

# Finding meaning for youth

I AM writing to you as both a teacher at Mt Scopus College and a graduate of the Habonim Dror Zionist Youth Movement. Perhaps more importantly, I write in my capacity as a third generation survivor of the Holocaust.

On Sunday April 23 I attended the memorial ceremony for the Holocaust at Carlton Cemetery, as I have done for the past seven years. I am uncertain as to whether this year's event was different because it marked the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II.

I do know, however, that this year the commemorative service was attended by more youth than ever before. But perhaps more importantly the memorial was aimed more towards the younger section of those present.

There was mention of the youth organisations present. Speeches were in English and Yiddish. The Yiddish sections were then summarised in English so that all could understand. Young people were involved in the ceremony itself. And perhaps more significantly, at the end of the service, the young people were crowded by Holocaust survivors who thanked them for attending.

To me this marks a great change in the future of Holocaust commemorations in the community. It is a tribute to many years of hard work by several people who have made it their ambition in life to attract younger people to such events as Sunday's memorial. Without mentioning names, they know who they are, and their efforts

should not be unnoticed.

The purpose of this letter is twofold. Firstly, it is important for the community as a whole to realise that the young people who attend such memorial services do so not out of any obligation to their schools or youth groups, but because they want to be there. They feel the Holocaust as a part of themselves and their heritage. Secondly, on behalf of the youth present, I would like to thank the organisers of the ceremony for making the effort to make the service meaningful and applicable to all Jews in the community.

In the spirit of how the ceremony finished, "We hope to see all of you, and more of you, here next year."

David Bryfman  
Lower Templestowe

## KRON'S VIEW



## CILENTO'S LIFE

I AM grateful to Professor Bill Rubinstein for his review (*AJN 31/3*) of *Raphael Cilento: a Life*, a copy of which has just reached me.

His objections, however, are based on his wish that I had written a book that I did not set out to write. I am a medical historian and it is Cilento's work as a medical innovator which concerns me most.

In very short compass, Professor Rubinstein raises the issue of what he calls "Cilento's racism", a matter which he finds "enigmatic". This term, as used by Professor Rubinstein, is itself an enigma since it is evidently indistinguishable from antisemitism. It is clear that Cilento, who set himself the pioneering task of bringing medical help to the then despised Australian indigenes, can-

not be dismissed so simply as "racist."

Racist is as racist does.

His review, further, opens with a simple error. Cilento did not "found the Dante Alighieri Society". This was and is a long-established international body. As I clearly explain in my book (pp. 124-25 and nn), in 1936 Cilento accepted the invitation of the founding committee to become president of the re-established Brisbane branch of that Society.

Fedora Gould Fisher  
St Lucia  
Queensland

## REFUGEES

THESE days it is a commonplace of Australian life to observe that this is

a land of immigrants. Yet immigration itself remains a ticklish topic, liable to cause argument and even acrimony in politics and in the general community.

Refugees are the most needy and the most helpless of would-be immigrants. Currently, they seem to be viewed with suspicion by politicians. Recently arrived Cambodian, Vietnamese and Chinese refugee-seekers have been referred to as queue-jumpers. Remarks are made about "heightened public concern" because "too many boat people are arriving in Australia." Legislation is drafted which will make it more and more difficult for such people to gain Australian protection or challenge immigration department decisions in individual cases.

Our democratically elected repre-

sentatives sometimes forget that our forbears include many who fled religious or political tyranny, or for simple want of bread and meat. Like America, we have welcomed, or at least tolerated, the poor and dispossessed from many countries, and we have benefited from their initiative, intelligence and hard work.

Back in the 1930s, some members of the Australian government opposed the entry of penniless Jews escaping fascism in Europe — because their presence might encourage antisemitism.

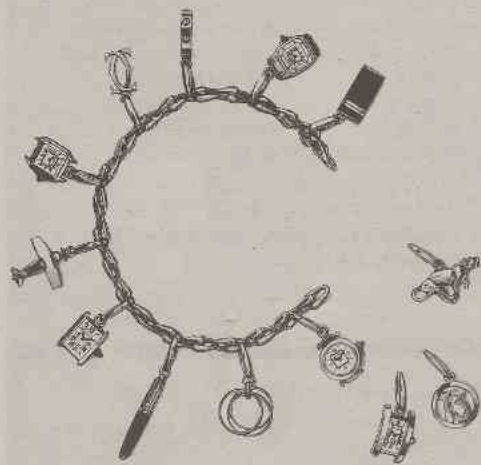
Then as now, the victims were to be held responsible for the prejudices and fears of those already comfortably encased. Then as now, earlier waves of immigrants, once well-established, sometimes failed to recognise the desperation and need of the very new arrivals.

There are international obligations which bind us to treat those who claim refugee status with consideration and fairness. These obligations are merely the official, legal formulation of humane common-sense, sometimes expressed as doing unto others as we would wish others to do unto us.

We ask our politicians to acknowledge their common heritage with today's refugees. We do not want punitive and retrospective legislation which penalise the weakest and most helpless among us. Australians pride themselves on their sense of justice and fairness. How about "a fair go" for refugees?

June Factor, for the  
Australian Jewish Democratic  
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## HOMOSEXUALITY

WHO IS Rabbi Tzvi Marx (*AJN 21/4* trying to fool — other than himself?

He knows that Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, condemning sodomy as a capital offence, mean exactly what they say and have never been interpreted in any other way by Halachic Judaism.

He knows, or surely must, that references to persons of "unconventional sexual identity" (*androgynus* and *tumtum* respectively) demonstrate Halachic recognition of inbuilt physiological sexual abnormality only — nothing more and nothing less.

He knows, or surely must, that there is no real scientific proof whatsoever of a genetic predisposition to homosexuality on the part of some individuals.

And he must surely know, and should acknowledge, that Judaism has never excluded "homosexuals", nor ever suggested that "homosexuals" are not entitled to say "for me was the world created". It has excluded, and continues to exclude "homosexuality" which represents the very antithesis of the reason that the world was created.

Rabbi Chaim Ingram  
The Central Synagogue, Sydney

ANTISEMITISM and homophobia are both outlandish bigoted concepts that result from ignorance, and that produce misinformation and cruel stereotyping.

In his letter (*AJN 14/4*), Robert Well writes of the "hijacking and manipulation of the media ... by the gay lobby." This extreme type of rhetoric is as absurd to me, as a homosexual, as would a statement about "the Zionist, Jewish plot to dominate the world", be to me as a Jew.

As Jews, we have broken down many layers of antisemitism, by coming out of the ghetto, mixing with the non-Jewish world and demonstrating that we are very very much a contributing part of humankind, and not some evil dark force to be feared.

Despite all of this progress, some people (Tuvya Rosengarten 31/3) would seek to deny this same opportunity to gay Jews. For the same reason that Jewish representation would belong at a summit of world religions, a Jewish lesbian or gay group belongs at a Jewish community event. We are part of the community and we have

the right to demonstrate this. We are not deviants and have no "message to convey", other than we are really and truly a part of the Jewish world and proud of it.

The irony of it all is that we are probably one of the most diverse and representative groups within the Jewish community as can be seen from Aleph Melbourne, a support group for gay Jewish men.

This is not a group founded to promote some so called "alternative lifestyle". We are a complex and diverse group of individuals all leading very different lives — working, socialising, interacting with our families and so on — all the things that our straight counterparts do.

In age we range from 17 to 58. In suburb, from Caulfield to Brunswick. In profession, from student to doctor to businessman. Some are religious, and others more lapsed. Many are in long term monogamous partnerships similar to those of our parents, while others are on the dating scene. And the one thing that we all have in common, in addition to being gay, is that we are all Jews — and proud ones at that.

Harvey  
Aleph Melbourne  
Caulfield

## HOMOPHOBIA

HAVING followed the debate in your pages on whether or is OK or not to be lesbian, I noted that the question of whether it was OK or not to be homophobic was not directly discussed.

I believe that homophobia can be likened to agoraphobia, claustrophobia or any other phobia from which people suffer. Thus, if for example, one is phobic about entering lifts, one does not blame the lift (usually) for one's distress. One normally seeks help for the phobia. It can

be the same for people suffering from homophobia.

Some of those who have entered the debate suggest that we, lesbians, should be accepted or at least tolerated by the Jewish community. I want more. I want to be judged as an individual on my individual merits.

I am proud to be Jewish in spite of anti-semitism and I am proud to be a lesbian in spite of homophobia. I am also a psychologist and have seen the despair and hopelessness brought to families by this social disease.

But as a community we can fight homophobia just as we can fight antisemitism. The best and most successful way to fight homophobia is to stand together as a community, to encourage our gay Jewish members to come out of the closet and to make it safe for them to do so. We can save whole families — heterosexual, lesbian, gay — from fear, shame and guilty by saying, "Homophobia is NOT OK".

Vera Ray  
Alphington

## LETTERS' POLICY

WE welcome letters to the editor. But we give preference to short letters of no more than 300 words. Letters may be cut for length, or edited for style and clarity. We only consider letters which include the sender's street address, day contact phone number, and full first name (not an initial) and surname. In common with standard newspaper practice we do not advise writers whose letters are not published.

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