



The Problems
of
Separation

essays
& diatribes

mitchell john warren

A Dialogue - God, not God's!

"You can't mix us Christians with all this other lot .." he say to me.

I shut him off with a wave of my frozen hand before we go off to war. What is it with these fundamentalists? Always preaching - it doesn't matter whether they're Christians or Muslims .. though I'd have to admit that the Muslims aren't in your face quite like these Christians, I suppose that its a factor of Australia being a so called Christian country. Muslims appear to be more interested in preaching by practice .. 'be thy do'ers of the word' ... What is that passage? From James, the Nazarene's little brother ... Ah yes, 'Whoever breaks one of the least of the commandments and teaches other to do so, will be the least in the Kingdom of Gods ... but he who looks to the perfect law - that law of liberty, not licence - and perseveres, not just hearers that forget, but do'ers who act ... They look at themselves in the mirror and upon walking away immediately forget what it is they look like.' Something like that ... Now, many would say that I too preach and I don't deny this at times, but I like to think that I'm just a mirror holder .. a reflector of their words ... Their worlds.

" .. the Greeks and Italians, they were ok," he said "at least they believed in god, but as soon as we started letting in the bloody Viet-cong and now these fuckin rag-head ba... "

Again I held my hand up, "You mean, in your god. What makes you believe, what makes you think, that this 'other lot' don't believe in gods?"

"They don't obey the law. Our law. Its our fucking country and they have -to-obey-the law!" he snaps, jutting his jaw out .. and sensing, perhaps, that I too have no respect for his god, and perhaps, that I don't obey his law.

"The gods are all the same," I said "they have no respect for law. People make laws, people with clubs ... And they make them purely to suit themselves. The law has nothing to do with Gods. And what's more, they make these laws only to make war between each other's gods."

He's drops his hoe. I've upset him. The wife's throwing the glitter making gear back into the vehicle with an obvious disgust at my heathen affrontery ... I'm unarmed but not alone. I have my eyes .. and my eyes, they're watching their gods.

"I'll show you something from a lawyer," he says, spitting the lawyer out as though its the ultimate weapon of his god.

"I'm not interested in your lawyer, buddy, nor much your gods. I was brought up among Muslims and never once was I preached to .. not like you fundamentalist Christians who preach continuously without ever a thought as to practice. No," I say "I shouldn't say that," I bow, "should I? You preach hate and you practice it well."

Well, as usual, I've just made a couple of good new friends.

"God! Not Gods! .. c'mon Scott." and she slithers in behind her wheel and slams the door. He gives me one last look of affront and follows. Me? ... I retreat back into Cornwell's biography of Pius XII.

Old Col gets up out of his Ferrari arm chair where he's been sitting listing to this claptrap, and wanders over. "Mitchell," he says "you do provoke these people. You gotta learn to ignore 'em. It don't matter much what they believe .. they just all boxed up in their own little worlds. Right, so so."

"So so, but Col, he came up to me and launched into the 'us and them' spiel. I'm not interested in what they choose to believe, its only when we have a conflict, and one of us chooses for it to become a clash that there's a problem. I'm entitled to my private ignorance just as much as they are. I'd rather that our ideals didn't have to clash. I'd rather that where they did, we could sit down and debate them without any real conflict ... But, where we can't do this, I'd rather that we could use that old fashioned imperative ... You know, the golden rule!"

"Haha," he laughs "the golden rule, too right, too right, but you do provoke them ..."

"From afar? You don't imagine he could read the cover of my book from 20m away .. and even if he could, what business is it of his?"

Now Col's an old miner, a Gong boy. We first met one day when he came over to see what his dog had found that was so interesting underneath my old van, and made a comment about how much he liked my music. C.C - his little dog - had discovered the glycol dripping from the old Ford, me blissfully unaware of this, thinking it was my music that had bought him over ... thinking, Ah, the little fellas just trying to get a break from 12 hrs of generated petrol power. Col's a good fella. Out on his own and a long long way from home too. We have our differences but we can chat quite amiably about them .. and C.C thinks I'm the bee's knees. That first meeting, up at a place called Stonehenge, Col had introduced me to the modern wonders of Movicol, of which alas, I'm now addicted. Early the next morning, Col came over with an old memory stick and asked if he could get some music on it. Sure, I said, leave it with me ... Oh, and Col, piss that damn generator off down the hill will ya. Col's a good fella. "Righto righto .. just testing just testing," he says, as C.C dragged him off toward the old men room.

"Col," I yelled over, "what sort of music? ... Anything?"

"Yeah, anything, like you was doin' yesterday ..."

Well I was doin' a lot of different stuff yesterday and I really can't imagine a 78 year old steel worker liking some of the stuff I was playing. So I says, "Anything .. are you sure?"

"Yeah, fill up the stick ... But none of that Coon Jazz shit!"

My mind flashes for a moment, Coon Jazz, I think ... everything I've got is Coon Jazz. So I says, "Col," I say " everything I've got is Coon Jazz."

"Ya know what I mean," he drawls, "that .. trumpet .. bugle shit ..."

"You mean like Stefan Grapelli, Django Reinhardt .. Louis Armstrong, Porgy and Bess, that sort of stuff ... Al Jolson?"

"That's what I said," he says "No Coon Jazz."

He leaves me thinking as he always does.

One of the problems with places like this - semi-wilderness - is that it attracts all the ya ya's, what we used to call Troggs - destructive for no

other reason than that they can. A lot of the old guys, these Gnomads, I can sort of understand .. sort of, but the younger ones, with young kids, I don't. I mean, times sure have changed, finite futures and all - but still, the kids. It is coal land I suppose, and its going to make them all rich and the rest of the world just that little bit poorer .. and sicker. Of course its going to make the kids poorer and sicker too, but then that, they're going to have to find out for themselves ... Perhaps Dad's temporary riches will somehow protect them from planet sickness ... Its a funny thing this new technology, by now you'd expect to see massive domed enclaves fully equipped with air and water purifying plants - coal fired of course - the plants on the outside; out there in the infinite world with us old bastards.

Col's an old fashioned Aussie bloke, tracky pants and blue singlet. Worked hard all his life for a wage and now, now he's thrown out on the scrap heap .. working on half of only one lung. And then we have these new age racist god-idiots here, tearing up the land for glitter, our shared environment, like there's no tomorrow. Given a licence to hate and to rape by an insular King with some corrupted belief that all the troubles in the world - well, in his Australia .. no, in the world, are caused by different coloured folk who call the same gods by different names. Of course, looking at it from his view point that means that they are different gods. What a tough reconciliation, this fact as they say, that there is only one god - Theirs. We need more love in Australia, the King says, more god. His. I notice that the King's been reassuring his people that his god - HE, he says - is looking after us all. Makes one sick, makes one wonder too, just how it is after all these years of the desexualising of equality, that god is a HE again. Makes one wonder how the girls stand for it? Well, I suppose that everything old is new again.

"Its that dammed cat of yours," Col says.

"Its not the cat, Col, its what it stands for ... I have friends back home who likes the cat but hate what it stands for. Not that they really understands what the cat stands for. I have a friend whose an art dealer. Loves the cat, but Art, you see, must be only for art's sake - decoration, pretty pictures - as soon as it has meaning, or that meaning can be read into it .. especially if that meaning is either adverse to one's desires or

something that one wishes not to know, then it can't be Art. Its this new world of assumed privilege; Art is like conversation, if its meaningless, or apparently meaningless ... I should perhaps say, if one can pretend that it is meaningless, then its safe. Eh! Crime is Not Art."

"Too right, too right .. "

Col actually know Art, painting, he surprises me at times for an old fella who speaks bad and has some pretty archaic turns of phrase, just some of the wisdom he seems to hide away. He's got a few nice prints up in his old caravan. Post-Modernist, Expressionist, I think they are .. a Guernica that wraps around his dining area, above his little table. You wouldn't know or think by watching him wandering about with little C.C. on the end of his ancient piece of string, the wisdom he has hidden away.

"You not painting anymore, Mitchell," Col says " .. why is that?"

"Ah, my hands Col, can't ever get things finished and carrying them about is a fuckin nightmare. Besides, writing is better, much more important - not that anyone's ever going to read it .. or admit to reading it, which is more to the point." I chuckle ...

"These old folk up here, they read it .. you're a provoker, Mitchell," he says pointing up at the circles of Gnomad wagons smoking up the empty paddock, "its that damned cat of yours. A provoker!"

Ah, he's a funny fella. I remember a couple of years ago sitting about on the Condamine River listening to his generator, he had me in stitches ... He says to me, "Jeezus, did ya see how fucking old they were!? They're fucking ancient!"

"What do you mean, old," I say looking at old Col - Old Coon Jazz - all slouched up in his arm chair, pot bellied, toothless and ancient chest scars ...

"Ha! They gotta be 80!" he says.

"80!, I say "How old are you?"

"77," he says ... with no hint of a joke.

"77 .. and you call them Old," I smirked.

"Fuckin Ancient!"

He's a funny old fella.

"You know Col, its a strange thing about writing .. everyone's suspicious about it. When you're painting, everyone wants to come have a look, have chat .. you even get opinions, which I like. I like getting opinions. When you're writing, no chance, when you're writing, everyone assumes that you're writing about them. They automatically assume that you're up to no good .. that you've gotta be writing about them. Its sad, don't ya think?"

"Its a sad world Mitchell," Col says, and after a bit of searching, he says, "but today the sun is shining."

I peer up at him and think of all the answers, all the ammunition that a phrase such as that gives me for another diatribe on modern man. On humanity and morals and metaphysics and a Christian god. Then Col says, "Mitchell, every picture's a whole lifetime .. " he says, "Mitchell, a whole lifetime imprisoned. All the fears, all the doubts and the hopes .. and the joys. Whither, Mitchell, is this lifetime tending?" and he nods across to me.

"Jesus .. ! Where the fuck did that come from!?"

"Ooh, I read books once too Mitchell ... Once .. ," he searches his seemingly toothless mind again .. then, " - that's Kandinsky. From his 'Spirit of Art', he says winking ... "Here comes your Christian fella .. "

"Ah, he's come to get his sieve stand, I was going to take it over to him. You know, an act of godly peace."

"Now, no fightin .. don't ya go provokin' him now."

I laugh. "All good man .. as long as he's not going to hit me with his Bible .. or with his lawyers opinions .. besides, he hasn't got the balls, he's one of those button pushers that can't cope when you push his buttons back. Like the kids today .. think its ok for their kids to rampage all over others, but us others have to tip-toe around their kids."

"Too right, Mitchell, too right. Did ya listen to the game last night?"

"Na, couldn't battle my way through Guy Sebastian ... Besides, listening to that Andy Moore and his unrepentant P.C crap does my bowels no favours."

The Christian emerges through the trees, C.C growls, Col and I both nod, "Mornin'" we say.

"Good game last night," he says ".. sorry about the wife yesterday ... She's got Lyme's Disease and she's on the pension, gets a bit touchy at times. She reckons you look like Osama bin Laden."

I smile. C.C growls. Col rocks forward and says, "I fuckin told ya! Its that fuckin turban" Its an icebreaker.

"What's the book your reading?" Asks the glitter gatherer continuing the conversation. I hold the the cover up for him to see, "Hitler's Pope," I say "you can have when I'm finished if you like ..." His eyes bleed. He doesn't want it ... He stalks off with his sieve pole ... C.C growls.

"Ya provoked him, Mitchell," Col says with a huge grin.

"Na Col, he asked me what book I was reading. I answered his question. No malice, where's the provocation in that?"

Col shakes his head. "Anyway," he says "wouldn't a thought Hitler would'a had much use for a Pope."

"Just to get the ball rolling Col. Once he had the ball rolling, then he didn't need one anymore."

"D'ya ever finish that one ya read to me .. up at that black- fellas place? The one about the stars .. "

"Ah, my Dreamtime story .. Rich Fat. Mmmn, I'll get arrested for that one now. No, I can't quite get the ending right. The kids at home keep changing it, the ending that is."

"What are they Christians," he laughs ...

"Na. Well I don't think so. I'm not sure where they're coming from, I'm not sure they actually know. Its this thing now, this insularity, this isolation thing .. this tangle of P.C and rabid right wing feminism; this

fear of actually saying the things you mean. Not so much saying them as admitting to them in public - sincerity, didn't we once call it? Too much self imposed fear now."

"Too right, too right," Col says "the world goes round and round and round."

"Mmm forever and ever .. exactly the way it is now. All puppy dogs, pink ribbons and gold roses. Eternally drifting fluff. Did I tell you Col, I'm thinking of rewriting Winnie-the-Pooh."

"Ha, you'll get arrested for that for sure," he says wagging his finger at me. "You want to leave well enough alone now, what with your take on things .. anyway, Winnie-the-Pooh's probably against the law now."

"Do you think I dissimulate Col?"

"Mitchell, I don't think you got the subtlety ..."

I laugh. "Do you think I should? Do you think I'd get my message through better?"

He heaves up, wagging his finger and says, "I'm off to the old boys room and when I come back, I'll tell ya what I think about telling lies in defence of the truth." Oh this I can't wait for .. damned Christians, they started all this, perhaps I'd better go back to painting pretty little pictures ...

A little later, Col baking himself in the sun around his bank of solar panels, generator humming away in the background, and me contemplating C.C's mindless pirouettes, the Christian fella walks back up through the trees. I hop my chair over into the sun .. our Christian has purpose in his manner, he's waving the pad of knowledge above his head. I drop my sunnies down over my eyes .. they're beginning to bleed in anticipation.

"Fella," he says striding over ...

"Fella," I answer.

"I want to show you this letter. Its from this lawyer .. "

"Jesus fucking Christ," I say "the fuckin letter."

"Now Mitchell .. " Col says. I raise my hand in a gesture to Col that says, 'Stop!' and put my finger to my lips. C.C growls.

"The letter. Yes." I say.

"This letter, its from a lawyer, in Parramatta .. he's signed his name to it so you know its gotta be true ... "

"Mmn huhm."

"It says here that the fuckin Muslims, these illegals, get paid more money than us Aussies. They come over here, illegal, and they get 60 grand of our money a year - our money!"

"Buddy," I say "your King rips off half a million bucks - your money - illegally every fuckin year. Year after year after year. And thats just the tip of his iceberg let alone all the rubbish he thieves from under the table with his spiritual corruptions, and its just to wind up people like you, and your children, in spiteful ignorant hate ... " He starts to speak again, waving his pad around in the air. I've had enough, I stop him with my out turned hand .. if I had a sword, or a silver bullet I'd use that. Col rocks back in his Ferrari and C.C growls.

"Buddy, what makes you think that I am not a Muslim?"

"Well you're white, ain't ya," he stammers.

"And I look like Osama bin Laden," I say flipping my sunnies up onto the top of my head, " .. take your gods and your cheating lawyers and move out of my little piece of hell. Piss off."

CC's going nuts now, Col's gumming down hard on his lips, swinging away in his Ferrari and holding this stagnant air in his holey lung. The Christian's standing there reeling on his heels.

"God!" he says. "Not Gods!"

"God" I say.

I look across at Col, "Provocation," I say "Woe to the lukewarm ... "

We sit there for a little while .. both lost in our contemplations ...
Suddenly Col jumps up and says, "C'mon C.C we gotta get to the old boys
room!"

"Sorry Col," I say, "are you a Christian, you're a Feeney, a Catholic?"

"Ha! Only when I'm a'wheelin in to the operatin' table Mitchell ... soon
as they wheel me back out, I'm a Republican - and don't ya forget it!"

"Not for a moment, Col. Not for a moment!"

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