is conned into taking a funeral for a pet goldfish and the regular Christian character Celia (a spinster of strong moral fibre and not much else) from *Home and Away* are typical examples of the unfortunate portrayal of Christians.

Is it possible to obtain better portrayals of religious figures? Australian Christians have either ignored film and television or failed to evaluate them critically. We watch television and films and perhaps occasionally complain about the morality presented or the poor characterisations, but we have done little to foster alternative images or to promote Christians working in these areas. If Australian Christians do not learn to participate in our visual society religious stereotyping will become even more entrenched in the future.

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These films may also contain dialogue using Christian terms in the form of cursing, but generally a more significant citation is needed to indicate a religious dimension. Since the 1970s there has been a proliferation of the use of the Christian expletive and it is beyond the scope of this short survey to list what would be the majority of Australian feature films since 1969. One classic example will have to suffice. In *Mad Max* (1979), near the start, the two pursuit drivers get into their car. One says 'Christ's sake, move over'. The other replies in an agitated manner, 'You're blaspheming again—I don't have to work with blasphemers'.

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The dramatised story of the 1936 Korumburra mine strike, *Strikebound* (1984) provides a wealth of religious scenes and references. The key people involved in the strike are both depicted as having faith. Wattie Doig's faith is in communism. His wife Agnes is a member of the Salvation Army. She had been a Presbyterian, but left over a disagreement and then joined the Salvation Army, probably because they are more socially active. Agnes is depicted as an Army officer (without explanation being given as to how she was allowed to marry a non-Salvation Army person, or indeed become an officer)., who is actively involved in the regular meetings, the teaching of Sunday School and outreach events. When Wattie becomes involved with the strike, Agnes does all she can to help. For the latter part of the film Agnes does not wear her uniform. Is this meant to symbolize the conflict between Christianity and Communism? The film does not make this clear, though committed communists would have been quite aware of the conflict in Spain which began in 1936.

Earlier in the film, there is a significant scene which perhaps illustrates to Agnes the distinction between the aims of their different faiths. Wattie is at a meeting to found the local branch of the Communist Party and Agnes is in the (nearby) Salvation Army hall for the weekly praise meeting. The following scenes cut from communism to Christianity, culminating in a battle between the two groups to out sing each other. The Salvationists sing *'Onward Christian Soldiers'* and the Communists sing *'The Red Flag'*. The Salvationists look the more disconcerted and Agnes tells Wattie the she was 'embarrassed', but doesn't really appear worried.

It is the communists and the strikers who are depicted as the agents of real change in a real world. It is a pity that the Christian tradition of support for social justice is not highlighted, unlike the strike themes in the foreign films *Comrades* (Britain, 1986) and *Matewan* (USA, 1987). Instead an open Christian commitment is seen by Australians to conflict with social causes which have structural foundations.

Probably the most enigmatic religious film this century is the controversial and widely acclaimed feature *Bliss* (1985). The film is based on the novel by Peter Carey, whose most recent novel (*Oscar and Lucinda*) also contains a fundamental religious theme.

In *Bliss*, the viewer is left to ponder many questions about life and death. Is Harry really in hell? Did he die and was he sent back to earth for some task? Is hell really like having an elephant sit on your car? Certainly Harry's discussion with the Reverend Des provides a scene of torture worthy of hell. The Reverend Des ranks alongside all the classical figures of religious ridicule in Australian films. Des is not the raving preacher of *The City* (*Three in One*, 1957) or *The Mango Tree* (1977), rather he is the inept, faithless minister of religion—worthy successor to the Reverend Petersen (*Petersen*, 1974).

Another hauntingly enigmatic film *The Tale of the Ruby Rose* (1987) also has a religious dimension. The director Roger Scholes is an acknowledged Christian film-maker, though he does not present overtly Christian messages. Ruby is a young woman with a fear of the dark. Scholes tells her

4. See also Peter Malone, Images of Religion in Australian Film, *Bulletin of Christian Affairs*, No. 127, 1982.

story about how she overcomes this fear and finds hope in life. Perhaps some viewers would make an analogy with faith.

Four recent films contain interesting religious elements. In *Those Dear Departed* (1987) most of the film is set in a type of purgatory, in which actors and performers wait until they have resolved all their earthly problems. When everything is bliss again, they are allowed to travel to heaven, 'where every show is a success'.

The *Navigator* is a fascinating story about a group of fourteenth-century miners in Cumbria, who embark on a quest at the instigation of a visionary child. If they succeed in placing a spire on the top of 'the great cathedral' they will (by faith) avert the plague.

In *Mull* (1988) there is an examination of religion as a crutch. The father with the dying wife finds comfort in his new religion. His son has embraced this religion (a type of fundamentalist Christianity) with an unhealthy fanaticism. Unfortunately, the wife dies and the husband returns to his former God—the bottle. *Mull* is unusual in that it depicted an adult baptism ceremony (the father's). Presumably the church is the Baptist? It lacked the dynamism generally to be found among Pentecostals.

Celia (1989) provides an interesting look at the moral world of the 1950s. Prayer is said in schools and ministers deliver pulpit tirades about the Australian Peace Council which they see as a communist front. Morality, anti-communism and Christianity are all equated. A film with these themes has no room for the portrayal of the radical Christians of the time.

Undoubtedly the film which encapsulates the religious dimension for the 1980s is *Evil Angels* (1989). This is a triumphant film for all people but especially for Christians and the maligned Seventh Day Adventists. *Evil Angels* has appropriate measures of doubt and questioning, as well as genuine expressions of faith and church commitment. It is reassuring to hear that the truth does matter. *Evil Angels* has at its centre the Chamberlain's religion, unlike *In the Wake of the Bounty* where their particular denomination was not even mentioned.

A feature common to many Australian films is the use of what I will term the 'general Christian', the 'general minister/priest' and the 'general church'. It does not seem to matter what denomination or Christian tradition is depicted; the important factor is that Christian religiosity is displayed. This is particularly true of the functional funeral scene; (any man in a flowing garment will do) though the trained observed can make out important details. For example, in *Winter of Our Dreams* (1981) the minster's robes display the symbol of the Uniting Church. He is officiating at the funeral of Lisa, a 1960s society drop-out who had committed suicide. Lisa's home was Kings Cross, an area in which the Uniting Church has a major presence through minsters like Ted Noffs.

There is also the 'general religious' or 'spiritual' film. Some of these deal with the dark side. *Thirst* (1979) is about ritualistic blood drinkers and *Razorback* (1984) is about a gigantic, evil, death-bringing boar. *Picnic at Hanging Rock* was advertised as a 'recollection of evil'.

Other films present the conflict of good and evil, with the good emerging triumphant. The *Mad Max* trilogy provides an excellent picture of this theme. Perhaps Max is the true representative of religion for the Australian people. He has suffered and conquered. We feel safe with Max and we join in the ritual command'pray that he's out there . . . somewhere!'

Max is not the God of the ministers and religious, he is the God of the people. Many Australians have a secular materialistic outlook with privatised and categorized religious elements, but generally Australian films have tended to be overtly secular. Religion has been used in mainly functional ways—religious themes have not usually been integral to the story.

With the exception of Fred Schepisi and Peter Weir Australian film directors have shown little serious interest in religion. In other countries, however, religion has been the central concern of many films. The United States has had a religious film tradition from Hollywood biblical epics to the recent apocalyptic film *The Seventh Sign* (1988).

European directors Andrei Tarkovsky and Ingmar Bergman (son of a Swedish Lutheran pastor) are noted for their spiritual intentions and Italian director Federico Fellini has revealed his religious obsession in *La Dolce Vita* (1960), *Roma* (1972) and *Amarcord* (1974).

Australia has also lacked any significant institutional religious involvement, unlike the United States where the religious film industry became established with and grew from the evangelistic crusades of the 1950s.

Religious stereotyping has become quite established in the visual media in Australia. Though there are some exceptions (for example, the minister figure in *E Street*), most Australian television serials have stereotyped Christian characters. The English vicar-type who is conned into taking a funeral for a pet goldfish and the regular Christian character Celia (a spinster of strong moral fibre and not much else) from *Home and Away* are typical examples of the unfortunate portrayal of Christians.

Is it possible to obtain better portrayals of religious figures? Australian Christians have either ignored film and television or failed to evaluate them critically. We watch television and films and perhaps occasionally complain about the morality presented or the poor characterisations, but we have done little to foster alternative images or to promote Christians working in these areas. If Australian Christians do not learn to participate in our visual society religious stereotyping will become even more entrenched in the future.