

TELEVISION

New PBS Series on Children Widely Hailed

By Henry Herx
New York (NC) — "A lot of energy in this country goes into the rearing and the well-being of our kids," said John Merrow, "but much of it is wasted or misguided. What we all must do is learn how to join our efforts so that they achieve better results."

Merrow made the comments during an interview about a seven-part television series on which he serves as executive producer and host. The series, "Your Children, Our Children," premieres Sunday, April 1, 6:30-7 p.m. EST on PBS.

Merrow, who holds a Harvard doctorate in education and social policy, has considerable experience in broadcasting about school issues and young people.

One of the first things he did after taking a long vaca-

tion following the graduate school grind was to create and host the National Public Radio series, "Options in Education."

The series at first focused only on schooling and then branched out into other issues related to the upbringing of children.

He worked on the show for some eight years, producing a total of 400 one-hour radio documentaries, recorded not in a studio but anywhere in the country the issues brought him.

His venture into television came from a chance meeting with a NPR friend, Jim Russell, who was working for television station KTCA in Minneapolis-St. Paul. When Russell asked Merrow if he had any ideas for a television program, Merrow suggested adapting his radio series.

The next step was working

out a format with producers Gerardine Wurzburg and Tom Goodwin. Five years and countless ideas later, "Our Children, Your Children" was ready to air.

"The format for the shows," Merrow said, "is that of the documentary where the people involved do the talking. I do very little talking during these programs. I'm basically a facilitator who sets the scene for the individuals from whom the stories emerge."

"One of our aims in these seven programs," he added, "is to deal with stereotypes, flipping them over so that people realize that not every pregnant girl is from the wrong side of the tracks or that a disabled kid is not necessarily mentally retarded."

"We are not interested in pointing fingers at anybody

but simply in looking at issues that can lead to a malfunctioning family," he said. "There is a lot of neglect out there but any of us might be in the shoes of those who aren't coping well with their problems."

"Each of the programs," Merrow added, "ends with some kind of positive example of how families can deal with their problems. We want to enable people to do things for themselves but, when they need help, to be able to turn to the community without a feeling of guilt."

"This sense of isolation is a national hold-over from frontier days and parents should not have to expect they are on their own — it's a responsibility shared by the whole community."

Some of the issues explored in the course of the series are infant health (the

premiere show), sex and sexuality, child neglect and abuse, part-time work, special education, child care and a final program examining the present state of the family and what can be done to improve family life.

A distinctive feature of the series is the strength of its follow-up materials. Booklets of information, suggestions and community resources related to the subject of each show are available for those who care to write in for them. Moreover, following each broadcast will be a 90-minute call-in program aired by National Public Radio stations.

The kind of expectations the series has aroused among family life organizations and other national and regional agencies may be gauged from the record number of endorsements given "Your Children, Our Children." It

has received more than any new series in the history of public television — some 45 at present and they are still counting.

Endorsing organizations include American Citizens Concerned for Life, the National Council of Catholic Women and the Center for Family Studies at The Catholic University of America.

Obviously the professionals believe that there is a need for this kind of series. Merrow stresses, however, that meeting this need won't be easy.

"The series offers no magic solutions or national programs," he said. "Instead it offers a challenge to the country, asking how much do we really care about kids and their families. It's a priorities question for everybody." It's an offer no parent can refuse.

BOOKS

A Look at the Future and Meditations on the Passion

"1984 and Beyond," by Nigel Calder. Viking (New York, 1984). 207 pp., \$14.95.

Reviewed by Joseph F. McKenna
NC News Service

Twenty years ago, when he was editing New Scientist magazine, physicist and science writer Nigel Calder asked fellow scholars to offer predictions about the near future. Not too surprisingly, those predictions, which formed the basis of a series in the magazine, were a mixed bag, some of them being right on target and others being far from the mark.

Twenty years later, Calder is peering into the future in like fashion, weighing other's opinions on everything from technology to economics to human life in general.

The eminent author of "Nuclear Nightmares" and "The Comet is Coming!" performs his future-gazing by engaging in dialogue with a super computer named O'Brien, short for "Omniscient Being Re-Interpreting Every Notation." Unfortunately, this hi-tech version of "My Dinner with Andre" makes the book a somewhat tiresome reading experience.

Calder points out that the world's future — despite, or maybe because of its quickly evolving scientific and technological advances — may be anything but rosy. Here

are Calder and O'Brien talking in the final chapter:

"A (Calder): What do you make of it all, O'Brien?"

"O'Brien: Your species is suffering from too many unbagged cats."

"A: I beg your pardon?"

"O'Brien: Your metaphor. Cats let out of bags are not easily put back. You have mentioned many, but kindly say what you think are the most important threats for the next two decades."

"A: Artificial intelligence... joblessness... surveillance by Big Brother... nuclear war."

Nevertheless, Calder proclaims that a human "cannot be a party to a no-hope forecast."

"While some countries go down dark roads," Calder tells O'Brien, "others will find new ways back to daylight." Because the human species "has been case-hardened by crises without number" throughout history, he adds, it must have faith that there will be a future.

Twenty years from now, I hope I can read another presentation by Calder on the future. I also hope that by then he has found another task for O'Brien — like making a really good cup of coffee.

McKenna is a staff writer for the Catholic Universe

Bulletin, newspaper of the Cleveland Diocese.

"The Way of the Cross," by Josemaria Escriva. Scepter (London-New York, 1983). 123 pp., \$10.95 cloth, \$6.95 paper.

Reviewed by Father Robert Kress
NC News Service

Msgr. Josemaria Escriva was the founder of Opus Dei, which has spread widely throughout the world and has recently been granted the status of a personal prelature in the Catholic Church.

This posthumous work might be regarded as an expansion of the author's words, "Enter into the wounds of Christ crucified." He always urged his followers and people in general to meditate on passages from the Gospel, to try to place themselves into the scenes as one of the participants.

Among all the scenes of the Gospel, the author was most devoted to those from the Passion narratives. This book reflects his own contemplation of the scenes of the Passion.

Each station of the Way of the Cross is presented with a short narrative, depicting the event itself, with reference to pertinent biblical texts, and a series of meditation points applying the particular station to the meditator.

These points explore both "the mind of Christ" and the

mind of the Christian contemplating this Christ in his Passion.

Although the topic of these meditations is the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Way of the Cross and the Passion and death of the innocent Jesus, the point is made that "the cross is no longer a gallows." The author emphasizes that even the "love-sorrow" of the cross is for the sake of God's desire that "wants you to be glad..."

Those who approach these meditations hoping to ferret out some hidden secrets or information about the mentality and organization of Opus Dei will certainly be disappointed.

The meditations are, very simply, meditations on the stations of the Way of the Cross. They are more "Latin" in that they tend to be emotionally emphatic, both about the suffering of Jesus and the response of the follower of Jesus. They do not offer reflection-prayer of the systematic theology type. Each meditation is accompanied by a multi-colored illustration of the pertinent event, all from the Flemish school.

Father Kress is a professor of systematic theology at the Catholic University of

America and author of books and articles on various theological topics.

"The New Diplomacy: International Affairs in the Modern Age," by Abba Eban (Random House, New York, 1983). 427 pp., \$19.95.

Reviewed by Edward Doherty
NC News Service

Abba Eban has been Israeli ambassador to the United States, chief delegate to the United Nations, foreign minister of Israel, and is now a member of the Israeli parliament.

He has written a book that is remarkable in a number of ways. Unlike so many books by former foreign ministers, secretaries of state and national security advisers it is not a personal apologia.

Instead what Eban has given us is a comprehensive analytical history of the full sweep of international affairs in the post-World War II era.

Nothing is left out: East-West relations, the Middle East, the Third World, Western Europe, the role of the United States, and the United Nations. There is even a short chapter on the history of diplomacy, making it a book admirably suited for university courses in contemporary world politics.

In fact the literary elegance of the book's style perhaps reflects the progressive honing of Eban's own lectures on the same topics. He has been a visiting professor at Columbia University.

But this is not an ordinary college textbook. It is remarkable for its objectivity; even in the chapter on "The Unending Conflict in the Middle East" it is impossible to infer that the author is an Israeli who was involved in some of the events recounted, or to find any trace of nationalist or ethnic bias.

The book is distinguished by enviable style and insight, producing quotable observations on almost every page.

Some examples:

● On the United States and the Cold War: In 1945, "Secretary of Commerce Henry Wallace alone believed that U.S.-Soviet relations were suffering from mutual misunderstanding in which each exaggerated the threat posed by the other."

He even maintained that the Soviet Union might have legitimate security interests in

Books en Route

By Richard Philbrick

Washington (NC) — Here is a list of new books of particular interest to Catholic readers.

"Listening at Prayer," by Father Benedict J. Groeschel, OFM Cap., Paulist Press, \$5.95, 88 pp. Explains a way of prayer the author says is found in the lives of many saints and in many spiritual writings.

"Journey Into the Night," by Doris Blough Murdoch, Prentice-Hall, \$5.95, 162 pp. Shows a way to gain the energy needed to survive traumatic times by intensifying one's religious faith.

"Images of Peace," by Pat Corrick Hinton, Winston, \$4.95, 96 pp. Presents 40 optimistic meditations that challenge a reader to work creatively for peace.

"Liturgy, Prayer and Spirituality," by Kevin W. Irwin, Paulist Press, \$9.95, 332 pp. Underscores the faith life of Christian worshippers, the elements that comprise common prayer, and the implications of the revised liturgy for contemporary Christians.

"English Catholic Modernism — Maud Petre's Way of Faith," by Clyde Crews, Notre Dame Press, \$6.95, 176 pp. Examines the life and thought of a nearly forgotten theologian who challenged the church and its relationship to modern culture.

"The Death Decision," edited by Leonard J. Nelson, Servant Books, no price given, 179 pp. Contains essays derived from papers presented at a 1982 seminar on

bioethics and law at the City of Faith Continuing Education Center in Tulsa, Okla., under the auspices of the law school of Oral Roberts University.

"Trusting Together in God," by Jan and Myron Chartier, Abbey Press, \$6.95, 171 pp. Discusses the sense of fulfillment partners in a marriage can achieve as they build their faith and trust together in God.

"Growing in the Fruit of the Spirit," by John Blattner, Servant Books, no price given, 156 pp. A guide to living by the power of the Holy Spirit.

"Christian Family Values," by Thomas H. Martin, Paulist Press, \$6.95, 149 pp. Offers a historical perspective on the Christian concept of family and suggests criteria for appraising families today.

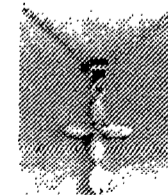
"Rejoice and Take It Away," by Father Gerard S. Sloyan, Michael Glazier, Inc., \$15, two vol., 464 pp. Contains Sunday homilies on a variety of subjects.

"The Embrace of the Soul," by Charles Rich, St. Bede's Publications, \$3.50, 83 pp. A book of meditations on the allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs.

"The Story of the Church," by Father Alfred McBride, O.Praem., St. Anthony Messenger Press, \$7.95, 168 pp. Presents 30 "peak moments" in the history of the church.

"How to Live Life to the Fullest," by Mary Lewis Coakley, Our Sunday Visitor, \$4.95, 133 pp. Written by a "seasoned citizen" as a handbook for her peers.

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