

## EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Affie Adagio

**End of Year Celebration: Mad Hatters/Masquerade Mask Party.** Those present had a great time as can be seen in the photos on cover. First prize was won by Viki Potempa.



The only disappointment was that there were only approx. 20 present. Members need to remember that it is such a function that needs support for the Humanist Society of NSW to grow.

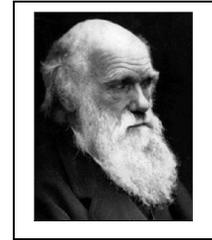
UNAANSW United Nations Association of Australia (NSW) has taken an office in Humanist House. This will be of help to us financially and to them especially as they had to leave their last office because of renovations.

**UN DAY CELEBRATION PARLIAMENT HOUSE** was attended by John August, Fred Flatow, David Duffy and myself. It was a successful event and I sat with the Greek Consul which gave me a chance to use my Greek.

**BOUGAINVILLE WOMEN'S STORY SEMINAR: Bougainville Women Resist Mining Companies.** I am convening this seminar to be opened by Lee Rhiannon which will take place on Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> March 2009 during International Women's Day Week and will take place in the State Parliament Theatre 12.30-5.30 at a cost of \$20 and includes finger food for lunch. Three organisations have agreed to co-sponsor this event: HumSocNSW, UNAANSW and WILPF (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom). I was typing the sworn statements for Waratah Rosemarie Gillespie's book on her experience in Bougainville, and I felt traumatised as to what people suffered especially the women. This needed to be shared with the community in an effort to raise community awareness about the trauma experienced. Please mark it in your diary and make every effort to attend in order to support this project. The money we raise will cover their air fares etc. (See p 4)

Victor Bien

**Darwin Day** is an international celebration of science and humanity held on or around February 12, the day that Charles Darwin was born on in 1809. So this year will be a big celebration because it is the 200th anniversary.



It will be a big occasion too because this year in November will be the sesquicentenary of the publication of his famous book *The Origin of Species*. The scientists will be celebrating independently of Darwin Day, see the Science Show episode 29 Nov transcript on Darwin Year 2009 for some details [http://www.abc.net.au/rn/scienceshow/stories/2008/24329\\_06.htm#transcript](http://www.abc.net.au/rn/scienceshow/stories/2008/24329_06.htm#transcript). Darwin Day celebrates the discoveries and life of Charles Darwin -- the man who first described biological evolution via natural selection with scientific rigor. More generally, Darwin Day expresses gratitude for the enormous benefits that scientific knowledge, acquired through human curiosity and ingenuity, has contributed to the advancement of humanity. However, from our point of view arising from our struggle against undue religious influence, his idea is a *dangerous* idea! Philip Batterham Professor of Genetics University of Melbourne Convenor of Evolution the Festival thinks Darwin is more significant than Einstein or Freud because of the ongoing impact of Darwin. Darwin has clearly affected our history, and that's something that we should reflect upon, but there is relevance to the major issues of this day. Climate change; can we adapt? Can our ecosystems adapt? That's a very Darwinian question. The uniqueness of humans, the issues of our evolution; is it natural? Are we controlling our own evolution or is natural selection operating? What are the consequences of us interfering with the evolution of humans and other species on the planet? There are so many questions and they're important to the whole community.

[Come to the March HuVAT where Victor will lead a discussion on this topic]

**DARWIN DAY 200 CELEBRATION**

## **PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

*John August*

**UNAANSW** (United Nations Association of Australia NSW): **New Tennant**. I announce with pleasure the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement with the United Nations Association of Australia, our new tenant, who



has who has moved into the previous bookroom. This means our financial pressures are much reduced, though probably not eliminated - we'll have to see how our finances end up in half a year to a year or so. Certainly, thanks muchly to the many people who have made donations to the Humanist Society over the past few years, and thanks in particular for a recent large anonymous donation. We've moved the bookroom into the main meeting area - thanks to Fred and Gillian for their efforts here. We plan to have a donation box so people can purchase books when there's nobody running the bookroom.

### **Other News**

We had a presence at the Newtown Festival, along with the Sydney Atheists and Secular Party at a shared stall. One Christian Blog bemoaned the fact there were no Christians there and only one stall of Atheists.

(<http://sydneyanglicanheretics.blogspot.com/2008/11/down-among-dead-men.html>)

We've recently purchased a data projector and screen, which we made use of at the last HuVat when Waratah outlined the actions of the Australian Government and Mining Companies at Bougainville - this was a replacement when Clive Parabou was refused a visa. We've joined with the United National Association of Australia (NSW) and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) to jointly organise a symposium as a part of International Women's Day 2009, called "**Bougainville Women's Story**: Bougainville Women Resist Mining Companies".

Ann has pointed out the possibilities for obtaining **grants from the City of Sydney Council**, something we plan to follow up.

We're progressing on the development of the new **Happy Human**. We've had some good meetings which have refined our understanding of the issues.

The **NSW Council for Civil Liberties** has made an interesting point in my communications with them : many Muslim majority countries operate under secular law - or at least, they're not "Islamic Republics" with Sharia law. The interesting thing is that there's some agitation for recognition of Sharia law in the UK and other western democracies when it's not even recognised in many Muslim majority countries. Go figure. I should also acknowledge a view that we should not become involved in current popular issues, but focus on humanist core issues; that viewpoint is acknowledged; nevertheless, committee majorities have supported such involvement. I don't have space to outline that viewpoint in detail, so please don't jump to conclusions based on this single paragraph.

Reaching out, I've spoken with Graham Long of Wayside Chapel - this is in the Uniting Church, the most progressive of the mainstream denominations - talking about definitions of poverty (remember "The Poverty Wars"?) and also what's involved in getting Uniting Church operations financially transparent like regular non-religious charities and businesses. In addition to the business operations of the Catholic Church and Uniting Church (noted in the Australian Humanist in Spring 2008 by S.N. Stuart), Graham drew attention to the operations of the Salvation Army and the Seventh Day Adventists, running "Sanitarium Foods".

**Victorian Humanists to teach Humanist Ethics in Schools:** According to the Melbourne Age of the 14th December :

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/religion-in-schools-to-go-godfree-20081213-6xxs.html?page=-1>

"VICTORIAN state primary school students will soon have an alternative religious education lessons

taught by people who do not believe in God and say there is "no evidence of any supernatural power". The Humanist Society of Victoria has developed a curriculum, which the State Government accreditation body says it intends to approve, to deliver 30-minute lessons each week of "humanist applied ethics" to primary pupils."

I'd expect there to be more details of this initiative in the Australian Humanist, and I do look forward to seeing the curriculum taught. The Victorians are to be congratulated, and hopefully we'll be able learn from and use the Victorian example as a precedent to get similar lessons taught in NSW.

### **Popemobile courtcase continues**

Ian Bryce drove around his "World Truth Day" Popemobile during the recent World Roman Catholic Youth Week, and had his car taken off the road for a trumped up ticket of "having a roof ornament likely to distract drivers" - strange, given how much roof borne advertising we have around. The NSW Council for Civil Liberties have taken up Ian's case, and recently represented Ian in the first procedural salvo at Downing Centre Courts - requesting further details from the police. Some say the charge will be quietly dropped. We'll see what results - there's certainly the opportunity to use the attraction of a newsworthy item.

(see <http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/court-damns-fake-pope/2008/12/01/1227979938770.html>)

### **Bus Slogan Rejected**

Following from initiatives in London and Washington, the Atheist Foundation of Australia planned its own campaign with "Atheism - Celebrate reason!". This has been reject by APN Outdoors, along with various other phrases.

President of the Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc, David Nicholls said: "I am flabbergasted. This is extremely disappointing and a severe blow to freedom of expression in Australia. We are witnessing the result of seemingly paranoid executives interfering with pertinent social

comment. This action has thwarted the right to state peacefully and openly a legitimate and timely message without violence."

Interestingly, in early 2006 APN Outdoor also put a gag on advertising by the Respect Life Office in Perth, an arm of the Catholic Church, when they planned to promote the idea that women experience trauma after abortion (I understand women can have a feeling of relief, not trauma). In any case, this initiative was reject by APN Outdoor because the images were considered "political in nature" and "offensive."

Just what is allowed seems to be allowed is decided on an ad hoc basis by APN Outdoor, and we do need to look at the bigger picture. I'm sure the APN allows advertising of a non-religious nature which would offend some people - just as long as they're the dollars people are used to - used to sell goods, not promote ideas or awareness (whoever is pushing them). The world around is rather untidy when you look closely. In any case, it seems the Sydney Atheists are planning a promotional initiative of their own.

### ***IHEYO: Experiencing real young humanist activism in the world***

*Uttam Niraula* (1<sup>st</sup> vice president, IHEYO)

It is my pleasure to introduce the International Humanist and Ethical Youth Organization (IHEYO) among Australian humanist friends. I am sure most of the member of humanist society, rationalists and readers know about IHEYO personally. That is why I am going to make a further introduction here. IHEYO would like to explore some possible opportunities for youth to engage with the international young humanist movement.

**Short Introduction to IHEYO:** The International Humanist and Ethical Youth Organization (IHEYO) is devoted to promoting the spread of humanism among young people. IHEYO is working together with many groups and individuals around the world. With humanism in practice, IHEYO means all humanist, freethinker, laique, skeptic, rationalist, atheist, agnostics and similar groups. It is also the youth organization of the

International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), [www.iheu.org](http://www.iheu.org). IHEU is the umbrella organization of various humanist organizations from all continents. IHEYO has also established relation with some United Nation's organizations and youth organizations working in international level. The head office of IHEYO is located in the Brussels to which member organization from Belgium is supporting to host main office.

IHEYO started carrying active movement by the year 2002. There are so many people who have contributed to flourishing the youth humanist movement through IHEYO in its history till that date. IHEYO's main identity is to bring into active association youth groups and young humanist individuals throughout the world interested in promoting humanism, as is described in the [IHEU Amsterdam Declaration 2002](#). IHEYO is only one organization in the world of its kind. It is rapidly expanding its membership each year. Many membership applications are being registered to IHEYO from various countries. It is interesting that youth organizations from countries of so called religious fundamentalists and terrorists are also interested to be the member of this secular organization. It makes IHEYO more proud.

Currently there are 11 executive committee members in the board of IHEYO. It holds board members from all the continents except from Australia. So, multiculturalism is the most interesting part of the organization. Likewise it holds each regional working group in Europe, Africa, Asia and America. All the regional working groups are independent to make their own action plan. For an example; activity of IHEYO in Africa may vary from the activity of Asia. Or European working group is organizing tolerance campaign while African working group is busy on working against HIV Aids.

IHEYO holds its most popular event annually. On which a lot of activities occur such as cultural show, lecturers, game, interactions, exchange of knowledge etc. It holds the annual conference parallel with the IHEU conference in every alternative year. Alternative years it goes on its own. Last annual conference of IHEYO was held in Washington DC in 2008. This year IHEYO is going to organize the conference in Nepal in October.

**IHEYO's aims are:**

- ❖ To promote the development of cooperation among member organizations and humanist youth, especially on the international level;
- ❖ To promote circulation of information and expertise among member organizations and humanist youth;
- ❖ To carry out educational and cultural action in order to promote a Humanist vision of cultural, social and ethical values;
- ❖ To represent its members to any and all international governing institutions on all questions related to the organizations purpose;
- ❖ To contribute and give a voice to youth humanism on the international level.

How can you involve in young humanist movement?

- There are several activities for you to be involved in youth humanist organization. IHEYO has recently started an activity called Humanist Sofa. It is so interesting and creative activity. If any humanist friend wants to travel the world, he/she would be warmly welcomed by national humanist friends. You even do not need to pay any cost for hotel. You can stay in family environment with humanist friend. At the same time you will get an opportunity to engage with local humanist activities too.
- You can also participate in world humanist conference. You can join the world conference in Nepal by this year in October.
- Currently some member organizations of IHEYO are running youth exchange program in different countries. If you would like to be the part of youth exchange in your favorite country, it will be a good platform. During youth exchange program you can participate in local humanist activities, your own research etc.
- If you deserve any special quality; it may be a contribution for youngsters in the world for those who are seeking. You can also log on to [www.iheyo.org](http://www.iheyo.org) for more information. There may a lot of qualities inside you which can be a major contribution for betterment of this world.

[Uttamniraula73@gmail.com](mailto:Uttamniraula73@gmail.com)

(m) 0431242538

[Some members have been taking Uttam and Upsara to show them Sydney. Please come along too so they may experience our hospitality...Ed]

<b>BOUGAINVILLE WOMEN'S STORY</b>
-----------------------------------

## SEMINAR

Waratah Rosemarie Gillespie

### BOUGAINVILLE WOMEN'S STORY SEMINAR:

#### ***BOUGAINVILLE WOMEN: resist mining companies***



*"Only when the last tree has died,  
And the last river been poisoned,  
And the last fish been caught,  
Will you realise that you cannot eat money."*  
warning from the Cree First Nation

The connection between human beings and other life forms on this planet has become lost among the smoke stacks of industrialization. People who lived by tilling small plots of land to feed their families were derided as "peasants" in Europe and as "primitive" elsewhere. As the myth of infinite resources fed the engines of industry, colonial conquests, achieved through the cross and the gun, robbed Indigenous Peoples of their resources and took over their lands.

For five hundred years, European colonial expansion continued in various forms, aided by a version of Christianity preaching to Indigenous Peoples that it was sinful to fight back. Many of those who did were massacred behind a cloak of silence, as Europeans were encouraged to "settle" lands made vacant by acts of genocide.

Behind the smokescreen of industrial progress, a clash of cultures, between those connected with their ancestral lands and those whose connection had been severed, grew. In the industrialized west, the god of Christianity was partly replaced by the god of consumerism – a modern opiate for people trapped in an unequal economic system. More resources were needed to meet the manufactured needs of a society dominated by the cult of consumerism. Global mining companies raided pristine lands of Indigenous Peoples for minerals to maintain this seemingly unending consumerist splurge. They left behind a trail of environmental destruction, dispossession and death. The clash of cultures reached a turning point on a little known Pacific island called Bougainville. This is the first place in the world where an Indigenous People closed a mine that was destroying their land and

livelihood and kept it closed. Here, among the legendary beauty of a tropical island covered with rainforest and food gardens, women are the owners of the land (except in the south-east). The duty of the men is to defend the land of their mothers. Bougainvillean women were pivotal in the successful struggle to stop the giant open cut copper and gold mine which destroyed the land and livelihoods of thousands of families. Women of the mountainous Panguna area in central Bougainville, whose land was taken for the mine, were ignored by both Australian administrators and mining company executives. As is common in many other parts of the world, Bougainvillean women were treated as invisible – until rebellion broke out. Continuing destruction of the land and environment by mining lit the fuse that sparked the rebellion. A cruel and bloody war followed, as Papua New Guinea soldiers, under orders to reopen the mine "by any means necessary"\* were sent in to do the mining company's dirty work. Thousands of Bougainvilleans died behind the iron curtain imposed by a military blockade, which was enforced by Australian supplied patrol boats, machine guns, bullets, grenades and Iroquois helicopters.

Here are some statements describing the trauma:

"It's very hard for women and children when the Army fires these white phosphorus mortar bombs, because when they explode the poisonous fumes go everywhere. It's hard for children to run away because they've got small legs, and they suffer from diarrhoea and vomiting caused by the fumes." (White phosphorus burns at room temperature)

"The people in the back of the truck were screaming with pain and fear. When we arrived at the hospital, I stopped and helped the injured people off the truck. The last lady left on the truck was Ellen...her lips were white and I realised she was dead."

Chiefs of Siwai said:

"There are many cases where our women have been raped by the Security Forces. Joyce Pitehe is one of the women who fell victim to four Papua New Guinea soldiers who took turns raping her."

After years of repeated cover-ups, the story of the struggle and suffering of the women, and the men who supported them, will be told. As part of the 2009 International Women's Day celebrations, the Humanist Society of NSW, UNAA (NSW) and WILPF are jointly sponsoring a

seminar about Bougainville women who resist mining companies. We are inviting a woman landowner from the Panguna area and a Bougainvillian film maker among other speakers to speak at the seminar, to be held on Wednesday, March 11 in the NSW Parliament theatre, beginning 12.30pm. For further information contact Convenor: Affie Adagio – 0421 101 163

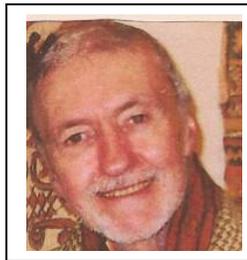
\*Sworn statement by the former head of the Papua new Guinea Defence Force, General Jerry Singirok.

## **WORDS AND IDEAS**

*David Tribe [Contd. from previous edition]*

### **RENAISSANCE HUMANISM**

(C15-16): During the European Middle Ages cultural revivals, now called “renaissances” by historians, emerged for a time: the first notable one during the 766-814 reign of Charlemagne (Carolingian Renaissance).



But what’s universally recognised as the Renaissance really began in the 14th century and blossomed two centuries later. It had many origins. Politically the Middle Ages operated under a feudal system consisting of a hierarchy of pope, emperor, king, nobility, squirearchy and commoners, either freemen or serfs. This was by no means as stable as is often represented, for the balance of power constantly shifted among the first four, while more than one pope or emperor might exist at the same time. But instability increased markedly with the rise of an urban middle class organised through merchant leagues and craft guilds, willing and able to become patrons of the arts.

Philosophically everything was dominated by dogmatic theology and stultifying ideology. That didn’t stop heresies from arising, but they were soon brutally suppressed. Thomism had become the new dogma, unquestioningly accepted, and Aristotelianism had fossilised to the extent that Aristotle’s every observation of nature (and Galen’s anatomy and Ptolemy’s geocentric astronomy), true or mistaken, was enshrined in scholastic thought. Belatedly rebellion against this domination led to a critical examination in the light of emergent sciences. This was stimulated by a return to the questioning Socratic method represented by Platonism.

Culturally the Middle ages were entirely dominated by Roman Catholicism in the West and Eastern Orthodoxy.

Religious apologists claim the church saved education, literature, art and music in Europe from destruction by barbarian invaders. The truth is that these barbarians were soon Christianised, and all the schools, universities, libraries and cultural movements of classical times were destroyed or closed down. To gain an education, however limited in range, one had to enter the church, usually a monastic order, and promote a faith that stressed original sin and otherworldly aspirations. Writers, artists and musicians had only the church, which was the richest institution and ultimate censor in Christendom, as patron. By the 15th century secular and liberal clerical patrons were emerging to support those scholars and writers rebellious against religious orthodoxy, artists tired of painting only gloomy religious pictures and musicians bored with Gregorian chants. Non-religious, even bawdy, literature, art and music made an appearance.

When translations of the bible into the vernacular began in the 14th century it was desirable to trace, as far as possible, the source material behind the different versions of the Latin *Vulgate* (383-405). This search for original Greek and Hebrew texts was fostered by a great flood of classical and early Christian manuscripts brought by monastic refugees from Constantinople (Istanbul) when the city was conquered by the Ottoman Turks. These classical MSS showed that the ancient Greeks and Romans, far from being ignorant heathens, were more civilised in their thought and lifestyle than their Christian successors. Not that these Renaissance scholars wished to return to paganism or advance to atheism. One of their famous intellectuals, John Colet, was a dean of St Paul’s, London; another, Thomas More, became saint and martyr for his Catholic faith. Rather, they stressed that humankind had an obligation to achieve its full potential as earthly citizens and not as mere tourists on their pilgrimage to St Augustine’s City of God. As to God, he was seen as more a fount of love than a volcano of vengeance, and Christians should study Jesus’ life and ministry as well as his Christology. These Renaissance scholars were, therefore, authentic religious humanists: that is, believers who wished to humanise a harsh and sterile faith, not unbelievers who saw their philosophy as an alternative “religion” that deserved the same legal and financial privileges as the church.

It was however only a short step from recognising the humanity of Jesus to questioning whether he was really

part of the Godhead. This was a reversion to early Christian heresies, notably 4th-century Arianism. Various nitpicking and prevaricating definitions tried to distinguish between anti-Trinitarianism and Unitarianism. It was argued that God was the absolute Platonic One, who couldn't be split into three. Where, then, did this proposition leave Jesus? Some gave him a sort of demigod role through the logos, others argued that he was entirely human and merely a "great moral teacher".

The humanising of Jesus was followed by the humanising of God as pure love by people who became known as Universalists. They rejected hellfire and said that all creatures would eventually be restored to harmony with the divine. In the United States in 1961 the Universalist Church of America united with the American Unitarian Association to form the Unitarian Universalist Association. Contemporary Unitarians and Universalists are recognised elements within the world humanist movement.

Removal of divine sacrificial and soteriological (redemptive) activities through Jesus stripped the Christian God of his principal functions. Moreover, the fact that he could be humanised at all might suggest that instead of humankind being made in the image of God, God had been made in the image of humankind and Revelation was a human invention. That effectively turned a Christian theism into atheism. The likely existence of a 16th-century cult of atheism, however unpopular, has generally been ignored or denied by both religious and non-religious historians. In its favour is the fact that Sir Walter Raleigh and Elizabethan dramatists Robert Greene and especially Thomas Kyd and Christopher Marlowe were suspected or accused of atheism at the time, to say nothing of William Shakespeare subsequently. Further, in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605) Sir Francis Bacon admitted that "a little or superficial knowledge of philosophy may incline the mind of man to atheism".

**SCRIPTURE TIME FOR HUMANISM  
IN VICTORIA**

*Victor Bien*

The NSW Society has the wish to do what Victoria have achieved



and what the Queenslanders tried to do in 2006 but alas we don't have the volunteering oomph.

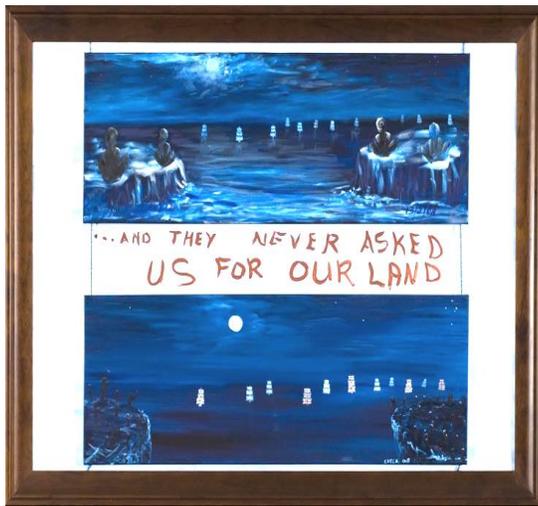
Last year I received an e-mail what I thought was a keen energetic person about this issue and suggested he might like to join the Society to pursue this issue but he never followed through. This behaviour has happened time and time again. People express concern but won't put themselves out. So how much does it really matter to them? There are not enough people who are driven enough to put the necessary hard yards into the game like Harry Gardner did in Victoria. He has been working away on the issue for years... Same with Zelda Bailey in Queensland. It still remains to be seen whether the effort actually gets up. I expect that before that happens the Christian "gatekeepers" to go ballistic and run a scare campaign as they did in Queensland. That campaign stands in my memory clear as a bell. At that time two notable Federal polities got involved: Julie Bishop and Santo Santoros (who subsequently had to resign from the Howard Government in disgrace [for unrelated reasons]). On that occasion they scared the pants off the Queensland government who canned the initiative. I don't agree with [the] remark...implying that science and maths can take the place of some educational activity to do with religion (understood in a broad sense) or values or whatever (fuzzy)... Actually the NSW HSIE (Human Society and Its Environment) syllabus does deal with comparative religion although how successfully that is carried out in individual schools most likely depends on how broadminded the parent community is in those schools. The "scripture" time slot to me seem deeply impacted being a carry-over from the historic agreement the churches had with secular government (Sir Henry Parkes) in the 19th C. An HSNSW objective is for "To gain and maintain for non-religious people the same rights as are enjoyed by members of religious bodies".

**WINNER OF COFA PROFESSIONAL AWARD  
2008**

*Elaine Syron*

The Winner of the COFA PROFESSIONAL AWARD 2008 as part of the Parliament of New South Wales Indigenous Art Prize, Gordon Syron writes about his winning painting:

*...AND THEY NEVER ASKED US FOR OUR LAND.*



I painted this painting on the day of the APOLOGY by The Prime Minister of Australia Kevin Rudd 2008. My Story

...AND THEY NEVER ASKED US FOR OUR LAND is from a series very dear to my heart. I have painted this re-enactment of "the landing" or the "coming through the heads" in over 100 paintings. I want to show the negative feelings of the Aboriginal people and why Aboriginal people are so angry. The truth is the way it was. The white master race came and took our land and did not even have the courtesy to ask us or buy it. They said we weren't even human beings when they claimed our land as Terra Nullius. British law is all right for the British, but Aboriginal law, customs, language, dance, music, mimi-spirits, our religion or culture or Dreamtime have been around for over 35,000 or more years. The British law and its history is only 220 years old in Australia. There is a need for Aboriginal artists to be historians and to have a voice and to remember the generations of our ancestors and they did not die a forgotten race of people. *Invasion Day I* and *Invasion Day II* were bought in 1999 by the Museum of Sydney. *Invasion Day II* was shown at the Olympics in Athens, Greece. It now hangs in the foyer of the Australian Pavilion at the Beijing Olympics. (Artist and historian, Gordon Syron)

The Winner of the COFA PROFESSIONAL AWARD 2008 is Gordon Syron as part of the Parliament of New South Wales Indigenous Art Prize. The recipient of the 2008 CoFA Professional Award is Gordon Syron for his painting '...and they never asked us for our land'. This work is constructed from two panels that hang over a canvas stretcher. The imagery of tall ships looming menacingly on the horizon accompanied by the text that divides the two painted panels is a powerful evocation of

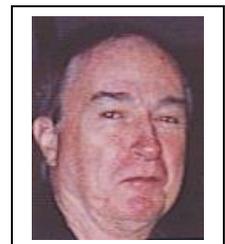
Gordon's longstanding commitment to documenting the true history of our nation. With the COFA award Gordon will have the opportunity to investigate a project during a residency that utilises COFA's arts and teaching resources that will culminate in a solo exhibition at COFA in 2009. Professor Vivien Johnson Tess Allas From the catalogue, PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES INDIGENOUS ART PRIZE 2008.

SYRON'S STORIES WILL LIVE FOREVER! From "prison artist to master artist" is a huge step for a bush boy raised on a farm at Minimbah, near Forster-Tuncurry on the North Coast of NSW. Gordon Syron was the eleventh child of sixteen children of Aboriginal parents. In 1972 Syron began serving a life sentence for killing a white man that stole his family's land and it was there that he learned to paint. "I paint about my life experiences and the things that I care most about which is Australia's distorted history. Aboriginal people have been left out of history and the white man has documented what their view is and now it is our turn to correct it and put in the Aboriginal perspective". The titles of Syron's paintings speak for themselves: *Invasion Day*, *Where The Wildflowers Once Grew*, *The Dance Of The Dolphins Before The Coming Of The Redcoat*, *And They Never Asked Us For Our Land*, *The Black Bastards Are Coming*, and *The Narcissistic Redcoat*. Syron's paintings are a refreshing break from the still-life or the European influence which has dominated the Australian history of art. Syron paints a variety of landscapes, breathtaking portraits, caricatures and captures the cry for the environment with "No Trees And Here Comes The Redcoat". Syron's art is sometimes described as Outsider Art, however he is in a class of his own as you can note at the recent opening of Premier State, Campbelltown Art Gallery on the 27th of Sept. Djon Mundine, curator, chose 10 Syron paintings and he has his own room in a group show of 30 Aboriginal artists see website. More paintings can be viewed on the website Pentateuch Gallery.

### **HUMANIST CELEBRANT NETWORK**

Charles Foley

Dear all, I have previously noted that I will pass the torch for Co-ordinating (and "Presiding" over) the Humanist Celebrant Network (HCN) to another member upon



my celebrating my 65th Birthday on Friday, 09 January 2009.

One member was mentioned, nominated, appointed and accepted by all those who responded to previous emails, and that person is Jennifer "Jenny" Cram from Brisbane. She is our new "Coordinator" and President as of that date. Zelda Bailey, the President of the Queensland Humanist Society has had this to say about Jenny: "You could not be passing on the Presidency to a more capable, knowledgeable and charming person. She has already hugely assisted me in what I am doing for the Humanist Society, and is so helpful to others, too. We appreciate her valuable membership and her many talents." I thought that before I moved back to ordinary member status that I would pass a few comments about the state of the HCN. We are a small "free-will association" of like thinking (Humanist or Humanistically inclined) Civil Celebrants. We exist in the hearts and minds of our members and are a virtual community "Network" primarily on the Internet, and we are not now nor have we ever been officially incorporated. For years we existed primarily to pass on to each Humanist member the official pronouncements of the AG (unlike other associations which only let their executive officers know, in full, what was sent down). We are essentially a group of Humanist or Humanistically minded friends and colleagues. (It is noteworthy that in America our their Humanist Celebrant "Clergy Equivalents" have been known since 1939 as the "Humanist Society of Friends" and are an incorporated into and are a special part of the USA national Humanist body, the American Humanist Association). We have for many years been recognised by the Commonwealth of Australia Attorney General and his Department as a legitimate Celebrant Association. We now sit in and participate in assemblies such as the 18 member Coalition of Celebrant Associations (CoCA), the AGs Celebrant "Future of Ongoing Professional Development" forum, and (as a member of CoCA) we attend the AGs discussion group (next session in February in Canberra). We have no dues or fees, no Treasurer and therefore no funds. Unincorporated bodies find it difficult, if not impossible these days, to have bank accounts, unless "auspiced" by another sympathetic body that is legally incorporated. Jenny personally contributed the funds for our Humanist Celebrant Network Website out of her pocket. HCN attendees at Canberra forums like myself and Chris Counsel attend Canberra meetings with the AG Department, representing us out of their own pockets. Jenny has problems flying so there will be more delegation for these purposes in the future. CoCA members have voted that member associations of that Celebrant Peak Body need to contribute an initial \$100 for administrative working capital. We have not yet contributed our \$100 "Entry fee" but an anonymous

generous HCN member has recently agreed to do so. There may be more financial contributions asked of the CoCA membership (like HCN) in the future. It should be noted that there is a move afoot to contend that, since the AG refused to talk to Celebrant Associations and would "only" talk to a "Peak Body", then he should pay to have this communicative body to exist. So far he has sprung for meeting and catering costs for all meetings with himself and his (MCS) staff but not for any other incidental attendance costs. There is also the situation of HCN membership. **The NSW Humanist Society had great foresight in founding the HCN and have nurtured us over many, many years and are still our staunch allies within Humanism and in the community.** At times only the very few members of the NSW Humanist Society who were also Civil Celebrants (General, Naming, Funeral, or Marriage Celebrants) were members of HCN, although from time to time others may have been included in the HCN and on the HS of NSW website and listed elsewhere. When I agreed to be co-opted, there were very few active participating members of the HCN.

However, CoCA has given the HCN two years to have a Celebrant membership that exceeds 50 Celebrants (of whatever designation - Marriage, Funeral, Naming, etc) or be expelled from the "Celebrant Peak Body".

During my tenure we have become a truly national body with aspiring members simply giving their agreement to a statement about their adherence to certain general principles of Humanism. Of course many of us are card carrying Humanists (As Jenny, Chris Counsel and myself are) but many are not, nor does one need to be (although if one were, it would be terrific for both Humanism and Celebrancy!). We have no policy on this beyond a commitment to the general Humanist principles in the statement on the website.

Attempted contact with the various Humanist Societies in Australia only elicited one reply, and that was from Zelda in Queensland. More has to be done with the other Humanist Societies to attract Humanist or Humanistically inclined Celebrants in all the states and territories. With so many new Celebrants needing an "affordable" Celebrant organisation, we should be able to point out that 'the price is right' if they are of our ilk. The ACCN has a brief blurb about HCN on its website and some have been

attracted by that publicity but other avenues to increase our reach need to be explored. The AGs and some other Celebrant Associations are pushing for Non-Aligned Religious Celebrants (NARCs) to be included in Celebrant bodies and in discussions, such as about OPD. I have noted that most of the Australian Unitarians are extremely close in their thinking to Humanists and overseas the Unitarian-Universalist Churches and the relevant Humanist Associations often co-operate on issues together. This might be a possible way to include other likeminded Celebrants (perhaps as "Associates" or in some way "Affiliated") in our Celebrant Network. The point is that we need practical suggestions to increase our celebrant membership before September of 2010. Some have suggested that Buddhist Celebrants (who are non-theist and are often socially active) might also like to be included in some sort of "Associate" or "Affiliate" membership. Others have suggested that the New Zealand Humanist Celebrants and other overseas Humanist Celebrants (see our web page for a list) might like to have a shared membership and information base on issues of common concern such as Professional Development, sharing creative Humanist Ceremonies for the 21 Century, discussing areas of concern and support or just plain Humanist Celebrant contact and fellowship. Others have suggested that this sort of interaction may be facilitated or accomplished through the International Humanist and Ethical Union. As many of us know, the IHEU is the world *union* of over 100 Humanist, rationalist, secular, *ethical* culture, atheist and freethought organizations in more than 40 countries. One of our more notable HCN members trains Celebrants internationally, which might provide us with "Associate" members if the OS Celebrants qualified as Humanist inclined in thought, word and deed! There are those in our organization however, who take serious exception to members who identify as or are actually "religious" or "Spiritual" (and not exclusively "Secular") Humanists. Perhaps the category for HCN of non-voting "Associate Members" could accommodate the Unitarians, Buddhists, overseas Humanist Celebrants and others who might like to join with us in our free will Celebrant association of Humanistically inclined Celebrants. To make our Network more attractive to prospective members and user friendly, one member has suggested that we have some sort of forum so that we can meet and greet and converse and debate with each other. She offered to set up a Yahoo group or something similar with strict guidelines. This process needs to be carefully considered, once Jenny takes over in a few days time. We Humanists can be contentious, firm in our opinions and vociferous, even within our Humanist Societies. Humanists don't have a Credo (although there are "Humanist Manifestos" that have been around for a while, which act as guides to many of us). The issue listed above (concerning possible religious "Associates" or "Affiliates") would be a case in

point for contention, debate and emotions, I am sure. However, these issues and others DO need to be considered and discussed within a rational and calm framework by the membership, if we are to move from a one-way communication mode, as has been our tradition in HCN. There are many of us in the HCN who are leaders in other Celebrant Associations, in organisations that serve other Celebrants and in Celebrant educational or training institutions. Most of us are members of one or more other Celebrant Associations, with some of us being quite vocal about the direction that the AGs takes, that Associations or CoCA adopt, that OPD or training should consist of, etc. Some of us do not want our Humanist affiliations known as there can be prejudice from those who would hire us or elect us to positions of responsibility or who would pre-judge us. Some of us have no problems with other's perceptions of them as Humanists and some do have sensitive concerns. After all is said and done, we in HCN are here in reality. We are now a viable, active, relevant body. We are influencing other associations, trainers, the AGs Department, politicians, BD&Ms, the general Australian community, and a potential recognised force within the global Humanist Community . We have many opportunities ahead. I believe that under my "Caretaker Coordination" that the HCN is bigger and better than when it was passed over to me. I will remain as active a member and a supporter of our new fearless Leader as I am able. **[Thank you Charles for all you have done...Ed/HCN Celebrant]**

### **MEMBER'S NEWS**

*Angela Drury*

A warm welcome to **new members**

Douglas Dunstan, Andrew Wilson, Derek Whitmore, Maxwell Taylor, John Clarke, Dylan Anderson and Lachlan Adair. Thankyou for **generous donations** to Alfred Whitaker, Maxwell Taylor, and Marcus Butler.

(Back outside cover)

