This is the published version of a paper presented at the Graduate Certificate in Tertiary Education Mini-Conference held at The Flinders University of South Australia, Bedford Park, South Australia, November 15, 2000.


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THE USE OF PROBLEM BASED LEARNING IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

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In August and September 2000, I was responsible for a new Certificate IV level theology module of six 2-hour sessions, offered by the Adelaide College of Divinity under the name 'The Big Questions'. As the name might suggest, the module allowed participants to engage critically with some of the big questions facing human life, particularly within the context of Christian faith. This paper is intended to offer a critical description of what happened in the module and some suggestions for its revision before being offered again. It will do this in three parts:

A. What we did: documentation of the module;

B. What we learnt: evaluation of the module in the light of the literature on problem-based learning (PBL);

C. Recommendations for changes to the module.

A. What we did: documentation of the module

The desired learning outcomes for the module were:

- to know that there are no correct answers to the questions posed; i.e. the subversion of any tendency to give 'easy answers to hard questions';
- to identify the source of one’s own prior understanding;
- to experience a sense of confidence in undertaking serious theological study at pre-tertiary level, i.e. an overcoming of any anxiety and an encouragement to embark on tertiary study if appropriate;
- to know that one’s own life experience and the existential questions that arise from it are taken seriously by professional theologians.

The participants

The module had been advertised in Anglican parishes in suburban Adelaide, and attracted about 60 participants of varying ages and educational backgrounds. All were involved in local churches (most, but not all Anglican), and while none had undertaken previous formal, tertiary-level studies in theology, all had reflected seriously and deeply on their own Christian faith, often over a long time.

Content

The module was a one-third part of a larger topic, in which participants were encouraged to take all three modules, but each module could stand alone if participants had good reason for taking only one of the three parts. The 'Big Questions' module comprised the second of the three. The first module, 'The Big Picture' offered a coverage of the biblical and historical story of the Christian faith community, with a basic orientation to the past and a greater focus on content than process. The third, 'The Big Adventure', was to be a more speculative, future-oriented attempt to sketch the task of the Christian community in the post-modern context. The second module, the one outlined here, intended to focus on issues facing Christians in contemporary life - some of these questions being of a more-or-less perennial nature, others much more conditioned by context, but in either case, with a present (rather than past or future) focus. The method was less concerned with content to be conveyed than with issues to be probed, or in other words, with process.

The themes to be addressed were:

1. Does Science Disprove God?
2. Why Does God Allow Evil & Suffering?
3. Why Christianity in a Multifaith World?
4. Is There Life after Death?
5. How do I Make Moral Decisions?
6. What are We Doing When We Pray?

Method

All three modules were offered by teachers who had agreed that problem-based learning (PBL) would be the essential methodological link between them. Clearly however, PBL is better suited to some modules than others. It is far easier to apply in module two than in module one, for example. The classes were held on Monday evenings, 7.30 to 9.30 pm, with the opportunity to
meet afterwards for supper. About a third of the participants took this opportunity on a regular basis, though most had left by 10 pm or shortly afterwards on most evenings. In the two-hour sessions, the first hour was devoted to small group discussion led by a tutor or group leader. There were four small groups, each of about 15 participants. In this I was assisted each week by three recent graduates who acted as group leaders, and a fourth who covered several unavoidable absences. The group discussion each week was based around a particular reading or set of readings designed to raise the issue in question. These had been circulated in booklet form before the start of the module, and were accompanied by 'worksheets', lists of questions designed to help the readers focus on specific questions in the text. The work of the group leaders was, without exception, much appreciated by the participants.

All but two of the plenary sessions began with scripted dialogues to illustrate the problem under discussion. I chose not to use these for every session as I felt predictability could become boring to the class. The alternative, in the case of session 4, was to use a pop song and some reflection on it to illustrate the theme, and session 6 was taken by an outside visiting speaker. The dialogues involved a story or vignette from me (or in the case of session 5, from one of the group leaders, Dr Philip Tolland), followed by three responses representing standard viewpoints, spoken by the three group leaders. The responses were scripted, but with the understanding that the speakers could ad lib to bring to the role something of their own personalities and, as appropriate, elements of emotion, spontaneity and humour. As an example of the dialogues, I cite the one scripted and led by Phillip Tolland in the 1996 Bruce Beresford film, 'Paradise Road' (see appendix [cited with permission of the author]). The interpretation of events in the Dutch East Indies presented in the Beresford film was contrasted with the interpretation given in the book by Jan Ruff-O'Herne (1994), and the film which had followed it in the same year. The film had received wide publicity in Australia by winning the Australian Film Industry Best Documentary Award in 1994. The problem identified by this particular vignette was: Why did Australian audiences let Beresford get away with a particular interpretation of the Japanese abuse of so-called 'comfort women' during the Second World War, without major criticism?

The desired outcomes of this session were the insights that:

- Moral judgements will be contextually based: there are no moral absolutes as such, but;
- This insight is to be achieved within a safe environment – i.e. the session was not trying to undercut or threaten the belief structure of the participant – if anything, its aim was to make it more sophisticated, and thus stronger;
- This prepares the ground for a non-foundationalist theological approach to this and other moral questions.

Similar vignettes had been used in sessions 1 and 3 to introduce the themes of:

- Science and faith - with set positions represented being: 'scientific hegemony', 'eclesiastical hegemony' and 'synthesis';
- Christianity in a multi-faith world - with the set positions represented being: 'wissy-wissy liberal', 'fundamentalist Christian' and 'super-cool post-modern'.

Although there was a good deal of humour in these earlier presentations, there was also the problem that they lent themselves to stereotyping. Humour was obviously not appropriate in the session dealing with suffering (session 2), nor in the example cited above (session 5), except in expressing the naïve 'Australian' voice.

The vignettes lasted in each case about 15 minutes, and were followed by some interaction with the class and some more formal lecturing on the background to the different responses to the problem, the problems involved in each response, and suggestions as to how the responses might contribute something of value to the debate. Although I had no hesitation is expressing my own views on the matter in hand, the final conclusions were in each case deliberately left open. The aim was not to provide correct answers, but to explore possibilities. There was also the need at times to respect deeply-held convictions while disagreeing with them (see below, on the need for a 'safe environment' for discussion).

As an example of this exploration of possibilities I cite session 4, where in the face of certain set expectations as to what constitutes a Christian understanding of life after death, a number of biblical references can be juxtaposed to indicate a wide variety of beliefs within the one tradition:
Session 4: ‘Is There Life after Death?’ Various biblical pictures

- no afterlife - the dead do not praise God, but life here and now is to be lived and celebrated (Ps 30: 9; 88:4-5).
- the martyrs will live again - a voice from the inter-testamental period (2 Macc 7:14).
- today, you will be with me in paradise (Lk 23: 42-43)
- on the day of Jesus's resurrection, some of the dead are raised (Mt 27:51-53)
- at the end of time, the dead will arise and all shall be changed (1 Cor 15:52)
- there is an in-between time, a time of waiting (purgatory?) (Heb 12:1).

This list of possibilities was accompanied by overheads of depictions of heaven by artists who had lived and worked within the Christian tradition, but in different cultural settings. Again, the method was to open up a variety of possibilities, and ask participants to explore which model they instinctively identified with, and why.

B. Evaluation of the module in the light of the literature on Problem-based Learning (PBL)

Because the topic as a whole had been arranged at fairly short notice, as an extra to an already busy teaching and administrative load, none of the presenters had done any wide-ranging reading in PBL. The decision to use this method was made on the basis of our common reading and discussion of only one article by Grahame Feletti (1997). While this lack of adequate preparation may have added a certain freshness to the approach, at the same time it meant we failed to benefit from the wisdom of other pioneering attempts at this particular teaching methodology. With the benefit of hindsight, for example, I would now say that the method itself was not explained in sufficient detail to the participants. Commonly accepted practices in contemporary higher education, like scheduling the ‘tutorial’ or small group discussion group before, rather than after, the ‘lecture’ or plenary meeting, also needed explanation. (In the attempt to develop and encourage a new learning method, we tried, I think with some success, to avoid traditional educational jargon like ‘tutorial’ and ‘lecture’). It is perhaps significant that the final session, in which the plenary (in my absence) took the form of a more formal lecture given by an expert who had not been part of the initial planning, was much appreciated by the participants.

The methods used to evaluate the module included:

- discussion among group leaders,
- a student evaluation of teaching (SET) questionnaire administered at the final session and a subsequent questionnaire two months later,
- reading of PBL literature,
- discussion following the presentation of this paper at the Flinders University School of Education mini-conference in November 2000.

Two problems emerged quite early in the module. One was the difficulty of the pre-reading, the other the use made of the worksheets. The readings had been chosen with a general, tertiary educated readership in mind, to fill a gap between a full tertiary level study of theology on the one hand and the popular short courses already available and offered quite widely in church environments on the other. While my sense of where the participants would come from was reasonably accurate, most (though not all) of the readings were seen as too hard from the start, and participants were clearly putting in more than the anticipated amount of time simply to understand the arguments. The group leaders reported that they had to spend time explaining the content of the articles. The curious thing, though, was that when I collected and read the responses to the first worksheet, I discovered that almost without exception participants had indeed understood the article very well. The same complaint, and the same finding with regard to a high level of understanding, was to be repeated each week. A minority of participants responded favourably to the level of difficulty, reporting that they had come not for pat answers, but to be stretched intellectually by the process. Though this minority grew during the course of the six weeks, it would be misleading to say it ever became the majority voice. The only conclusions I can draw from this are these. First, the readings were not so much too difficult as
too technical in their language. Secondly, there was a certain amount of anxiety on the part of some participants at being in an educational setting - this leading to a feeling of not having understood material that they did in fact demonstrably understand remarkably well.

The second issue was the assumption that the worksheets were intended as a form of formal written assessment rather than a guide or a roadmap into the texts. Responding to the effort clearly being put into the worksheets, I acceded to this assumption, accepted the worksheets as assessment tasks and shortened the final assessment task from 2000 words (or equivalent) to 1000 words (or equivalent). I realise now this was probably a mistake arising from not having thought through the assessment process clearly enough. The problem was that it became almost impossible to respond to the worksheets satisfactorily because of their number each week. The responses were on the whole remarkably perceptive, giving the strong and indeed humbling impression that the participants in almost all cases had brought to the text a great effort of concentration and the gathered life experience and reflection of, in some cases, six or seven decades in the Christian faith. The longer assignments showed the same qualities of depth and sincerity. There was little option but to offer a distinction or high distinction result to responses of such personal depth and honesty. To criticise would have been possible only on highly technical grounds, and would, under the circumstances have seemed churlish. Honest engagement with the issues rather than technical expertise or historical knowledge had in any case always been the desired learning outcome of the module.

The diverse literature on PBL points to a number of common elements:

- it assumes a learner-centred approach, in which the role of teacher is understood in terms of facilitation of learning;
- it was developed in a setting of vocational education, especially medical education (educational aim);
- it relies on the use of small groups, generally meeting several times in the course of a week (group size and dynamic);
- it is generally holistic in approach, presupposing that the whole learning environment and the whole learning experience is favorable to its methods (holistic method).

There is a point of disagreement within the literature as to whether PBL is to be associated with problem-solving. This will also be addressed below.

Of the elements in common, only the first applied to the module described above. The module was quite consciously presented in such a way that content was less important than process. Even the use of traditional terminology was avoided, though without resort to the terminology of facilitation favoured in the PBL literature (eg. Silins and Murray-Harvey, 247; Savin-Baden 2000, 126-7). However, in other respects the module was rather different from the learning experiences outlined in the literature.

Educational aim

I feel it is important to distinguish here between several models of education, on the basis of overall aims or intentions on the one hand and on the other hand on the basis of whether it is an initial induction into a particular way of thinking or the continuation and supplementation of this the following is an elaboration on distinctions made by Radford, 1996, 140).

Liberal education (understood in the traditional sense as learning for life as a free, politically responsible member of society) and its continuation as

Life-long learning. In life-long learning I would include certain short courses which may or may not impart particular skills. WEA short courses would be examples. Clearly, an examination of the 'big questions' of life, offered in a certificate-level course, is going to fall into this broad category.

Vocational training and its more creative alternative,

Vocational education, are forms of socialisation into a particular vocation, trade or profession. Training refers to the acquisition of particular skills, while vocational education, though directed to a given calling, is intended to equip people for a life within that particular calling. The latter is more than simply equipping with skills or socialisation into a particular professional 'guild', in that it intends to equip people to think laterally and creatively in their chosen calling. It may even at first appear to be less effective than vocational training, and its graduates less skilled, but it is
directed to the learner learning to think in a particular way. In this sense it is closer to liberal education than vocational training. An example of the contrast between vocational training and vocational education is the way nurses were trained 'on the job' until relatively recently, and the newer university-based nursing degrees. Both vocational training and vocational education are supplemented and continued in the form of

Professional development. This is the on-going supplementation of the initial induction into a profession (through either training or education), aimed at the enhancing and developing of particular skills or patterns of thinking related to the profession in question.

These five categories might be shown in relation to one another diagrammatically in this way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>learning aims</th>
<th>initial study course</th>
<th>continuing learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>acquisition of specific skills</td>
<td>vocational training</td>
<td>professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education for life</td>
<td>liberal education</td>
<td>life-long learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education for life in a specific profession</td>
<td>vocational education</td>
<td>professional development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Problem-based learning, though originally developed in the context of vocational education, can be and has been successfully adapted to other learning contexts, as Savin-Baden (2000) has shown (ch 9).

Group size and dynamic

Clearly the attempt to use PBL in a large group is not anticipated in the literature, and was probably a mistake. For this reason and prompted by the case studies in Savin-Baden 2000, ch. 3), I have proposed for future offerings of the module (and asked for responses to this in the second questionnaire) a three-part division of each session:

- the vignette to be given in an initial plenary session, followed by
- small group discussion to be based on the vignette (rather than on pre-reading), followed by
- return to the large plenary session for sharing of opinions and findings from the small groups, and (possibly) for formal input from the facilitator.

This would in fact constitute a more thorough use of PBL than was used in the first offering of the module in 2000, as pre-reading would not be the major focus of the small group discussion. Reading would still be required, but more to inform the discussion than with a view to being its main focus.

Holistic method

An introduction of the class to PBL method is clearly needed (Prosser and Trigwell 1999, 76; Savin-Baden 2000, ch 3), or self-directed learning in a more general sense (Savin-Baden 2000, 29). The first evaluation questionnaire responses indicated the method was not well understood, even by those participants who responded well to it. I am also interested to what extent the acceptance of the PBL experiment correlated with age and/or previous educational experience.

Several case studies in the literature suggest PBL works best when applied holistically, either to an entire educational setting, eg, an entire faculty or even university. The descriptions of the early introduction of PBL at Griffith University (Ross, Abel, Margetson and Sauer 1985; Abel, Margetson and Sauer 1985) and the establishment of the Medical Faculty at Newcastle (Feletti and Wallis 1985; Wallis 1985) are examples of this 'starting from scratch' approach. This was clearly not the case in the module described above - in fact it was a very limited experiment in PBL within a larger certificate-level course structure, which, though not in principle opposed to PBL, had not previously made extensive or co-ordinated use of it. For this reason the second questionnaire asks participants for their reflection on the setting or context of the module. Even
so, it is important to note that PBL can be effectively introduced on a far more limited scale, within the context of a conventional, existing course structure (Ramsden 1992, 175-6). But Savin-Baden argues convincingly that PBL is most effective when it functions at the basis of a whole curriculum (Savin-Baden 2000, 3). Otherwise PBL can be subverted by its environment (Savin-Baden 2000, 13).

PBL and problem-solving

Savin-Baden 2000, 2, 146, et passim] argues that PBL is not to be confused with problem-solving, and indeed it is surprising just how often writers slide unconsciously between these two concepts (Boud 1985, 13; Ramsden 1992, 148-9; Prosser and Trigwell 1999, 176). While I want to acknowledge that PBL may involve problem-solving, on the basis of the module described here I accept Savin-Baden’s distinction as an important one. The big questions are by definition not solvable.

Of Savin-Baden’s five models, the fifth is most appropriate for the questions under discussion in the Big Questions module. Model V focuses on matters of belief, where - even more than in the other four models - the questions are inherently unanswerable. It is important that these questions be raised and that participants be enabled to accept this inherent unsolvability, but also that this questioning take place in a safe environment. By this I mean that long-held and cherished beliefs of the participants must be respected, even though the learning process may involve a respectful leaving behind of these beliefs. Andrew Dutney (1991) has addressed this issue in relation to theological education in general.

As an example of this I relate an incident in a recent first-level BTh class. I was introducing the theme of the human condition as described in the well-known texts on creation from the Book of Genesis, and offering - among other things - an alternative approach to the highly problematic notion of ‘sin’. The interpretation I wanted to encourage was to see sin in these texts in terms of ‘failure to’ (undertake certain actions). This involved showing how the texts might support this interpretation, and also the dismantling of a more traditional interpretation in terms of ‘obedience’, by demonstrating the some of the (extra-biblical) foundations of this interpretation on the one hand and its dubious social and ethical consequences on the other. (For English-speaking people, the opening lines of Milton’s Paradise Lost must bear a large share of the blame for the automatic, though often unconscious, association of sin with disobedience. And again, it has taken the totalitarian abuse of obedience in the last century to disabuse us of our naïveté - including our theological naïveté - in this area.) This dismantling had to be done very gently if the students were to question for themselves a very familiar and often uncritically received traditional interpretation, and to open themselves to a new way of reading these texts.

Part of the educational process here may be, as Savin-Baden (2000, 102) points out, the need to allow space for grief - in this case, grief for the loss of past certainties. It would be just as irresponsible for a theological facilitator to fail to respect this need as it would be to allow unquestioned beliefs to remain unquestioned. In other words, the learning process is best carried out in a safe environment - in this case one in which the facilitator demonstrably holds to the same overarching belief system (including respect for the texts in question) as the participant. For this reason it is important for many people that these ‘big questions’ be raised in a theological (rather than merely a religious studies) environment, that is, an environment in which matters of faith can be discussed searchingly and honestly, but from within a faith framework. It is not sufficient to work in a putatively ‘objective’ or disinterested framework (which, in any case a post-modern perspective would rightly regard as a self-deceptive fiction).

C. Recommendations for revision of the Module

As these recommendations have already been stated in the discussion above, they will be listed here largely in point form. The module was evaluated on the basis of:

- discussion among tutors;
- SET questionnaire and subsequent questionnaire;
- reading of PBL literature;
- discussion in a wider context.

The findings of these evaluations can be summarised under the two headings:
What we got wrong
• educational aims – ie what sort of module is this;
• group size and dynamic;
• holistic method.

What we got right
• learner-centred approach;
• problem-based, not problem-solving;
• safe environment.

The recommendations for next time the module is offered can be summarised thus:

Resources
• Readings need (in most cases) to be supplemented with easier preliminary reading materials, and with a glossary of technical and difficult terms.

This would remedy the problem of the difficulty of set readings. The participants who did respond well to the set readings encourage me to supplement and explain rather than replace them with easier texts.

• Worksheets are to be supplied as guides to the reading materials, not as assessment tasks. My feeling is that worksheets should be explained from the outset as aids to learning rather than assessment tasks. This may mean that written responses are not required to be handed up to the facilitator. Assessment could be reserved for the contracted assignments and perhaps for the quality of group participation. This, and the contractual nature of assignments, would need to be explained in much greater detail next time the module is offered. These explanations should be in writing rather than verbal, as verbal explanations were both time-consuming, especially in the first session, and unsatisfactory - well into the six week period a number of participants still had valid questions to resolve about assessment tasks and learning outcomes.

• Better planning and use of technological support, eg. video clips where appropriate.

The vignette based on the Bruce Beresford film worked very well as many of the participants in the class had seen the film. Some were able to speak either from personal experience, or of close relatives with personal experience, of having been prisoners of war. Despite the three options being aired quite passionately, a surprising number continued to support the naive 'Australian voice' at the start of the subsequent discussion, and shifted in their perspective only during the discussion. The vignette would have worked even better, of course, if we had thought to show the scene from the Beresford film to begin with.

Method
• The desired learning outcomes to be stated, and PBL method to be clearly explained and negotiated with the group, from the outset.

• The use of small discussion groups before the plenary is to be continued, and the plenary is to be opened with the vignettes / dialogues each week, thus:
  • the vignette to be given in an initial plenary session,
  • small group discussion to be based on the vignette,
  • return to the large plenary session for sharing of opinions and findings from the small groups, and (possibly) for formal input from the facilitator.

An alternative way would be to extend the discussion of a particular question or theme over two sessions, possibly but not necessarily separated by several days but in the same week (Feletti 1997, 3), thus:

  session 1: vignette and small group discussion, followed by reading around the question before session 2,

  session 2: discussion of the vignette in the light of reading and further reflection.

• Whatever pattern is adopted, it needs to be preaced with a clear, written explanation of


- the aims and desired outcomes of the module as a whole,
- the teaching and learning methods to be used (especially PBL),
- the assessment tasks and criteria.

- The small groups need to be even smaller in order to engage effectively in PBL – no more than 5 or 6 participants. This may mean one group leader will have to move between two or three small groups.

**Assessment**

- This is to be based on:
  - the quality of small group participation, and
  - a contract agreed to by week 4 and completed after the end of the module.

An effect of a holistic approach to the use of PBL would be to ensure that all elements of the module were integrated, in this case, assessment with learning outcomes and methods of presentation.

- Assessment criteria need to be stated clearly from the outset;
- Mixed-mode assessment, including self-assessment (against agreed criteria) and peer assessment, to be used.

**Bibliography**


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**Films:**


*Paradise Road* (1996), by Bruce Beresford.
Appendix

Session 5, ‘How do I Make Moral Decisions?’:
During 1996 Bruce Beresford directed a film entitled ‘Paradise Road’. The film, purporting to be factual, was about a group of women incarcerated in a camp in the Dutch East Indies during the Second World War. Essentially the story is about how they form a choir and give concerts. However, the film also contains a sub-plot in which some of the women are taken to a large house in the country, confronted with a table laden with all kinds of delicious food, and asked whether they would like to serve as comfort women for the Japanese. Most refuse but a couple agree. The implication is clear: those who were comfort women for the Japanese did so as a matter of choice and convenience. Interestingly the Japanese are portrayed in this film as strafing civilians, beating the prisoners and even killing one of them by setting her alight.

Many people were disquieted by this film and protests were staged against it in various parts of the world. However, these protests were generated by different perspectives and often led to diametrically opposed conclusions. For our purposes it raises the interesting question of who has the moral high ground? Does anyone?

Voices from Holland
It is not right that this film should be screened in this or indeed in any other country! The film portrays the sexual slavery that the comfort women endured as a choice on their part. Nothing could be further from the truth. And if we are to believe the rest of the film where the Japanese are obviously not averse to beating, strafing, killing, starving men, women and children, why are they acting like perfect gentlemen in this particular case? Former comfort women feel violated by this film. It’s a betrayal of their sufferings and a travesty of the truth. We are told that this story is only a sub plot in the film. Certainly it adds nothing to the film which is about the triumph of the human spirit. So, if it adds nothing to it, why is it there? We think there are several points being made here. Firstly, that history doesn’t matter. Secondly, that women ‘ask for it’. And thirdly, that because the women survive they’re somehow OK, and none of this really matters. Such things happen in war. And need I remark, they’re still happening. I wonder how some of the Bosnian women might feel about viewing this film. Ban it!

Voices from the United States
We don’t believe the film should be screened in this country. Actually, our concern is not with the comfort women, because after all, such things happen in war. The film says that these women had a choice. Let’s face it, if you were starving and sick and then were offered all this food and medicine and nice clothes in return for sex with the enemy, wouldn’t you at least think about it? All very well to talk about morality, but morality only functions and has meaning in the context of life. No, our concern is with the way the Japanese are portrayed in this film. They’ve been made into monsters. Now, as a citizen of the U.S. I have to say that our record hasn’t been without blemish when it comes to the Japanese. Think of Hiroshima, a city without military significance. And if that’s not enough, what about Nagasaki? Even at the time people were raising questions about moral justification for dropping a second bomb. Add to that all the Japanese-American citizens we carted off to internment camps, except for those we sent overseas to fight against the Germans. And, if you want something more recent, how about the American soldiers who raped that Japanese girl on Okinawa? Yes, this film should be banned, not because of the comfort women issue, but because all it does is stir up hatred against a people who were no more or less barbaric than we ourselves. It’s just that we don’t like to think about the underside of our history.

Voices from Australia
Actually I think you’re both wrong. I believe the film was well worth watching. I thought that it had to show some of the brutalities of the Japanese. After all, it’s not as though they’re unknown. Many of us have relatives or neighbours who suffered at their hands. So I think you couldn’t have an authentic film without this background. I don’t know why the people in Holland are getting so upset about the two or was it three women who decided to throw in their lot with the Japanese. I wouldn’t have done it, or at least I like to think I wouldn’t. But let’s put things in perspective; that wasn’t the point of the film. The whole point of the film was about choir and the triumph of the human spirit against tremendous odds. And as for our American friends, I think you’re just suffering from an exaggerated conscience. Sure a lot of lives were lost by dropping the bomb, but a lot of lives were saved, too. And as for internment camps, just ask any objective observer where he or she would have preferred to spend the war: somewhere out in the Midwest or Palembang? I don’t think they will have any difficulty making their choice. For goodness sake, see the film for what it is: a group of ordinary women trying to remain human in circumstances which are manifestly inhuman. We need more films like this.