In the beginning... the National Outlook *story*

Bruce DUNCAN

When *National Outlook* hit the printing presses in October 1979 as a Christian monthly magazine of current affairs, few of us dared hope that it would last more than 21 years.

The initiative came from Ray Temmerman, and a group of students at the University of Sydney, notably Bernard Carey, Philip Esler and myself, soon became involved. Bill Neville, then a senior public servant with the NSW State Ministry of Education, also joined the organising group. He had been chair of the national study campaign around issues of international development organised ecumenically by the Australian Council of Churches and the Australian Catholic Bishop's Conference. Action for World Development grew out of this as a joint endeavour of the churches before it was given independence.

Most of the initial funding of $6,000 came from religious orders and diocesan clergy. Philip Esler contributed the name, *National Outlook*, and advised us legally. Bernard Carey used his splendid negotiating skills to secure amazing quotes from printers and typesetters. Bernard did the lion's share of work in preparing the first issue, and then an editorial committee shared the task. We wanted to develop a popular magazine as a cross between the London *Tablet* and the US *National Catholic Reporter*.

Our initial capital was tiny, but we hoped that once we demonstrated that the magazine was a serious venture, we would attract more substantial finance. To our great disappointment, no such support eventuated. *Outlook* was forced to rely on its turnover, with the generous assistance of many volunteers. However, we were never able to pay contributors, a huge handicap, as relying on voluntary contributions greatly restricted editorial initiative.

For a few years, *Outlook* printed 10,000 copies a month, with 4,000 going to newsagents. Our best sales were about 6,000, but we relied mainly on our 2,000 subscribers and 150 parishes, mostly Catholic.

After Bernard and his wife, Hilary, moved to Oxford for study about 1980, they met Peter Hebblethwaite and recruited him as a contributor for *Outlook* at a very modest rate. His death in 1994 left a huge gap in English Catholic journalism.

Bernard took over as editor for a period in 1983, before moving back into academia. He is currently deputy vice-chancellor of the University of Western Sydney. Philip Esler moved from law to New Testament studies, and about 1988 was appointed Reader in New Testament at St Andrew's University, Scotland, the first Catholic to hold the position since the Reformation. He is now Professor of Biblical Criticism there.

After a stint as an industrial chaplain with the Interchurch Trade and Industry Mission in Sydney, Ray Temmerman returned to his native Canada where he married. He and his wife are now involved internationally in the Association of Interchurch Families.

What were *Outlook*'s achievements?

First, it provided the first (and to this time, still the only) genuinely ecumenical vehicle in the print media for social debate.

Second, *Outlook* joined in the great social debates of the time, including over liberation theology, nuclear deterrence and arms control.

Third, we reported consistently on the work of the justice and peace agencies, in all the churches. We balanced criticism of capitalism with regular features on problems in communist countries.

Fourth, we explored poverty and social disadvantage in Australia. The struggle of Aboriginal Australians for their rights was also high on our agenda.

Fifth, *Outlook* monitored the continuing drama of global poverty and injustice. In the early years, Bill Neville wrote many articles on problems in the Pacific Islands where he had lived and worked. Since then he has brought wider international dimensions through his involvement in international church organisations. When David Thomas joined us from South Africa in the mid-1980s, he greatly improved our coverage of African affairs.

Sixth, with assistance from the Mercy Foundation, *Outlook* has been able to provide a practical service to refugees from the war in Bosnia. A number, including some Muslims, have been given experience in office procedures, computer page-layout and design that has helped them to new careers in their new country.

Among our many writers, Judith Gibson was outstanding for almost the entire history of *Outlook*, first as music reviewer, but then in sparkling film reviews which have continued to this very last issue.

From the mid-1980s, David Thomas undertook more of the editing and management, until Bill Neville returned in 1993 from a period in Geneva with the international Catholic graduate organisation, Pax Romana. Later that year he took over the editorial task, a temporary expedient that became more permanent. To the unrelenting, unpaid efforts of these two belongs the recent existence of *Outlook*.

What a great privilege it has been to work at such a project, and to enjoy the comradeship of such talented and generous writers, readers and so many volunteers—too numerous to be mentioned by name. May God bless everyone involved.

One-time editor of ***National Outlook****, Redemptorist priest,* ***Bruce DUNCAN*** *is a Board Member of the Social Policy and Advocacy Research Centre in Melbourne and teaches Social Justice at the Yarra Theological Union. His definitive book* ***Crusade or Conspiracy? Catholics and the Anti-communist Struggle in Australia****, published by UNSW Press was launched on 21 February.*