



GUEST COLUMN PHILIPPE LASSERRE

STATE LAWS—PRIVATE INITIATIVES

Many countries are experiencing tensions between their various faith communities, and between those communities and the authority of the state. This is no less true for my country, France, where such issues have been front-page news in recent months.

The waves of immigration of the past decades and the rise of fundamentalist elements within some of the largest religions have brought such tensions to the fore. This takes unexpected turns, like the realization that boys from France's minuscule Sikh community may be acting illegally when they wear turbans to school.

Such concerns have led some countries—such as Sweden—to pass laws separating church and state. In most Anglo-Saxon countries, a strong tradition of tolerance and respect has led to the full acceptance of all kinds of religious practices. The state does not interfere as long as law and order do not come under threat. However, this tends to create a situation where 'community-ism' (*communautarisme* as it is called in France) reigns, and ghettos can develop.

BANNING THE SCARF

Each country is affected by its history. France, in particular, is deeply marked by its 1789 Revolution. The terrible clashes between the Catholic church and the radical leaders of the Revolution led, more than a hundred years later, to a political concept of secularism (*laïcité*). This led to religion being banned from all spheres of public life, and to a partial privatization of religion—which, paradoxically, does not exclude financial support by the state or local authorities for the maintenance of church properties. The idea is to protect

religious practice, whilst ensuring that it does not interfere with state affairs.

The rise of Islam in France—now the second religious community in the country, ahead of Protestantism—has led to the law, passed in the National Assembly on 10 February, banning the scarf (or *hijab*) worn by some Muslim girls in French schools, because it is a 'conspicuous religious sign'.

HONEST CONVERSATION

Even though the law was passed by an overwhelming majority, public opinion is very divided. Some in France see it as necessary in order to protect children from the control and domination of intolerant members of their family and community. Others see it as distortion of the true concept of *laïcité à la française*. Still others see it as using a sledge hammer to kill a fly. School principals, they say, could well have dealt with individual cases. The problem is that they did not, and that each case had become a national affair under the glare of media attention and the pressure of a Muslim community wanting to assert its identity at a time when it feels threatened. Nobody can tell how things will evolve in France now, or whether the law is actually practicable.

While democratic governments will have to negotiate their way through this ethical minefield, there are practical actions that we can all take as individual citizens. For example, I recently took part in an occasion where some 50 Muslim men and women had 'an honest conversation' with an American couple from the State of Virginia. It took place in a suburb of Paris where the majority of the population are of African, including North African, descent. The Americans had come to discover the reality of French society today. The Muslim audience wanted to hear from citizens of

the superpower that many of them consider as enemy number one.

As the scarf-wearing young woman who launched the evening said, 'This is the first time in my life that I find myself face to face with two Americans!' Despite the risks of such an evening, the atmosphere was harmonious, friendly, respectful. There was warmth, humour, reality. From both sides things were said that were true and hard to hear, about America or about the Arab world. But everybody left with the feeling that they had made new friends and learned new things. And for the joint organizers, French and North Africans, it was a good exercise in tolerance and honesty.

Dialogue is possible if some people are willing to listen with humility, and dialogue leads to change. Dialogue is possible and needed wherever groups are exposed to intolerance and confrontation, which can quickly become the cradle of violence and terrorism.

OPEN HOMES, OPEN HEARTS

A generous idea, implemented in various circles around the world, including the network of Initiatives of Change, can help to defuse tensions and build understanding: to celebrate a day of 'Open homes, open hearts' in early June every year when each home, each family can open their door and their table to people of another culture, faith or community, and have a time of honest conversation.

In France, as in the rest of the world, we are confronted with a new reality with the cohabitation of various religious and ethnic groups, and this confrontation, or the answer to it, will be a hallmark of the 21st Century.

Philippe Lasserre is a writer and interpreter in Paris.

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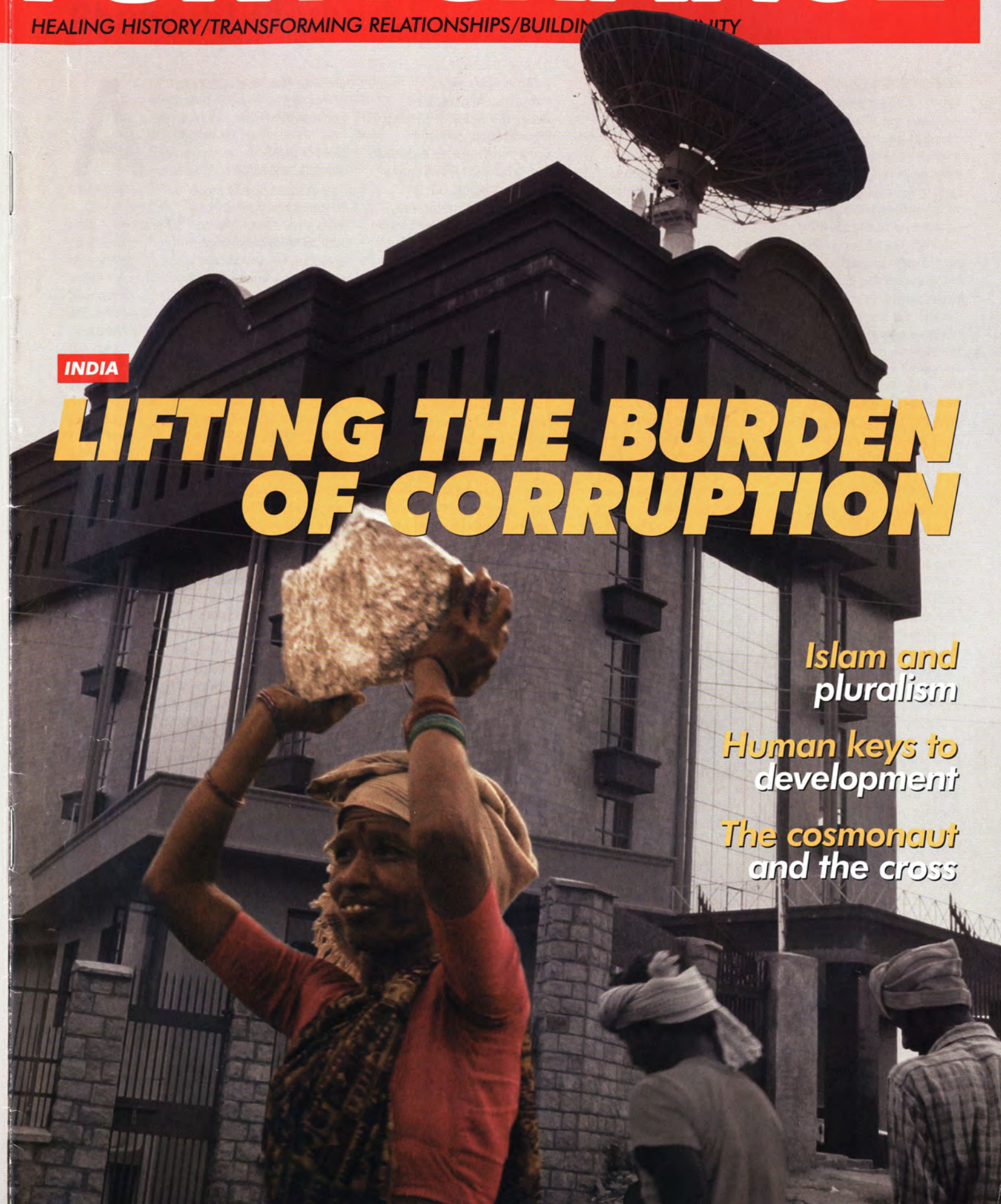
Lead Story: *For A Change* visits an English village which is making community work.
Profile: Carl Clowes, pioneer of community renewal and the revival of the Welsh language

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FOR A CHANGE

HEALING HISTORY/TRANSFORMING RELATIONSHIPS/BUILDING COMMUNITY



INDIA

LIFTING THE BURDEN OF CORRUPTION

Islam and pluralism

Human keys to development

The cosmonaut and the cross

EAR TO THE GROUND

HELEN DUIGAN IN JOHANNESBURG

FREE AND FAIR

South Africa's democracy is ten years old. After two previous successful elections, it never even crossed my mind when we went to the polls in April to question whether the elections would be free and fair. I took it for granted. Risky, taking Africa's record into consideration? No, the elections underlined the progress we've made in a decade. An international observer commented that the 2004 election process compared with the best in the world. Perhaps South Africa should offer to help with the vote counting in Florida in the US presidential election later this year!

A MANDATE FOR TROUBLE

The African National Congress (ANC) got more than two thirds of the vote and President Thabo Mbeki has promised not to fiddle with the constitution. The New National Party, descended from the infamous party that institutionalized apartheid, virtually disappeared.

The Independent Democrats, the new party of plucky and outspoken Patricia de Lille, won seven seats. She has been a thorn in the side of the government. At the post-election victory party President Mbeki suggested with a twinkle that she should take a much-needed break before coming back to Parliament and creating more trouble. 'Did you hear that?' she said triumphantly to all who would listen. 'I've got a mandate from the President to create trouble in Parliament!'

ROOTS

Fourteen years ago in Germany I was asked to address a group of people on South Africa. It was in the final days of the National Party, two months before the ANC was unbanned and Nelson Mandela released from jail. I said: 'I am an Afrikaner and I love being an Afrikaner.' Silence. How could anyone who was a member of the polecat tribe of the world make such a statement?

I still feel that way. My roots go deep into the African soil. But as a white South African, one's professional options are becoming fewer and fewer. Max du Preez put it bluntly. (In the Eighties he launched South Africa's only Afrikaans anti-apartheid newspaper, which was finally closed down by government pressure.)

'After years as an independent operator I decided it was time to get a job and I applied for something right up my alley. But: "You and I know you're ideal for this job, but it's politically and strategically impossible to appoint a white person," I was told by the interviewer. "We have to go black now. History is against you, my brother."'

This experience led du Preez to write his latest bestseller, *Pale Native*. 'I can change my personality, my qualifications, my appearance—I could even have a sex change. But I cannot change the colour of my skin,' he says.

'The energy I feel gushing from the soil into my spirit tells me who I am. The ancient mountains around me whisper to me that I am where I belong. In Africa.' I

am with Max on this. It's not colour, it's love and commitment.

WHO ARE EUROPEANS?

This leads to one of those fundamental questions—Who am I? South African? African? Afrikaner? English-speaking South African? We whites are sometimes still labelled 'Europeans' which I find peculiar, seeing my French Huguenot ancestors arrived in Africa in 1688. Are Australians or Americans Europeans? Are Argentinians Spaniards?

IN YOUR FACE

South Africa, as a new democracy with a rainbow of cultures and colours, is still struggling to understand itself, to find a comfortable identity. Besides du Preez's, two other current bestsellers are stirring the debate. In *A Change of Tongue*, poet Antjie Krog traces the 'humour of change and the pain of belonging as South Africans try to find new footholds in a democratic space'. *Redeeming Features* by media and social commentator, Denis Beckett, is a personal and often agonizing look at the schizophrenia so many of us suffer from—being deeply critical of the damage caused to black and white by politically correct 'transformation' and 'affirmative action', and then breaking one's heart over the sheer generosity and humanity that South Africans show one another.

Difficult issues confront us. We have to work through them with honesty, courage and hope if the 'South African miracle' is to survive.



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Rhubarb! Rhubarb!

A new comedy drama, *Rhubarb! Rhubarb!* by Hugh Steadman Williams, was premièred in a church-based arts centre in London recently. That was appropriate enough: the play is set in the home and family of a Church of England vicar. And the vicar and his wife were played by—the church's vicar and his wife who started life as professional actors.

The stage vicar has the dream of opening a new family centre in the parish, to help save and repair broken families. The centre needs the go-ahead of the bishop. A doting parishioner, Miss Pomfret, has brought gifts of rhubarb to the vicar over several years, though he has never had the heart to tell her that he can't stand the stuff: it brings him out in a rash. His wife is determined that he should come clean and tell Miss Pomfret the truth. The vicar's artistic son and ambitious daughter, her rich boyfriend, and the family's house cleaner complete the cast.

In a scene of sheer slapstick, family harmony collapses into chaos and mayhem just as the bishop arrives, seeing the family at its most dysfunctional. The vicar seems to have blown his chances of winning the bishop's support for the new centre.

My wife and I saw the play just before our 23rd wedding anniversary. Like the vicar's family, our family has had its fair share of ups and downs, setbacks and triumphs. But we have learnt that, as in the play, it is not our perfections that count but our honesty, fidelity and sheer stickability. After all, none of us is a paragon of virtue. Rather it is knowing and admitting that we've 'been there, done that', and still survived, that can be a source of encouragement to others.

Divorce rates in the West remain appallingly high, and Britain has one of the worst records at some 40 per cent. Too many couples seem to want to quit when they fall at the first hurdle. Yet 60 per cent of marriages do survive and the couples soldier on regardless. Forgiveness and a new start are always possible. As has been said, it is not your love that sustains your marriage but your marriage that sustains your love. Family life, the cornerstone of civilization, is by no means over, though we certainly need the vicar's family centre.

Mike Smith

MICHAEL SMITH

www.forachange.co.uk

FOR A CHANGE

For A Change is about change, how to make it happen and how to live it. We believe that what happens inside people has an effect on the world around them. At the heart of global change lies change

in the human heart.

We draw our material from a wide range of sources, including Initiatives of Change. We give a voice to people all over the world who are making a difference. We invite our readers to join them. Your stories are our stories.



Initiatives of Change

Initiatives of Change (formerly Moral Re-Armament) works for moral and spiritual renewal in all areas of life.

It was born out of the work of Frank Buchman, an American who believed that change in the world must start in individuals.

Initiatives of Change is open to all. Its starting point is the readiness of each person to make what they know of God and eternal moral values

central in their lives. This personal commitment to search for God's will forms the basis for creative initiative and common action: standards of absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love help to focus the challenge of personal and global change.

These ideas have given rise to an international community in more than 70 countries, working in such areas as reconciliation; tackling the root causes of corruption, poverty and social exclusion; and strengthening the moral and spiritual foundations for democracy.

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Panos Pictures
A labourer at work on Hi-tech City. See lead story p4.

FOR A CHANGE

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INDIANS GET TO GRIPS WITH GOOD GOVERNANCE

John Freebury and **Mike Brown** report an initiative aimed at bringing good governance to India while Australian **Natasha Davis** discovers that new freedom of information laws coupled with some determined grassroots activism is bringing far-reaching change in the country.

Chandrashekhar Prabhu was a gold medalist student of architecture and town-planning in America's Ivy League when former Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi sent two emissaries to tempt him back to his country of birth. He wasn't interested—he had just got his Green Card and accepted a post at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Finally, the Prime Minister confronted him in person. 'What if you could change the fate of your city?' she asked. He was on the plane home to Mumbai next day.

It's a question that stirs many high-achieving Indians. But, as Prabhu found when he dug into the realities of his city of 12 million, whole systems of corruption and vested interests make bringing change daunting if not downright impossible.

'Creating ethical business in India is like trying to grow strawberries on Mars,' says Mumbai businessman Suresh Vazirani. 'You may be able to do it in a controlled environment. But at what cost and effort!'

Neither man is giving up though. Vazirani's high-tech bio-medical equipment company has won national awards for quality and exports—all done without paying bribes. Prabhu has battled the coalitions of corrupt politicians, developers and mafia which keep Mumbai's urban development mired in unmanageable problems. As Chairman of the Maharashtra State Advisory Committee to the Department of Housing, which works steadily to resettle Mumbai's six million slum-dwellers, he has instigated over 60 legal cases to make government answerable, and promises to do 'whatever one can' against systemic corruption.

The two reformers joined others at a conference on 'Better Governance: from fear to opportunity' at the Initiatives of Change conference centre in Panchgani, India, during March. It was organized by the Asia Pacific and Africa Regional Group of Caux Initiatives for Business (CIB-APARG).

The conference brought together a growing network of senior government officials, social workers and NGOs, media and industrial leaders who have launched a Centre for Governance to act as a national thinktank to provoke government reforms in India. They first came together a year ago to grapple with the social and policy challenges confronting India under globalization, and decided that it came down to better governance. (See FAC, Apr/May 2003 and Apr/May 2004).

As Prabhat Kumar, former Cabinet Secretary, put it: 'If any country wants to derive maximum benefit from globalization, it must put its own house in order—with good political and corporate governance.'

Opening this year's conference, Kumar highlighted the huge disparities between Indian states in critical areas like child mortality rates, illiteracy and poverty. Punjab, for instance, has 130 times the per-capita income of Jharkand, a tribal state of which Kumar was until recently Governor.

While India basks in the 'shining' achievements of high growth rates, unprecedented foreign exchange reserves and a booming IT industry, 'the debit side of indifferent and unresponsive governments far outweighs the innovative measures', argued Kumar.

Through the March meeting two major agenda directions

emerged for the Centre for Governance. RD Mathur, one of its convenors, summed these up as:

■ Tackling corruption at both a symptomatic and a systemic level by enlisting civil society, the business sector and all stakeholders involved.

■ Working to improve the ethics and values of individuals and organizations. Roundtable meetings held during the past year, together with training programmes at various levels of government and industry, could begin to help meet this need, he said.

Conference participants found an emerging synergy between senior bureaucrats and NGO activists like Arvind Kejriwal from Parivarten (see p7). Sunita Nadhamuni, coordinator of Bala-Janaagraha—a citizens' movement for better governance—described a partnership programme called PROOF (Public Record of Operating Finance) which tracks public disclosures of municipal accounts, performance indicators and government spending in Bangalore. The challenge of moving 'from representative democracy to participatory democracy', she believes, is most appropriate at the level of local government.

A rapidly expanding area of governance is 'e-governance' (the control of procedures and workflow via computers). The benefits are already evident, argued Nadadur Janardhan who, through a UN agency, has advised over 30 governments on introducing e-commerce in international trade. Through a vast network of fibre-optic cables, the state of Andhra Pradesh has made government records available in English and local languages. Already, it has brought a dramatic reduction in land disputes, which occupy 70 per cent of court cases, claimed Janardhan. Medical records available state-wide are improving health care for the poorest. Employment opportunities and better marketing of primary products were bringing significant benefits.

But, warned Asheesh Khaneja, who as an executive with Oracle South Asia has also been involved in bringing this software revolution to Andhra, 'E-governance is not a short-cut to budget savings or a clean and efficient government.... It often presents both costs and risks.' Its implementation was best



Former Cabinet Secretary Prabhat Kumar (right) with other participants in the conference



preceded by developing ethical leadership and standards, he suggested.

That ties in with the Centre for Governance's second line of strategy. The Secretary of the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs, Vivek Agnihotri, described a training programme to introduce

'drivers for service quality' into one huge government bureaucracy, the Department of Public Works. It involved getting people together to think holistically of how to bring quality, he said. 'We are so busy pushing on files, we do not take the time to look within in the search for solutions.'

Business speakers at the conference seemed committed to improving their own standards of integrity. A specialist in corporate governance, Ram Babu of PriceWaterhouseCoopers, spoke about 'triple-line accounting', and 'Global Reporting Indicators' (GRI) which track the environmental and social as well as economic performance of companies. Of the Fortune 500 companies around the world 140 are now using GRI, as are an increasing number of Indian companies, said Babu.

Economics professor Arun Kumar argued passionately that such rethinking needs to be applied to India's whole economic planning. He challenged the notion of 'homo economus'—of man

'WE ARE SO BUSY PUSHING ON FILES, WE DO NOT TAKE THE TIME TO LOOK WITHIN'

being economically determined. 'The market and the state are creations of society. They are not to be viewed as independent of society, and therefore it is up to society to decide how to use them for the wider welfare of society,' said Kumar, who is Chair of the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning at Jawaharlal Nehru University and author of *The Black Economy in India*.

As Arun Wakhlu, founder of Pragati Leadership Institute, put it: 'This is where the spiritual dimension comes in.' He brought the conference back to governing one's self as the basis of collective governance—a theme also stressed during early morning sessions on 'Inner Governance', where individuals could give personal insights into finding integrity in their own lives.

These sessions mapped the essence of creating better governance, said Yogendra Narain, Secretary-General of India's upper house of Parliament, the Rajya Sabha. 'What's important is not your external power but the power over your own feelings... the connection between your personal life and official life. My *dharma* (righteous action/truth) is to fight evil. These sessions have added to my storehouse of spiritual experience that I have tried to bring together in my life.'

Alongside the Centre for Governance, Prabhat Kumar and his colleagues are soon to launch a Centre for Training in Ethical Leadership (CENTREL). They plan to make that fight for better governance practical as well as personal.

John Freebury is a cultural management consultant from Canada. Mike Brown is an Australian writer.

CHARLES FERNANDEZ

INDIA'S GRASSROOTS STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE

Natasha Davis meets Indians who are determined to empower the underprivileged

India is a country that shares many of the world's problems... and also offers many solutions. For many years I have been passionate about finding creative solutions to poverty, communal violence, environmental destruction and corruption.

My journey to India was partly a quest to see how 'change-makers' operate in a country confronted by such challenges. I was particularly drawn to the country of Mahatma Gandhi, who advocated personal transformation and sacrifice as part of social action.

I have spent five rich months in India, with 'Action for Life', a ten-month programme for mainly young people who want to explore the relationship between personal transformation and the commitment to building a better world. During this time I have discovered that fighting the web of corruption and giving a voice to the 'common person' is at the heart of social change movements in India. The shocking reality is that up to 85 per cent of the money allocated to food rations, sanitation, or education is syphoned off by people at all levels of government. Poor governance is the single biggest contributing factor to social, environmental and economic distress. Misappropriation and lack of accountability for public money keeps the poorest poor.

If this is the problem, one solution lies with common people reclaiming a share in power and decisions. Our journey brought us into contact with inspiring groups in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan who are making grassroots democracy a reality.

'The right to information is the right to live' is the slogan of Masdoor Kissan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), who have spearheaded the Right to Information movement in India from their base in rural Rajasthan. Right to

Information legislation now exists in seven states in India. Meeting a group of MKSS workers revealed how this simple but powerful tool puts power into the hands of common people. The new laws enable citizens to demand access to government information—from village expenditure to food ration records—and removes the veil of secrecy around government officials and elected representatives.

Mystical sunrise vistas of rural India provided the perfect backdrop for our visit to villages outside Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, where we met with the group Asha (Hope). (See www.ashanet.org). It was started by 'non-resident Indians' studying in California. One of them, Sandeep Pandey, realized his doctoral research on rocket science was assisting the arms industry. So he quit, and moved to rural India to live in apparently joyful poverty with his band of volunteers. Their emphasis was, and is, education (one village we stopped at was 90 per cent illiterate). Asha supports over 250 village schools. But other more basic needs began to focus their agenda.

Using the Right to Information legislation to



THIS IS THE LAND OF MILK AND CURD, NOT THE LAND OF PEPSI COLA'

campaign for fair wages and the 'right to food', they demanded access to *panchayat* (village government) expenditure records. As in other parts of India, the struggle brought a violent response. But communities are clearly buoyed by the success of the movement. In one village, the *panchayat* chief was forced to resign after the misappropriation of over Rs200,000 (US\$4,300) was revealed. In different villages we witnessed the creative approach of Asha volunteers who engaged children with songs and chanting such lyrics as 'this is the land of milk and curd, not the land of Pepsi Cola'.

The Right to Information movement is enthusiastically championed in Delhi by a small, energetic people's movement called Parivartan (Change). It started when Arvind Kejriwal resigned as an Assistant Collector in the Indian Revenue Service. In partnership with locals, Parivartan undertook painstaking audits of civil works in two slum districts of Delhi, 'ground-truthing' the documented expenditure with public hearings involving thousands of residents. In 64 out of 68 works audited, almost half the expenditure was unaccounted for. As a result of their campaign the Municipal Corporation of Delhi now requires public accounts of any civil work to be displayed on site. (See www.parivartan.com.)

Having worked in watershed management for the past five years in Australia, a highlight for me was a visit to the Alwar district of eastern Rajasthan, where a 20-year programme of restoring traditional water-harvesting systems has transformed a desert landscape into a green oasis. The most exciting aspect of this project is the grassroots participation in local resource management. Who would dream of a 'river parliament'? Well, that's what the locals formed when the Rajasthan government, delighted to find the once dry Arvari River now flowing and full of fish, decided to make a quick buck by selling fishing licenses. The villagers took on the government—and won. This unconventional parliament now meets regularly with representatives from all the villages in the region to set the rules for managing the natural resources and resolving any disputes.

It is not only the grassroots and gutsy approach of these groups which inspired us, but their integrity and commitment to empowering the poor through the Gandhian philosophy of sacrifice and justice in action. In Australia 'community capacity building' is the latest jargon—but how rare are examples of empowering communities to take up their own battles such as I have been privileged to see in India. ■



JOHN FREEBURY, NATASHA DAVIS



Extremism is a betrayal of Islam's essence, states Imam Abduljalil Sajid.

Most people treat Islam and Muslims as synonymous and mutually interchangeable terms. In my opinion the word 'Islam' should be used exclusively for the way of life based upon the Qu'ran, the word of God, and Sunnah, the proven practices of the Prophet. 'Muslims', as human beings, are free to abide or deviate from Divine Guidance.

Islam has never claimed to be a new faith. It is the same faith that God ordained with the creation of the first man sent to earth. The only difference is in theology, concepts and practices.

In the Constitution of Medina (*Sahifat al-Madinah*), the Prophet Muhammad legislated for a multi-religious society, based on tolerance, equality and justice, many centuries before such an idea existed anywhere else in the world. Under the terms of this document each religious group enjoyed cultural and legal autonomy. The Jews and Christians were equal with Muslims before the law, in what Murad Hoffman calls the 'true Islamic model of religious pluralism'.

INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

The Qur'an not only conveys a message of peace, tolerance and compassion; it provides mankind with a global framework for cooperation and a charter for interfaith dialogue. It repeatedly stresses that all peoples have had their prophets and messengers, and that multiplicity of every kind is part of God's magnificent design: 'Among his wonders is... the diversity of your tongues and colours.'

This means that prophetic guidance is not limited to any one community, period or civilization. So Muslims—if they are true to their faith—do not claim a monopoly of the truth or of revelation.

The actions of a few Muslim fanatics have been interpreted as vindicating the old idea that Islam promotes violence. All too often in the media the word 'terrorism' is coupled with the adjective 'Islamic'. If Islam

were really, as some suppose, a religion of fire and sword, why would 'the true servants of the Most Merciful' be defined in the Qur'an as 'those who walk gently on the earth and who, when the ignorant address them, say "peace" '?

According to the Qur'an, 'God does not love aggressors' and war is only permitted in self-defence, or in defence of religion. When the opportunity for peace arises, Muslims are encouraged to be forgiving and to seek reconciliation, for mercy and compassion are God's chief attributes. War in itself is never holy, and if the lesser *jihad* of war is not accompanied by what the Prophet Muhammad called 'the greater *jihad*', the struggle to control the lower instincts and the whims of the ego, then war may be diabolical.

The following principles may be derived from the Qur'an:

- Muslims should not ridicule the beliefs of others.
- Muslims should not associate with those who ridicule our faith.
- When Muslims address those who do not share our beliefs, we should speak with courtesy.
- Muslims should invite people to use their reason, appealing to the intellect to interpret God's words, because there is no contradiction between faith and reason.

Above all, there must be freedom of opinion and discussion both with those who hold other religious views and with those who share our faith—for if we cannot appreciate diversity within our own community, we will certainly not be able to value religious diversity.

If Muslims were to follow these principles, they would become once again a 'community of the middle way' (Qur'an 2:143), exercising moderation and avoiding all extremes.

However, before one can begin to apply these principles there has to be the willingness to listen and to engage in dialogue, and there has to be some degree of mutual respect and equality between the two parties. When there is a gross disparity



of wealth, power and privilege, such as exists between Israel and Palestine, dialogue is very difficult. The arrogance and selfishness of the rich nations, and the ever-widening gap between them and the rest of the world, generate feelings of resentment and discontent. In Islam a rich man does not merely have a duty to distribute some of his wealth to the poor, but the poor have a *right* to share in his wealth.

TREATED UNJUSTLY

We have to make a choice—individually and collectively—between confrontation and dialogue, destruction and construction, war and diplomacy. True global cooperation will not be possible until we recover an awareness of the ecumenical, ecological and ethical principles which are at the heart of every spiritual tradition. In most of the world's trouble spots, Muslims have been massacred and tortured and denied their most basic rights. Thousands of innocent people have died in Afghanistan and in the Iraq War. Not unnaturally Muslims feel that they have been treated unjustly by what is

'WE SHOULD NOT ALLOW EXTREMISTS TO HIJACK ISLAM OR ANY OTHER RELIGION'

euphemistically called 'the world community'.

As the British Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has written, 'No one creed has a monopoly of spiritual truth; no one civilization encompasses all the spiritual, ethical and artistic expressions of mankind'. Those who share this view, and see religious, cultural and ethnic diversity as a blessing, must find the middle way between religious fanaticism and fanatical secularism.

It is essential, as Prince Hassan of Jordan has said, that we promote a dialogue of civilizations, and that we should not allow extremists to hijack Islam or any other religion. It is vitally important to refute those shallow secularists who regard religion itself as inevitably divisive, and to rediscover the ethical principles upon which all the great spiritual traditions are based. It

is not simply a matter of respecting religious differences; we have to recover the practical spiritual wisdom which unites us and makes us human.

The Holy Qur'an commands believers 'to come to common grounds' (3:64) for interfaith cooperation. Can we find a common ground on which Muslims and non-Muslims stand comfortably in a democratic and pluralistic society? My answer is a resounding yes.

Religious conflict, particularly between Islam and Christianity in the past, or the more recent conflict between Israel and Palestine, more often than not rose out of human excesses and the desire to stir religious passion to support political goals. Muslims, Jews and Christians share similar core values of respect for human life and dignity and profound commitment to charity

The Jama Masjid mosque, Delhi, India

and the common good. In fact all religions cherish honesty and sincerity, compassion and love, sacrifice and selflessness, justice and fairness, patience and perseverance. There is no religion that does not regard human dignity and mutual respect as vital aspects of a flourishing civilization.

Islam is a religion of peace. The terms 'Islam' and 'peace' have the same root, 'salaam'. Whenever Muslims meet they exchange the greeting, 'Peace be unto you'. The Muslim also utters this statement at the end of every ritual prayer.

In history, whenever Muslim armies entered a country they would give guarantees of life, property and honour to all the non-belligerents. Even in war Muslims are not allowed to kill an old person, a woman, children, or those who are crippled or disabled. Not even trees and crops may be destroyed.

AMNESTY

When the Holy Prophet entered Mecca as victor, everyone was offered amnesty. When Caliph Umar entered Jerusalem he was not even prepared to pray in a Church for fear that those who came after him might treat the place as a mosque and take it away from the Christians. But when the Crusaders took Jerusalem, there was a total massacre of the population.

Islam condemns the presence of all forms of terror. I feel ashamed when I hear that Muslims are breaking the Law of Islam. I sincerely apologize to those who have suffered due to any senseless actions of so-called Muslims.

Islam is firm in asserting that the end cannot justify the means. 'Good and bad are not equal,' states the Qur'an (41:34). 'Replace evil by good.' If you fight falsehood with falsehood it is falsehood which prevails. If you change evil by evil, it is evil which is victorious. Islam says that evil is to be eliminated by good. This strikes at the roots of fanaticism.

We must address the root causes of terrorism, hatred and hurt. Unless we do this, irrational people will continue to commit heinous crimes against humanity. We must eliminate injustice and exploitation, pray to overcome hatred and violence in ourselves, and rededicate ourselves to peace, human dignity and the eradication of injustice.

There is a famous saying in Islam: 'Remember, remember, remember. Evil is not in the body. Evil is in the mind, therefore harm nobody. Just change the mind.' ■

Imam Abduljalil Sajid is the Chairman of the Muslim Council for Religious and Racial Harmony, UK.

PAUL & MARGUERITE CRAIG

SOWING SEEDS OF GROWTH



MIKE SMITH

Rebuilding after war - and rebuilding relationships - are keys to sustainable development says agriculturalist Paul Craig. He talks to **Michael Smith**.

The ink was hardly dry on the Dayton peace treaty that brought the Bosnian war to an end when agriculturalist Paul Craig made his first visit to the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo, in 1995. 'Seventy per cent of Bosnia's livestock had been killed, eaten or stolen during the war,' leaving small farmers destitute, he says.

Craig was among the first international agricultural experts into Bosnia after the war. Agrisystems, the small British agricultural development company where he works, had been asked to advise the International Fund for Agricultural Development on how to spend \$6 million in Bosnia.

'I came in over Mount Egmont and was escorted at night by a convoy of French troops across the airport, which was closed, into Sarajevo in the snow. There was no electricity and only three other guests in the Hilton Hotel. We had to use the inner staircase. If you used the outer one you were in danger of being shot by snipers sitting up in the mountains, even though there was

a cease-fire.'

Agrisystems trucked in some 3,000 in-calf heifers from Austria and Germany and Craig went in with one of the first distributions. 'We unloaded the cattle on a tennis court where the farmers collected them. They really had nothing. At least they would now have milk for their children, possibly a surplus to sell, or cheese to make, and in time they would get a calf.'

IDYLL

Craig and his wife, Marguerite, tell me this story in their home in Hertfordshire, north of London, which has a delightful view over rolling English farmland. It is an idyll remote from the war-torn trouble spots where together they have been involved in agricultural development and post-war reconstruction for over 30 years.

When we meet, they are packing up to leave for the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific. It is a wrench for Marguerite, having put down local roots after years of travel. 'It's harder to leave this time,' she says. 'Before, when we went to Zambia, Nigeria and

Papua New Guinea, our children were with us and our parents were younger.'

The European Union has awarded Agrisystems a three-year contract in the Solomons as part of a massive 80 million euro aid package. The islands have been plagued by ethnic violence and a breakdown in law and order, following a coup in 2000 which forced the government to call in Australia and New Zealand to restore law and order and recapture control of the government's finances.

These objectives have been achieved and Agrisystems is now tackling rural development, education and inter-island transport, which has largely collapsed, Craig says. 'We are setting up a trust fund of 25 million euros to manage and provide shipping, aviation and road development.' Meanwhile, Marguerite hopes to put her experience as a primary school teacher to use. The islands' 800 or so primary schools have had no new teaching materials for three years. The aid scheme will fund text books for every child and provide training for some 1,100 teachers.

Paul Craig graduated in Agriculture from Edinburgh University in 1970. A formative, if unlikely, influence came from a travelling theatre group from India, brought to Edinburgh by a grandson of Mahatma Gandhi. One of their stories was of three Indian farmers who had increased their village crop yields after settling personal jealousies and finding reconciliation. 'In the following vacation I went to India and met the reconciled brothers. A divided and starving village had been transformed. They had adopted new seeds and technology and now had a surplus. That taught me a fundamental lesson—that people's attitudes and relationships are as important as any technology when seeking to improve a situation. It also led me into international development.'

The story of Craig's own rapprochement with his father, a Glasgow businessman, is captured in a re-enacted documentary video, *What are you living for?* A frank conversation 'lifted an iron curtain' between them and restored their friendship.

APOLOGY

Craig gained his Masters at the University College of North Wales and spent a year in Saudi Arabia doing agricultural research, sent there by the UK's then Overseas Development Administration. This led him to Zambia as an animal husbandry officer, a job which tested his conviction about relationships. In front of a senior official, he blamed a local livestock specialist, Mtonga, for a faulty roof. 'I immediately knew I was wrong to humiliate Mtonga in front of our boss. But it took me three days to sum up the courage to apologize to him.' Craig says his apology helped to build the trust between them. When Craig's contract ended in 1979, the Zambian graduate who took over his post told him: 'We have grown together technically but we have also grown together spiritually.'

Human relationships were again the key in Papua New Guinea where Craig was seconded by Booker Tate Ltd in 1990 to get a loss-making poultry and crocodile farm back into profit. The farm, which employed 400 people, had a million chickens and 5,000 crocodiles. Bad management had led to the receiver being called in. Relations between the management and the farm workers' union were 'diabolical'.

At first, the head of the farmworkers' union didn't trust Craig, and the head of the national Trade Union Congress was hostile. Their first encounter was

at a restaurant where the TUC leader was 'seriously drunk', Craig says. He later apologized to Craig for this and respect grew between them. Craig wanted to introduce fair working practices and a wage agreement. 'The employees had been treated pretty badly, particularly the unmarried men who were living in terrible conditions. We were able to improve their showers and rooms.' It took nine months, several strikes and continual trust building to implement the wage agreement but, to Craig's satisfaction, it was the first ever such agreement in PNG to be endorsed by both the TUC and the Ministry of Labour.

In 1992 Craig was one of the first agricultural experts to go to Albania, after the collapse of Enver Hoxha's Marxist regime. His then employer, Dublin-based Rural Development International, sent him as the project manager of a 25 million euro European Union reconstruction scheme. 'When I went into the Ministry of Agriculture,

'IT WAS THE FIRST EVER SUCH AGREEMENT TO BE ENDORSED BY BOTH THE TUC AND THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR'

there was no paper, no heating, one typewriter, and they had no experience of running anything but a centrally planned system—and that was collapsing. The state farms had no funding to continue and overnight had to be split up, creating over 300,000 new farmers with 1.5 hectares each. The government had no experience of how to handle that.'

Craig's team brought in mechanization, fertilizers and agrichemicals, and trained advisers in supporting smallholders. Ten years on, he says, 'Albania is beginning to have a decent agricultural economy and is exporting goods to Italy and elsewhere. But the fragmented landholdings continue to mean subsistence living for many.'

Craig employed Agrisystems in Albania to advise him on mechanization, and they invited him to join the company in 1994. He became its Managing Director in 2002, but stepped down last year to go to the Solomon Islands. The company has a turnover of £5 million and is dedicated to 'challenging the causes of poverty'. Craig sees its role as 'working ourselves out of a job' by handing over to local experts.

Contracted by the UK's Department

for International Development, Agrisystems took Craig to Ukraine, which is facing similar issues to Albania in moving from a Soviet-style system to a market economy.

The £3 million, three-year project was to set up development advisory centres in a province of 5.5 million people. These have now been handed over to Ukrainians. The small farmers are now able to pay towards the advice they receive, and this makes the centres, which the government cannot afford to fund, sustainable.

SIERRA LEONE

Meanwhile, in Sierra Leone Agrisystems is training ex-combatants—from both the rebel forces and the Sierra Leone army—in rural development schemes. These include brick- and road-making, building police stations and health clinics, and training in agricultural skills. 'We insisted that half of each training course should include people who had

stayed at home in the community,' Craig says. He likens integrating the rebels back in this way to the father's welcome to the prodigal son in the Biblical parable. The approach seems to be working.

Craig describes himself as a 'free marketer', and at a public meeting in London last year he didn't mince his words about the need for the European Union and the USA to end their agricultural protectionism. 'The protectionist lobbies are self-serving,' he said. 'Europe is two-faced: the major donor of development aid but also the originator of the most restrictive tariff barriers.'

Craig reflects that 'if you embark on a life of faith and purpose you fall often. It is important to have a partner who loves you and helps you get back on track.' He clearly has this in Marguerite. She has a passion for teaching and has spent the last 12 years teaching five-year-olds numbers, the alphabet and reading, and also the importance of 'sharing and thinking of the other person'. Each generation, comments Craig, has to learn that basic lesson afresh. 'In terms of human relationships we've all got to learn it again and again.' ■



DAVID BAUGHAN

Addressing child trauma in Sierra Leone

WHEN JENNIFER WHITE-BAUGHAN met Emma Kamara at a conference on peace and reconciliation in Caux, Switzerland, last year there was a 'fire of connection' between them.

The two women, from the US and Sierra Leone, quickly found they had shared concerns. Kamara told White-Baughan about her work with a grassroots community organization in Sierra Leone called Children's Learning Services (see FAC April-May 2003). 'She added that the children could not seem to learn due to trauma from the decade of civil war that had just ended,' says White-Baughan. 'I told her that I was a trauma specialist who worked with children who were war and trauma affected—and that I had just closed my practice!' Needless to say White-Baughan promised to visit Sierra Leone.

She had no difficulty in enlisting the support of her husband, Dr David Baughan, who had been with her at the conference and had also met Kamara. The Baughans live and work in North Conway, a small town in rural New Hampshire, where David is a family doctor. They invited Pam Goss-Power, a colleague specializing in early childhood education, to be the third member of their team.

'David has experience designing primary healthcare delivery to least developed areas,' says White-Baughan. 'Previously we have both worked at the University of California, San Diego, Medical School with refugees

'IT RAPIDLY BECAME APPARENT THAT TRAUMA AMONG TEACHERS WAS DEEP AND WIDESPREAD'

Above: Students at a school in Port Loko, Sierra Leone

from Central and South America, Vietnam and Laos—and with immigrant Mexican workers. With Pam's expertise, I think we made a well-balanced team.'

The three arrived in Sierra Leone in March 2004 armed with school supplies and toys donated by two New Hampshire schools and with the news that a freight-load of computers, given by a local medical group, was on its way. Three days of the visit were spent visiting schools in the Port Loko District of the Northern Province, an area which had experienced some of the worst fighting. They also met with members of several 'Peace Clubs', groups of students and teachers trained to be peer mediators in

conflict resolution by Kamara's Children's Learning Services and a partner organization, Rainbows of Hope.

'It rapidly became apparent that trauma among teachers was deep and widespread,' says David Baughan. 'Therefore any intervention for the students must be offered to the teachers as well.' His wife adds, 'We found that one school alone had 880 ex-combatants in their midst. Some were older than their teachers. The teachers felt overwhelmed and traumatized themselves as survivors, not to mention the presence of children who had killed and terrorized.'

At one Catholic girls' school, the nun asked how many of the girls had been affected by the war, and all raised their hands. 'She had more than hinted that most of the girls had been raped regardless of age.'

They also travelled by UN helicopter to the eastern part of the country near to the border with Liberia, where they visited child development clubs sponsored by World Relief.

During the visit White-Baughan had the opportunity to give presentations on post-traumatic stress and on trauma and the brain. The team was also asked to assess what help was needed and could be offered. They see no easy solutions and are mindful of the dangers of imposing western models, but hope that it is now at least possible to assess the extent of trauma in children of different ages. 'If we can help teach Sierra Leonean teachers how to recognize traumatized children that will be a start,' they say.

They are now looking at ways forward based on working through schools as centres for understanding and healing trauma, and as focal points of development in rural areas. White-Baughan points out that, using local labour, a school can be built or re-built for as little as US\$12,000. 'The village feels ownership of the school. With a little training, teachers and para-professionals can go out to the homes to link parents back to the school for parenting and child-development classes.' Paul Williams

Students on their honour

EDUCATION AT Pine Crest School in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, means more than garnering good grades and landing a coveted spot at a highly-regarded college.

Each year, students ceremonially sign an honour code, 'I will not lie, cheat or steal; I will respect myself and others.' The code has evolved over the last 15 years, but the signing ceremony is a new development.

'It grew out of a concern for the climate and times we live in,' says Upper School Head Todd Huebsch. 'We want our students to be their own role models.'

Research shows that such honour codes can curb cheating effectively. One study, based on surveys on 48 campuses in 1990, 1995, and 1999, found that 'serious test cheating on campuses with honour codes is typically one third to one half lower than the level on campuses that do not have honour codes' (www.academicintegrity.org).

Pine Crest's code is backed up by a Commission for Honour and Integrity, composed of students and staff, which aims to create greater awareness of the importance of academic integrity and honesty, and of making good decisions.

'Our discussions are lively and often passionate,' says Barbara Grosz, chair of the commission and of the Upper School Science Department. 'Everyone on the committee cares deeply about helping to create a culture of honesty in our school community. We do not view the issues of integrity, honesty and honour as "student problems".'

The school also has an honour court, made up of seven students from different grades. They serve as guardians of the honour code—dealing with students who violate it—and as mentors. Their collective goal is education rather than adjudication.

The code is part of a programme of interactive courses which allow students to learn from each other as well as from their teachers, parents and others within the community about character, leadership, integrity, honesty and trust.

All sixth grade (age 11) students enrol in a values class taught by the school's Chaplain, Ali McKee. As part of this course, they are given several assignments. One involves interviewing both of their parents about teenagers and morality. 'This assignment sticks with both students and parents,' says McKee. 'I have had parents come up to me at graduation and thank me for having their child do that assignment.'

Serving others and the community is also part of the curriculum. To graduate, students must have done at least 50 hours of social service.

The school believes that what its students learn about values will determine the type of people they will be for the rest of their lives. 'It's not about how smart we are, but about the choices we make in life,' says McKee. Susan Pompeian



Students sign the Honour Code

LOU TOMAN/SOUTH FLORIDA SUN-SENTINEL

TURNING POINT

Crash course in faith

What has making your bed got to do with surviving plane crashes and meeting prime ministers? Jim Coulter tells Mike Lowe.

TO SURVIVE one plane crash is lucky. Jim Coulter survived three—all during his training as a pilot in World War II. On one occasion a wheel fell off his plane shortly after take-off. The frantic waving of his instructor in another plane alerted him that something was amiss. He pinpointed the problem by flying low and looking at his plane's shadow—and managed to land safely, to his commanding officer's astonishment.

The third and most serious crash happened in thick fog on a moor in Yorkshire, England. Coulter was in the habit of taking time early in the morning to pray and ask God for direction, and had written down, 'You will be in great danger today but you will not be afraid'. Despite the fog his commanding officer had insisted on taking an aircraft up, trusting to the plane's instruments and the airfield's 'beam' to guide them in.

As they came in to land, Coulter says, 'I knew we were going to crash and that I might not survive, but I was strangely calm about it.' The first sight he had of the ground was of it rushing towards him seconds before impact. The plane bounced a couple of times before flipping over onto its back pinning its occupants under a massive weight. It turned out that the 'beam' was bent. Both survived with relatively minor injuries.

Coulter's faith stemmed from an encounter with Moral Re-Armament (now called Initiatives of Change) at a school camp some years previously. 'What impressed me was that several of those involved were sportsmen—in fact I'd competed against some of them and therefore hadn't expected them to be spiritual.'

Inspired by the message that people could change, he inquired whether they could do anything for his hated step-mother, Rose. 'Their answer was,

"We didn't meet her but we did meet you", meaning start with yourself.' When he followed their advice to ask God for direction, he had the rather unglamorous thought that he should make his bed. After he had done this for several days, Rose wanted to know what had led to this change. Real communication and reconciliation followed.

The great love of Coulter's life was his future wife, Rita, and he had been concerned at her growing levels of anxiety and fearfulness. Some months before the school camp a thought had come to him 'out of the blue' that Rita's fear was connected with his lust. He had dismissed this thought because 'I was no more lustful than the average person, and there didn't seem to be anything I could do about it.' Something about the MRA group at the camp gave him hope that he could live differently, and although he hadn't made a conscious decision, Rita noticed the change in him and began her own investigation into 'this thing' that had come into his life.

When Coulter went to various teachers to admit that he had cheated in exams, his link with MRA suddenly became public knowledge in the school. While some shunned him and Rita, others sought them out to ask what had happened to them. When he went into the Air Force, he decided to pray on his knees beside his bunk each night—with similar results.

As he returned by ship to Australia after the war, Coulter pondered whether to return to his job as a journalist or to give his whole time to work with MRA without pay. In his daily time of prayer and searching, he'd had a thought that 'within 24 hours of your return you will meet the Prime Minister'. It seemed so preposterous that he didn't tell anyone.



COLIN GRAMP

I MIGHT NOT SURVIVE, BUT I WAS STRANGELY CALM ABOUT IT

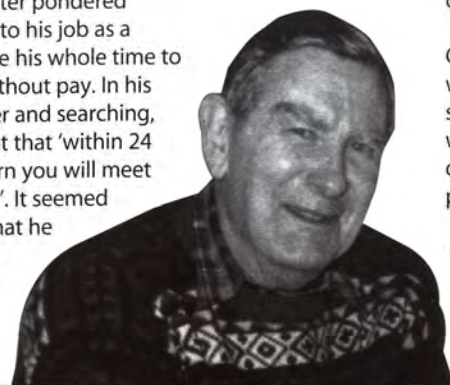
On arrival, friends arranged for Coulter and another returning airman with links to MRA to stay in the home of people he'd never met before. 'At 10pm a man arrived who was obviously a regular guest there. It turned out that he was personal assistant to the Prime Minister and when he heard what we'd been doing and our convictions about Australia he said he must arrange for us to meet Prime Minister Chifley. We saw him the next morning. It was exactly 23 hours after our arrival.'

Coulter found himself telling the Prime Minister about his dilemma. The Prime Minister replied, 'If I were you I'd back your hunch and give it a go.'

This confirmed Coulter's conviction. 'It never felt particularly noble because I was free to decide whereas many of my colleagues were no longer here. I genuinely felt God had saved my life in the three crashes and there was an obligation to do something with it.'

In his memoirs, *Met along the way**, Coulter describes how this decision worked out, and his encounters with seven of Australia's prime ministers, as well as several sporting giants and other less well-known but extraordinary people. ■

*Grosvenor Books, 2003, ISBN 0-9592622-5-3



WHAT ARE YOU DOING ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT?

I'M A keen naturalist with a particular interest in birds. I feel passionately about preserving the countryside. Whenever I see a familiar tree felled or hedgerow 'butchered' I take it like a personal injury.

At school I was fortunate in having a teacher with a love of nature. The best lesson of the week was nature study when we would go out into the local fields and climb trees, and see how many different leaves, birds or flowers we could find. We were encouraged to pick up and admire spiders and all manner of other creatures and wonder at their diversity rather than scream and stamp on them. How many kids get a similar opportunity today?

A local heath was cleared for gravel extraction several years ago and was eventually used for landfill. Gone for ever was the sea of yellow gorse and broom; in its place a sterile overgrazed horse paddock. I think of that loss and the ridiculous amount of waste generated to fill all those holes in the ground and do my best to recycle as much as possible at home. It's up the paper bank, bottle bank or clothes bank all the time.

Landowners, particularly the smaller ones, are not averse to blocking footpaths or removing footpath signs. A quick word with the local Council's Footpaths Officer can often convince people of the error of their ways! Similarly if you consider a particularly fine tree is worth protection under the law, it does not take too long to obtain a preservation order.

So my advice is to get out and walk the highways and byways and keep a

watching brief so that good husbandry is encouraged and our offspring have something worth inheriting. *Brian Thomas, Warlingham, Surrey, UK*

WELL! I'M trying to do my bit on several levels. Firstly, I'm lucky to be employed in the environment/conservation sector. I work on behalf of the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust both raising their profile with the public and trying to swell the 'army' through recruitment.

The Trust also promotes sustainability both at individual and organizational levels. Two examples—we offer subsidized compost bins to encourage recycling and we have an initiative to show how we can all reduce energy output.

To practise what I preach I have two bins myself and have replaced all my light bulbs with low energy types. (It's been said that if every household in the country replaced just one bulb with a low energy one, the energy saved would allow us to close down one nuclear power station!)

I also garden in a wildlife friendly way—not using chemicals or slug pellets, and leaving 'untidy' areas to provide micro-habitats. I also grow a mix of 'foreign' and native plants to provide food sources.

My main 'hobby' entails working for the Trust in a voluntary capacity as County Recorder for Dragonflies. This involves collecting and collating sightings sent in to the Trust. The dataset formed as a result is an invaluable tool used, for example, as ammunition when challenging planning applications and helping to formulate habitat

management plans. *Steve Covey, Swindon, Wiltshire, UK*

WHICH 'ENVIRONMENT'? Is it the physical environment we all share and cope with in varying fashions—that which, when out of balance, threatens our health and well-being? Is it the mental environment which frustrates us in our efforts to communicate with each other? Or, in the final analysis, is it our spiritual environment—that in which we protect our personal perspectives and often evangelize our personal truth while shielding ourselves from the possibility of growth?

To distinguish between the three is to miss the point: inter-connection, of course. For we all have an ongoing obligation to take personal and collective responsibility for our selected time on this planet. We can choose to believe that our presence here is little more than an accident of cosmic nature; or we can come to appreciate the vastness of our surroundings and consider that what we are exposed to is more purposeful than arbitrary, more inviting than threatening and worthy of more than exploitation for personal gain.

All of nature appears to thrive in a form of environmental harmony. Surely it offers an example worth emulating.

Lloyd J Klapperich, Greenville, Virginia, USA

I AM seeing a counsellor and staying in tune with my body. Changing the world starts with making sure that I am okay.

Samuel Campbell, Albers, Illinois, USA

THE ARTICLE, 'Our hand in the future' (FAC April/May), was a source of great encouragement for me. My wife and I feel strongly about the environment but neither of us is a great lobbyist or keen on demonstrations. You have increased our conviction that the little we can do through our practical conduct and style of life does help.

Take recycling and avoiding waste. A few of us were convinced from the start. Others gradually followed suit and the authorities were able to take more and more stringent steps. Other areas in Italy, where environment-sensitive people are too few, are now faced with such a dramatic situation that garbage is being exported to Germany at an exorbitant cost, which diverts money away from other vital needs.

In other fields—such as saving energy and water or supporting ethical finance—just by starting ourselves we have contributed to changing attitudes and establishing a trend. It so happens that in most cases our choices have turned out to be profitable.

Adriano Costa, Caldogno near Vicenza, Italy

NEXT ISSUE:

HOW-OR WHY-DO YOU MAKE SPACE FOR GOD?
UP TO 200 WORDS BY 14 JUNE, 2004, TO:
EDITORS@FORACHANGE.CO.UK

THE COSMONAUT AND THE CROSS

Easter in Russia introduces **Mary Lean** to the resilience of faith and the power of grandmothers.

There's no hope of squeezing into the church in the centre of Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, when we arrive late on Easter Saturday night. Instead we join the crowds waiting outside with their candles.

Then, around midnight, the church bells start ringing, and the priests emerge slowly from the church, carrying icons and followed by the congregation. The crowd joins the procession round the church. When it returns to the porch, the priest calls out '*Hristos voskrese!*' (Christ is risen!) and the crowd replies '*Voistinu voskrese!*' (He is risen indeed!). The greeting is repeated several times. It is the Russian equivalent of 'Happy Easter' and I hear it again and again next day as people greet each other, often exchanging hardboiled eggs dyed with onion skins. In a country where faith was to all effects banned for 70 years, it's not something to take for granted.

IRREPRESSIBILITY

Many of those in the procession around the church will not have observed the strict vegan Lenten fast favoured by the Orthodox Church. Nor, one imagines, have all the politicians solemnly lined up at the all-night service broadcast on TV from the Christ the Saviour Cathedral in Moscow. For some the Easter celebrations may be more a question of Russian tradition than of Christian faith. But even so, they represent the reopening of a door which only a generation ago seemed to be closed for ever.

The Easter celebrations are a testament not only to the irrepressibility of faith but to the steadfastness of all those grandmothers, who kept on praying and

seeing that the babies were secretly baptized. Both my hostess, now in her late 40s, and her daughter were among those babies. My hostess remembers coming home from school to tell her grandmother that the cosmonauts had looked for God in space and found he wasn't there. Grandmother kept her counsel—but 40 years later, it seems that she and the other *babushkas* have won out.

On Easter Day, Russian TV catches one of the cosmonauts dyeing eggs with his grandchildren. Does this mean he has changed his mind about God? The cosmonaut reveals that when he went into space, he had a cross in his pocket all along—given to him by an aunt for his protection.

My first visit to Russia is full of similar snapshots and contrasts. With no knowledge of the language, or even the script, I am completely in the hands of my hosts—and overwhelmed by the warmth and generosity of their welcome.

We arrive in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia's third city, in the snow, getting off the night train from Moscow at 2am. The city stands on a hillside at the confluence of the Volga and the Oka rivers, and is an ancient trade centre with a 550-year-old Kremlin (citadel). Its centre is full of beautiful 19th century merchants' houses, some restored but many decaying. The writer Maxim Gorky grew up here and the city carried his name during the Soviet period. During the Cold War, it was a closed city, because of its military industry, and the dissident physicist, Andrei Sakharov, was exiled here.

We cross the rivers to drive to the 17th century Makariev monastery, with its silver cupolas. Like many religious buildings its beautiful churches, with their ancient icons, are slowly being restored. During Soviet times it was a sports centre,

with a swimming pool in the largest church. On the way we pass through villages of wooden houses, whose inhabitants still collect their water from wells on the roadside. In a shop, there is a well-thumbed abacus on the counter. It feels as if our drive has taken us back a century.

Any foreigner who stays in one place for more than three days has to register with the authorities (as do any Russians from outside Moscow who stay in the capital). The experience is an introduction to Russian bureaucracy—a day spent queuing and shunting from one building to another, in the driving sleet. All official business involves the same struggles with uncooperative officialdom, my hosts explain. In the old days, people would be given paid leave to deal with bill-paying or registration. This arrangement was often abused and has now been abolished, but the system has not been reformed. So the people now fuming in the queues are also watching their wages drip away—and accumulating horror stories to swap with their friends afterwards.

HUMBLING

The way around the system is to make an arrangement with someone who knows someone. Money will not necessarily change hands, but a gift of chocolate or produce from one's *dacha* (country cottage) shows one's appreciation. Something similar happens with doctors, dentists and other professionals. Quite where the line runs between gratitude and bribery is hard to judge.

The hospitality is humbling. After an Easter feast with three generations of my hostess's family, we are invited for the evening by the director of the nursery school where she teaches. Here we are faced with a groaning table of homemade delicacies—pies and pastries of every possible kind; the traditional tall Easter cake with its accompanying sweet cheese; mushrooms and strawberries picked on her *dacha*. She tells me that there should be 48 products on the Easter table—one for each day of Lent.

And behind the warmth and humour, there are glimpses of the past, with all its contradictions. My hostess remembers weeping when she learnt, at the age of 26, that Lenin—who, she had been told, never told a lie and always cleaned

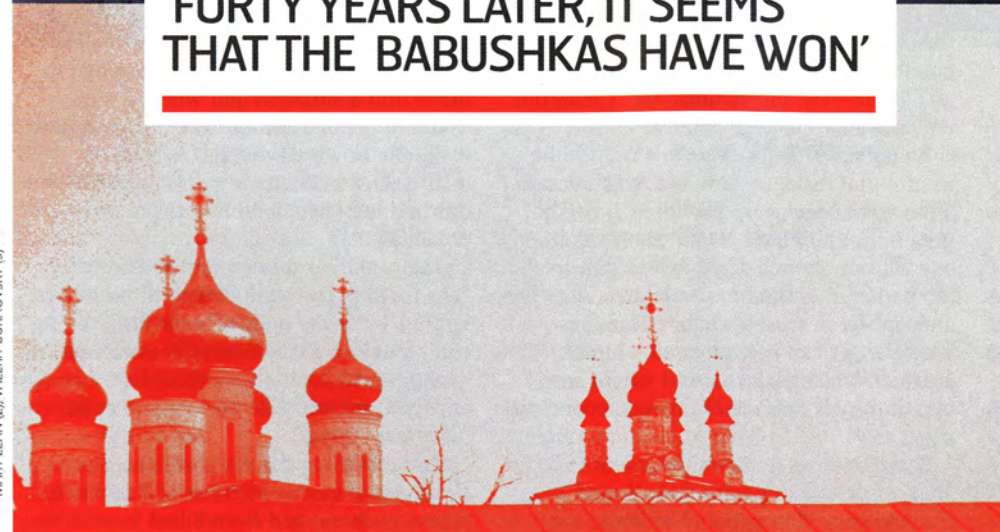


An Orthodox church at Easter



'FORTY YEARS LATER, IT SEEMS THAT THE BABUSHKAS HAVE WON'

MARY LEAN (2), VALERY BURKOVSKY (3)



his plate—had had a mistress. She was in her twenties, too, before she learnt that her grandfather had spent much of the 1930s in a labour camp. He, his wife and their nine children eventually ended up in a communal flat in Nizhny Novgorod—a rich seam of stories in itself. Years later, her sister returned to the building to open her first art studio.

WEIGHT OF HISTORY

One evening I am invited to a concert by a local publisher, who then takes me home for dinner. Her husband has prepared a dish from Uzbekistan, which traditionally must be cooked by a man. It turns out he has relations in Uzbekistan—and when I enquire more, I'm told the story has been written up as a novel. His grandmother, it turns out, grew up in Uzbekistan and was sent to a labour camp for eight years after her husband, one of Stalin's generals, was killed in a purge. On her release she travelled around Russia searching the orphanages for her children.

We visit churches to admire the ancient icons, creep into the entrance of the city's impossibly grand 19th century bank, compare prices in the western clothing stores on the city's main street, offer a couple of classes of schoolchildren a chance to practise their English and visit the studios and exhibitions of local artists.

I'm asked more than once whether the visit has changed my view of Russia and Russians. And, yes, perhaps it has. It has awakened me to the vastness of the country, and the heavy weight of history carried, often so lightly, by its inhabitants. I had not expected so much laughter in face of a life that is still so difficult, both logistically and economically. And I am moved by the generosity and courage I encounter.

On my first morning in Russia, we visited the Kremlin in Moscow, with its seven cathedrals. As we looked around the icons in the Archangel Cathedral, burial place of Ivan the Terrible and his family, three men and two women walked in and burst into the heart-wrenching unaccompanied harmonies of Russian church music. In the past, you could be sent to Siberia for singing these chants. Today such moments offer a hope of resurrection, in the midst of all the problems of this vast and ancient country. ■

HEALING STREAMS

Zainab Bawa draws insights from a new Indian book on dialogue and reconciliation between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs.

'Mine is the story of an ordinary person who, when thrown into extraordinary situations, acted according to the prompting of her heart.'

As I copy these words from Sushobha Barve's book, *Healing Streams**, I ask myself whether it is necessary to go through an experience of violence in order to understand the meaning of peace. What is peace? Does 'peace' differ from individual to individual, community to community, society to society?

Barve's book is timely because it raises pertinent questions for the victims of violence, the perpetrators of violence and for those involved in efforts towards establishing 'peace'. *Healing Streams* is more than an account of Barve's personal experience of communal riots in India; it is also an exploration of her own inner journey of transformation and growth. Perhaps this is what makes the book special. She points out that it is as important to be at peace with oneself as to have peace in the external environment. Barve shows that neither internal peace nor external peace is static; both involve journeys of confrontation, of emptiness and of faith—constantly.

LEFT FOR DEAD

Sushobha Barve's calling towards peacemaking began with a train journey in 1984. On the day of the journey, news broke out that Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India, had been assassinated by her two Sikh bodyguards. Violence against Sikhs spread throughout India. In Barve's train compartment, there were two Sikh passengers. Both men were dragged out of the compartment, beaten up, set on fire and left for dead. Barve and her colleague Sarla Kapardia, who were working with Initiatives of Change, witnessed this gruesome violence. And the incident followed

them like a nightmare.

Barve (herself a Hindu) decided to initiate dialogue meetings between Hindus and Sikhs. In one such meeting, while narrating her experience on the train, she said to the Sikhs present, 'I am deeply sorry for the hurt and humiliation we have inflicted on your community. Please forgive us.'

INCLUDING WRONGDOERS

The recognition and acceptance of one's identity is important; for, as Barve mentions, it leads to the answers to vital questions. Later, when Barve was working with the victims of the 1992-93 Hindu-Muslim riots in Mumbai, she was faced with questions such as: Why am I working with the Muslims? Is it because I am feeling guilty and repenting for the wrongs committed by Hindus against Muslims? In peacemaking, are we going to include only the victims? What about the wrongdoers?

This is where I have begun to trace my own understanding of dialogue, and, most crucially, of the processes I employ for dialogue. For some time, in my bridgebuilding work in Kashmir, I was engaged only with Kashmiri Muslims. Recently I recognized that no resolution to the bitterness inside each one of us is possible until we break the wall between Us and Them—Us, the victims, and Them, the wrongdoers.

As Barve explains, there is a need to be careful that dialogue does not itself become a process of exclusion. At times, it can be important to exclude 'some' people, but overall, our attempt must be to listen to all the parties. We need to create an atmosphere of trust and understanding where anger can be expressed without judgments being passed, and where an opportunity is provided to move beyond the anger.

Barve outlines in detail the issues that can arise while working with riot-affected communities. Throughout her book, she

speaks about the question of rehabilitation and how it needs to be holistic—both psychological and economic. Without economic rehabilitation, the community is left vulnerable and wounds can become deeper. From her experience with the 'Imamwada Mohalla Committee' after the riots in Mumbai, she points out that it is critical to create opportunities for gainful employment, particularly for the youth, so that they are able to restart their lives and rebuild the broken community. In the long-term, building peace is also a matter of building sustainable economics.

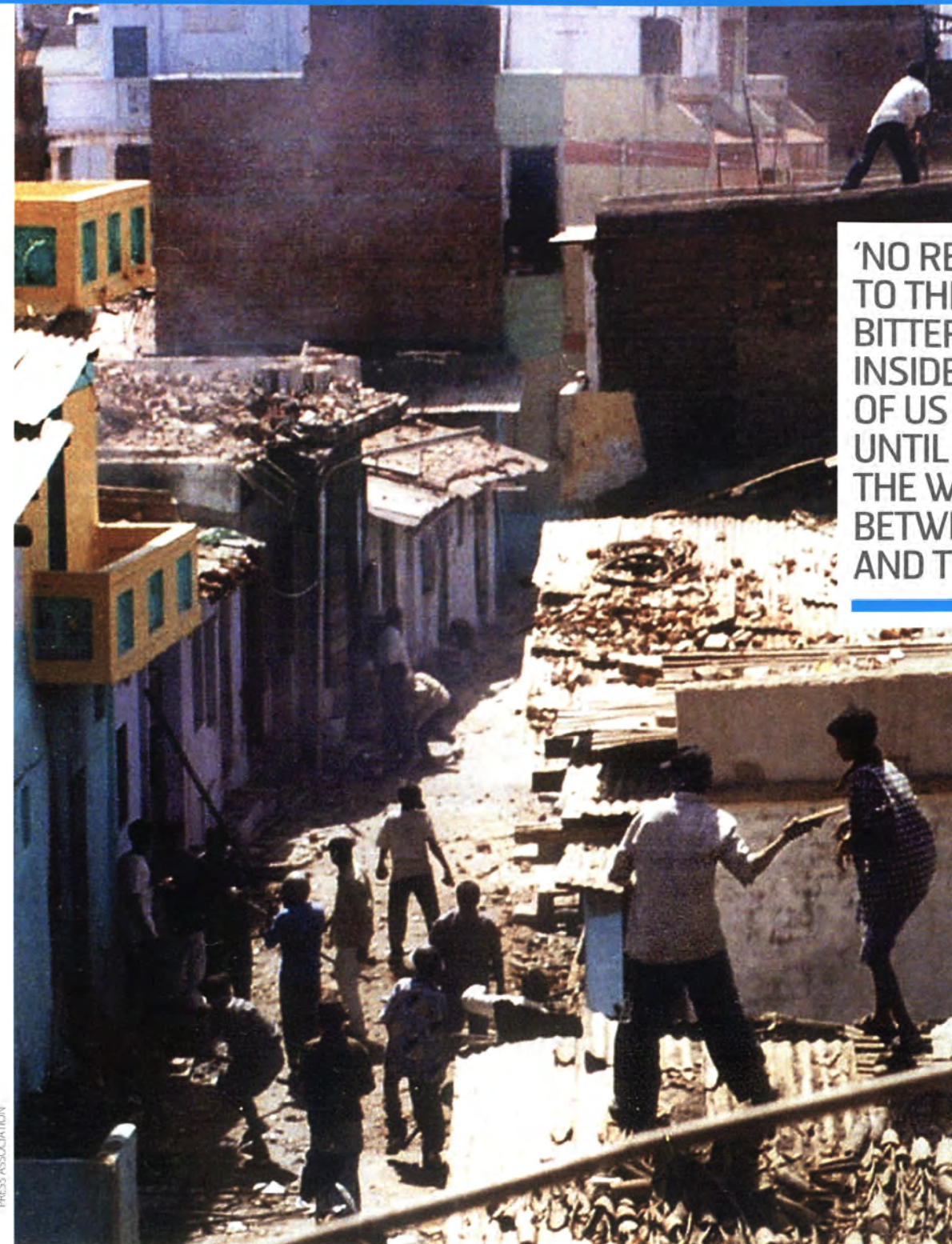
Barve describes how the Mohalla Committee experiment demonstrated the importance of organic models of community/neighbourhood involvement for establishing peace within the city. If citizens can resolve internal disputes, then there is no need for the police or the government to step in.

NO REVENGE

She also examines the role of outsiders in facilitating the rehabilitation process in a community. She concludes that the process of establishing trust between Hindus and Muslims will have to be a continuous one, perhaps needing sensitive outside intervention. The skill is to know when to move into a situation and when to step aside. In the end, people have to grow and make their own discoveries in human relations. A facilitator's role is to understand this and help people to find their own potential.

One of the most important threads that runs through the book is that of 'historical wrongs'—can we seek revenge for a wrong committed by a community in one era by 'paying them back' in another? How can we emerge from our collective memories of historical wrongs?

Barve refers to the story of Rano Shazia of Nagaland, a former Member of Parliament, whose husband had been killed in an



'NO RESOLUTION TO THE BITTERNESS INSIDE EACH ONE OF US IS POSSIBLE UNTIL WE BREAK THE WALL BETWEEN US AND THEM'

Intercommunal violence in India

election meeting. At her husband's funeral, Rano announced that her family would not seek revenge for her husband's murder. Several young men in their clan expressed their displeasure, arguing that their tribal tradition allowed for revenge killings. Rano steadfastly countered them saying that though their tribal tradition accepted revenge, their religion, Christianity, was against revenge and she would not permit anyone to be involved in killings on her or her family's behalf.

When Barve told this story to the women of Bhatodia (in the city of Bhagalpur), the women said that they did not want revenge

for wrongs committed against them during recent riots, but sought a different kind of future for their children.

Choosing forgiveness over revenge, choosing between good memories and bad memories, moving beyond one's identity and embracing the community—each one of these are choices that we have to make as individuals.

There is also a crucial need to sift through sources because, as Barve mentions, minor rumours can lead to most ghastly riots.

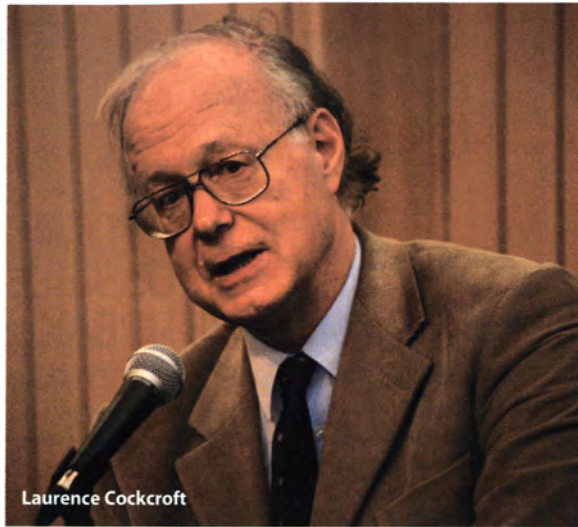
Today, our social fabric is extremely fragile. Developing a culture of peace is a matter of constantly being able to look

inside ourselves, examine our own prejudices, communicate more openly and transparently within our families and our communities, and work towards resolving conflicts rather than ignoring them. Each one of us holds within ourselves an extraordinary power to transform ourselves and become a catalyst towards wider change. ■

Zainab Bawa is a post-graduate student in political science at the University of Mumbai.

* *Healing Streams: bringing hope in the aftermath of violence*, Viking Penguin, India, ISBN 0143029622

JOHN LEGGAT



Laurence Cockcroft

ANTI-CORRUPTION ODYSSEY

LAURENCE COCKCROFT, Chair of the UK chapter of Transparency International (TI), stressed the role of the individual in fighting corruption, in a lecture at the IC centre in London in February. He spoke of the 'huge courage, effort and energy' of the four winners of TI's annual Integrity Awards, which are given to individuals who have stood out against corruption.

With democracy more widespread than ever before, 'it is much harder for a senior politician to be corrupt in front of the public', Cockcroft said. 'But on an individual level it depends on how far people take on initiatives to change it.'

'Corruption is a dynamic entity,' he said. 'It gets better or worse, but is never static. We have to ask the question: to what extent corruption prevents the world from becoming inclusive.' Referring to the role of religion in Africa, he said that 'Islam and Christianity are both antagonistic to corruption, but there is a failure by both, institutionally, to address the question.'

Cockcroft stressed that TI in the UK 'needs to focus more on what is going on in defence and politics'. In the private sector changes happen much faster than in the political or public sectors. The day after Cockcroft's forum, the *Financial Times* reported that there had been no major prosecutions of businesses for corrupt practices. The paper quoted Cockcroft as saying that corporate behaviour would 'only change markedly when there are a couple of high-profile prosecutions'.

Plea to support Third World farmers

'AGRICULTURE USED to have a very high standing in the development plans of Western countries, but over the last 10 years this has been lost,' maintained Christie Peacock, Chief Executive of the British-based non-governmental organization Farm Africa.

Dr Peacock was speaking at a public forum at the IC centre in London in April, hosted by the International Farmers Dialogue—a programme of IC. She appealed for greater status to be accorded to small farmers across Africa.

Farm Africa has produced an 'agenda and rationale' for investing in African agriculture and is busy lobbying DFID (the UK's Department for International Development). A new document, *Reaching the Poor—a call to action*, argues the case for investing in smallholder farmers in Africa. Peacock said that it was understandable that governments gave large sums in direct food aid during a crisis but it made more sense in the long term to enable poor farmers to increase their production.



Christie Peacock, right, with Claude Bourdin, France, left, and Pat Evans, UK, members of the International Farmers Dialogue

2003 INDEX

A comprehensive index for Volume 16 of 'For A Change' can be ordered from Maria Grace, 15 Lewis Walk, Newbury, Berks RG14 6TB, UK. Price £2.00 to cover photocopying and postage. For a free copy in electronic format, email: maria.grace@uk.iofc.org

FOR A CHANGE

'WE USED YOUR MAGAZINE ALL THE TIME. MAINLY STUDENTS FOUND A LOT OF USEFUL INFORMATION THERE.' RETIRED PROFESSOR, CZECH REPUBLIC

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VISION FOR THE MASS MEDIA

BERNARD MARGUERITTE, President of the International Communications Forum (ICF), addressed a one-day media conference organized by the Royal Society of Edinburgh in March. Its aim was to consider the breakdown of public trust in the media, and how well journalism properly served the public interest. In Scotland, concerns have been voiced about the relationship between the Scottish media, the Parliament in Edinburgh and the public, as well as about the concentration of media ownership.

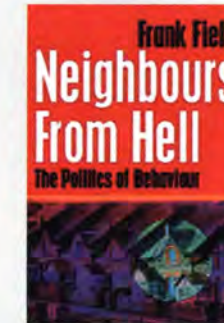
Margueritte said that the media could and should play a prominent role in the battle to build a better world, but in order to do so 'we have to refine our dignity and sense of mission. At stake is our own credibility, as media people and as human beings, and at stake is the future of our societies and our world.'

The other main speakers were Prof Philip Schlesinger, head of the Media Research Institute at Stirling University, Lord Steel, former presiding officer of the Scottish Parliament, Tony Stoller of Ofcom (the regulator for the UK communications industries), and Alastair Campbell, the former head of communications for Prime Minister Blair. The Chairman was BBC presenter James Nochtie.



Bernard Margueritte (right), President of the International Communications Forum, with the Lord Provost of Aberdeen, John Reynolds, during his visit to Scotland in March.

ONE MP'S RECIPE FOR RECOVERY



'Neighbours from Hell: the politics of behaviour', by Frank Field, Politico's Publishing, London 2003; ISBN: 184275078X

FRANK FIELD has been the MP for Birkenhead for 25 years. The visit of a group of pensioners to his surgery some eight years ago 'is indelibly etched on my memory', he writes. 'Nothing had prepared me for the description of what they were enduring... Young lads who ran across their bungalow roofs, peed through their letterboxes, jumped out of the shadows as they returned home and, when they were watching television, tried to break their sitting-room windows.'

The visit launched Field on a campaign, not only to find an answer to these problems but to find a new political ideology. This book is the result of his search. He ascribes the present problems of society to:

- the collapse of 'common decencies', which is the result of the rise of dysfunctional families;
- the loss of Christian morality;
- and the national collectivism of the welfare state undermining local solidarity.

He looks at the factors which held society together in the past. Believing that Christianity is unlikely to play again the role it once did in our society, he considers the three most

important virtues to be politeness, considerateness and thoughtfulness. 'That simple evangelical creed, centring on how each of us should use our lives, needs recreating by secular means,' he writes. The police, the schools and the social services should now take on this task.

Field would give the police new powers, through the courts, to take on the role of surrogate parents, for those parents 'who cannot or will not control their children'. He states: 'We need to move swiftly to an expectation that every crime is an act which will be followed up seriously by the police.' This would mean increasing the police budget by 50 per cent.

He also wants to make welfare payments part of 'a new citizenship contract'. It would spell out the duties of citizens by linking them with benefit payments. The government would be responsible for providing payments according to legally binding conditions. The claimant would be expected to behave in a way 'not to cause a continual grievance or annoyance' to others.

This contract would be rolled out on the registration of a birth. Other contracts for other benefits during life would be rolled out in the same way. When someone reached the state retirement pension age, 'the community would take the opportunity of thanking the individual for a successful working life, whether paid or unpaid'.

On education, he cites a national survey about the attitude to citizenship of 15- to 24-year-olds, which is an encouraging change from the disturbing statistics earlier in his book. 'For young people respect of

others is the most valued characteristic of good citizenship. The next is to be law abiding and to have respect for the environment. The third... is setting a good example to others.'

He is convinced that schools are the places to start. Again he sees contracts as a way of doing this—contracts between parents, pupils and the school, whereby all parties are stakeholders in the enterprise. Also, as more and more families become dysfunctional, schools must take responsibility for teaching values as well as knowledge.

Politics also has a role, he writes. 'The politics of behaviour requires resolution and vision. Success demands the Prime Minister and his entire government being signed up to the project. Tackling the breakdown of common decencies requires an effort equal to that which is mobilized for war.' He urges that a group of Ministers and MPs should develop a strategy to counter anti-social behaviour. 'It is not just a matter of joined up government but of joining the government with the electorate.'

This is a book which deals head on with the problems of anti-social behaviour which abound in many urban communities today. But Frank Field does not just bemoan what is happening. In well expressed and thought-out ways he shows a road to recovery. This needs all sections of the community, including the politicians. Is there the political will to implement and finance his suggestions? As one of Field's constituents, I certainly hope there is. *Ann Rignall*



NIGEL HEYWOOD

Indian agents of change

Mahatma Gandhi altered the history of India as he listened to villagers, all over the country, and encouraged them to 'Be the change you want to see in the world'. In the last few months, I have been part of Action for Life, a training programme involving people from 19 countries, who have been travelling in India before moving on to other parts of Asia. We met some of the people who are still on Gandhi's trail.

As we connected with students, businessmen, families, swamis, politicians, intellectuals, religious leaders, villagers and strangers on the train, we began to hear the many voices of India.

What we heard ranged from the ambition of young graduates to be part of the growing wealthy middle class to the passion of grassroots peoples' movements fighting for the 'right to information' for the poor. We met Muslims and Hindus trapped in the cycle of communal violence, visited organic and self-sufficient ashrams, and met people who are working to empower rural communities through water-harvesting and skills sharing. Underneath the diversity lay a common search for what makes people happy and content.

In some places we were privileged to meet regularly with small groups of local

people. We built strong friendships through sharing our life stories and searching together in silence for how God could use our lives to bring change. The central question was, 'How can we start with ourselves?'

At times it was hard to see what difference individuals could make in a country of one billion people, with all its pollution, corruption and poverty. The stories of the people we met did something to challenge this sense of helplessness.

Barkos Warjri is a senior civil servant in the Indian administration, who has faced humiliation—and risked his life—by refusing to tolerate corruption and injustice within his work. He is motivated by a determination to submit to God's will.

Mayur Shah works in a small business which sells telephone contracts. He became unhappy about the bribes they were paying to get Government business and convinced his co-workers that honesty would be a better policy. As a result the business lost money—until they realized that because they were saving money by not paying bribes they could afford to lower prices for the customers. The next month they began to reach their old figures again.

In Bangalore, a recent graduate, Shrupti Sampath, had found the courage to talk

honestly with her parents after attending a family workshop run by two of our group. 'One of the main problems was that we never discussed important issues,' she writes. 'There was a lack of understanding. We began to tell each other what was really on our minds. I learnt more about my parents' past and began to understand the reasons for their behaviour.'

After meeting our group, Ashish, a young engineer, decided to repay the railways for train tickets he had not paid for. He says, 'The right path is tough to tread and is easily left. You need some force to hold your hand and take you out from doubts and dilemmas.'

As a community of four different faiths, our common prayer was, 'God, guide us. Strengthen our bonds of love with all human beings and teach us to care for all. We cannot change the world but are ready to become the instruments of change in your mighty and caring hands.' We found ourselves becoming a link in a chain of people who are starting with themselves in the struggle for a more united, cleaner and more just India.

Nigel Heywood is an Australian fine arts graduate now travelling in Asia with IC's Action for Life training programme.

REFLECTIONS

PAUL WILLIAMS

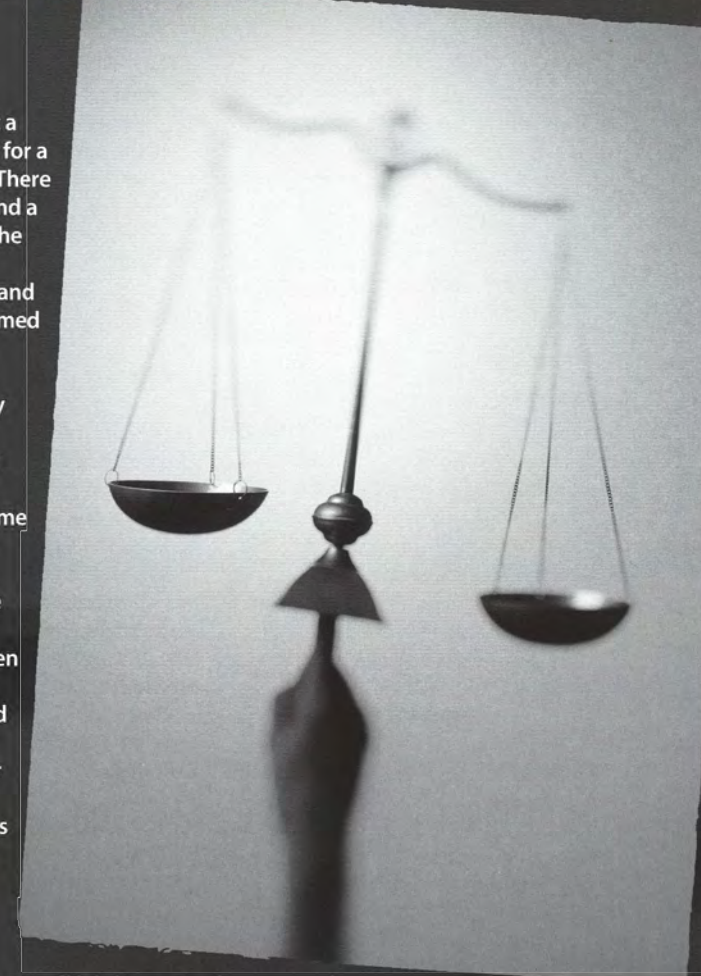
Balancing between two truths

SOME YEARS ago, I was at a meeting in France to plan for a forthcoming conference. There were 25 of us sitting around a large table, when one of the two Belgians present suddenly leaned forward and asked a question that seemed quite out of context with what we had been discussing. 'Should we say *forgive and forget*,' she demanded, 'or *forgive but don't forget*?'

Everyone took a little time to consider this and then one of our number gave what I thought was a wise answer. 'In interpersonal relations—such as between me and my wife—it's usually best to forgive and forget,' he said. 'But in international situations or between whole peoples and groups, it's not always good to forget. So in that case forgive, but don't necessarily forget.'

Thinking about this afterwards, I was struck not only by the truth, but also the nature, of my friend's answer. Two truths, not one. Both were right, but in different circumstances. This is true, but this is also true.

I realized anew that in the walk of faith we often have to live with conflicting—or perhaps competing—truths. As a Christian, I find plenty of these in the Gospels. We are told we should be in the world but not of it. We are urged to be wise as serpents and at the same time harmless as doves. That we should live life abundantly and also be 'dead' to the world. That we should honour and love wife and parents, but that we should love God more



and even be prepared to forsake them for him. We are urged to retreat to the desert and also to be active in the market place.

Wisdom and maturity comes as we are able to marry and reconcile these competing truths—as we get the balance right. 'Tension,' writes H A Williams, 'is the price of life. It is only when we refuse to recognize tensions that are life-giving that we fall prey to tensions that are death-dealing.'

There are plenty of tensions around. There is, for example, the tension between tradition (sticking loyally to certain founding truths) and innovation (being willing to look at new departures and new expressions of these truths).

There is a right path to be found between submission (accepting authority and the leadership of others) and maintaining personal integrity and a rightful independence.

There can be a fine line between bringing a vision to fruition and creating an empire where I am at the centre. There is an important difference between being realistic about someone or someone's plans and being negative and destructive. I recall an editorial writer for a national newspaper saying, 'The duty of journalists is to be sceptical but never cynical.' In personal relationships it is easy to cross over from 'salty' plain speaking (tough love) to being hurtful and abrasive.

We are halfway there when we accept that there always will be these tensions and conflicting truths and that, accepted, recognized and catered for, they can be life-enhancing and creative.

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