

# M A X H A L L E Y

writer - songwriter - copywriter

## Encounter with Father Bob

A two dollar bargains' trestle  
laden with shampoos, cheap razors and nappies  
was set up outside 'Solly Lew - Chemist'  
on the Fitzroy St footpath.  
Going from daylight to pervading  
pharmacy fluoro lighting  
I note the register check out counter  
was quite busy with three serving.  
Whilst waiting, I noticed a large framed well-worn older man  
with a pocked nose  
who stood straight,  
wearing a blue reefer jacket and an AO pin on his lapel  
being served by Solly.  
Then not looking sideways  
off he went,  
relying on a walking stick firmly held  
in his right hand.  
I was next,  
noddled to Solly,  
handed him my seaweed back scratcher purchase.  
Commenting on his previous customer with the AO,

I said I had a fair-weather friend with an AO who told me proudly,  
that the little lapel pin made a huge difference  
to how he was treated by cabin staff on Australian airlines.  
Solly responded saying that he had heard that Father Bob  
and others who have one “do not even get parking tickets!”

Later in the day  
I was starving and picked up a couple of ‘dimmys’  
from Andrew’s Hamburgers  
laden with soy  
which I immediately ate with my fingers  
to temporize my hunger,  
standing beside a green council rubbish bin.

The women facing mirrors  
in the hairdresser’s behind me  
probably thought  
that’s why fat people are fat.  
I threw the soy wiped bag in the bin  
in the late afternoon semi-light,  
regretting not getting a serviette.

Having slightly quenched hunger  
I was back in fluoro at the dry cleaners,  
picking up a summer suit.  
By coincidence standing there  
to my left was another customer,  
whose face and story had been imprinted  
into memory by the media -  
Father Bob,

wearing like the other man  
what looked like  
an everyday blue reefer jacket  
and a little AO pin,  
with his fleshy freckled hand casually on the counter.

We looked at each other -

I piped up

"I've just been talking about you."

"Who with?"

"Solly Lew."

Father B's response "Dear Solly, bless him."

Reflecting, I'm not sure what Solly would have said about the blessing  
as I imagine with a name like Solly he was probably Jewish.

However, Father B's spontaneous response obviously  
had no bearing on whether or not Solly was Jewish.

I related the conversation about parking tickets.

Father Bob laughed in disagreement with disdain

"No, that is not the case, I have lots of them!"

Then in his earthy drawl

"Australians do not like medals."

I could not say I agreed with that.

Maybe he was talking about Australia's tall poppy syndrome.

I thought I would like to know the rest of his story on that.

As he was about to leave

there was a moment when I thought

to shake hands and introduce myself -

then remembered the dim sims!

Instead I asked "Are you winning?"

"No, that one is over."

I sighed

"That's a shame! – Why?"

"Oh, the Church really does not understand the secular world."

As if it did not matter he went on -

"Oh, I'm working on something else now."

I responded to his prior statement, which was still running in my mind -

"Don't they realise there wouldn't be a church without the public!"

Off he went, out of sight,

a down to earth ordinary man

with the reputation for doing extra-ordinary things

which the broad public recognise,

see his efforts as necessary

and stand behind him.

The Church used *retirement age* as their excuse

as believable as *weapons of mass destruction*.

It seems the powers that be in the Church do not like the light,

being drawn away from them.

At its higher levels

just fragile adorned egos, working in dark corners, professing *light* -

denying that dark habits turn into forbidden customs.

One vision of red in heaven's name

is often in Rome.

Apparently it is said, millions have been spent

setting up multi-star accommodation close to the Vatican

for visiting believers and followers to stay -

it seems all with the blessing of the highest authority.

Adorned shining lights playing dice for the next puff of smoke.

To disguise self glorification -

best sanctify the mirrors for vanity

and muffle the microphones for supercilious pomposity.

The phenomenon of the 'holders of the light' is apparent,

but not necessarily confined to organisations.

A friend made a similar observation meeting a well known royal commentator recently

being miffed at not receiving sufficient attention at a small dinner party.

I seem to remember in the world of religion

a millennium or so ago

this is a familiar story –

as also eternally, in the world of politics and global powers.

I turned to Vicky behind the counter

saying in jest -

“Probably just as well the man of cloth did not know I am an atheist!”

Probably a good catholic, she did not comment.

In contrast,

I'm sure knowing I am an atheist would have made no difference to Father Bob Maguire.

He struck me as a man of all men.

I mused, being used to noticing

connections between

seemingly insignificant things in life -

his nose was pocked as well!

I know there are exceptions

and you cannot generalise

but it must be something to do with pushing forward

in life.

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