



COUNTERCULTURE DREAMS: A 1960S Story

by Gerard Charles Wilson

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THE AUSTRALIAN CHAPTER

As the third of eight novels broadly entitled the *Sixties Series*, *Counterculture Dreams: A 1960s Story* exhibits the epic scope and seriousness of Gerard Charles Wilson's commitment to exploring critically an era famous for the rapid and radical transformation of Australian society. An era, too, that saw change in the Catholic Church – largely, but not exclusively, by means of the Second Vatican Council – here in Australia and, indeed, worldwide.

That the sweeping phenomenon of change undergone in the the 1960s was not confined to secular society is made very clear in Wilson's close attention to Vatican II and the range of diverse, often conflicting, opinions and activities that this Council gave rise to among clergy, religious orders, and laity in the Catholic Church. The public experience of the faith for these had been liturgically centralised in the uniformity of the centuries-old tradition of the Mass in Latin, as well as in popular rituals and devotions like Benediction and the Rosary.

In the wake of Vatican II, among Australian Catholics accustomed to a stable tradition, personal questioning soon began to overtake a cohesively socialised understanding, transmission, and acceptance of authority, doctrine and practice in the Church of their forebears.

The tensions aroused by the relatively sudden upheaval, felt intensely in Catholic homes and schools, are clearly portrayed by means of Wilson's creation of the Williamson family and its circle, who function as the hub or lens of traditional Catholic reflection and critique of the turbulent times, particularly through Danny, his younger sister Angela, and their friend Cathy, all of well-above average academic ability, and the

first of their families' children to attend and distinguish themselves at universities in Sydney.

The author's thinly veiled references to prominent left and right-wing public identities on and off campus – for example, AL and BS – skilfully interspersed throughout the narrative, serve to sharpen conflicting, seriously consequential views on basic issues such as religion, social order, authority, family and sexual morality.

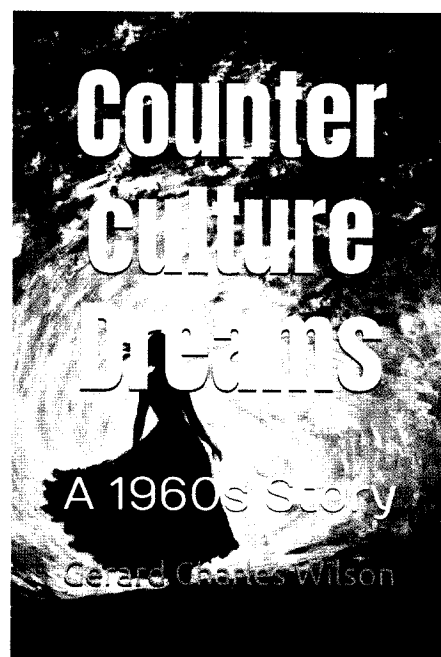
As one of the editors of the highly controversial student publication *Jaz* announces, its confronting Trotskyist agenda is: "to break the bonds of our suffocating, hoary society ... everything is up for *Jaz*'s treatment: religion, priests, censorship, racial discrimination, white society, the police, stuffy courts, the government ... everything!" Fighting words, accompanied by an often-violent activism that on more than one occasion incites Danny to respond with his fists.

The conceptual and strategic mastermind of the revolution's sexual ideology as identified by campus activist leader Ronnie Newell is real-life Neo-Freudian-cum-Marxist professor Wilhem Reich, "our saviour and author of our scriptures".

The new left's preferred weapon of societal critique will not be developed, reasoned argument, but rather, unrelenting, deliberately offensive mockery of conservative persons, institutions and ideas speciously justified and eventually defended in court as acceptably literary "satire ... designed to disrupt the *status quo* by parody".

With their young embarking on university studies at separate radicalised campuses, the Williamson parents maintain a protective vigilance of their children. This, as highlighted in Wilson's account, is hardly surprising – nor "fascist", as branded by sexual revolutionaries in their blatantly anti-Catholic invective and intimidatory tactics.

The publication and dissemination of *Jaz* within and outside the Sydney university world equips the



leftists with a powerful propaganda instrument, especially for initiating the "Sexual Revolution", the radical "libertarian" term coined by Reich himself. This revolution includes misandric "goddess and Mother Earth" beliefs and rituals, and promotes a pathologically vindictive "anti-patriarchy" radical-feminist ideology and manipulative code of conduct that almost claims the naïve Danny in his liaison with Laila, a cult practitioner.

On learning of Danny's part in the production and distribution of *Jaz*, his parents remind their talented but impetuous son of the values of his Catholic upbringing and schooling, his father bluntly classifying the matter as "one of Satan's unceasing attacks" and gathering the family to pray the Rosary.

Iconographic details of the Williamson home's conventional Catholic wall hangings – a crucifix and pictures of the Sacred Heart and Our Lady – form a starkly dramatic contrast to the blood-thirsty man-devouring image of the goddess Kali that adorns the bedroom wall of Danny's third girlfriend, Freya – a disciple, like Laila, of the "divine feminine".

This cultic movement is introduced in the very opening of Wilson's narrative when the Prioress and Mother General of a



traditional order of teaching nuns has cause to initiate inquiries into the suspected infiltration of esoteric, pagan “goddess” ideology into the order itself and into the prominent Catholic girls’ college the Sisters run in the Archdiocese of Sydney.

Wilson’s establishing of this bizarre phenomenon at the very start of his account highlights the 1960s Sexual Revolution’s direct hostility to Catholic formation, which upholds the inherent, rationally knowable relationship between freedom and truth. Its impact on Danny is illustrated as he drifts away from the morality integral to his upbringing at home and school.

As Cathy Dunn, now highly distinguished in her double major in History Studies, observes: the revolution’s political hedonism and its “goddess” idolatry have enslaving, even fatal, intent and consequences – both for men and for women. The adventurous and naïve Danny ignores this warning, and repeated admonitions by Cathy, his sister Angela, and even the notoriously promiscuous *Jaz* editor and promoter of Wilhelm Reich’s ideology, Ronnie Newell.

Questions about the new left’s educational influence are later raised, too, by a passing but telling reference to the “Jesuit” Sydney schooling of Trotskyist campus leader Cale. Cale, near the narrative’s end, leads a gang to disrupt a parish hall meeting addressed by a conservative international lecturer. This lecturer holds that the Second Vatican Council was primarily an orchestrated “political event” based on a philosophically flawed theory of knowledge inspired more by Kant and Hegel than by the epistemological realism of Saint Thomas Aquinas, a Doctor of the Church.

It is no simple task for an historical novelist to combine the objectivity

required by the discipline of History with the imaginative freedom of the novelist’s art. The engaging narrative flow and unified content in characterisation and theme of *Counterculture Dreams* are sustained by the author’s clearly defined linear structuring and focused chapter headings of material that spans the years of “counterculture” from 1962 to 1965.

However, these impressive literary achievements are diminished occasionally by a prim and stiff conversational style, and also by some episodes that seem too far-fetched to meet the expectation of credibility; for instance, the climactic chaotic Catholic parish meeting that ends in violence.

Heated no doubt as some such gatherings became in that tumultuous era, one where father and son (Mr Williamson and Danny) stand shoulder-to-shoulder and use two meeting-saboteurs’ arm-circled heads as battering rams against a nun-involved group of slogan-chanting intruders strains credibility.

An earlier scene, too, where Danny takes to thrashing the imported campus activist from Melbourne (AL) with his copy of classically conservative political philosopher Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, rings of slapstick. Then again, extremes of attitude and behaviour were far from alien to the ’60s!

Like the characters in Wilson’s thought-provoking account of times that in many ways gave birth to the significantly de-Christianised and ideologically dominated Australia of today, the reader of *Counterculture Dreams* is challenged to exercise due discernment with regard to contemporary “influencers” (either real or AI fakes), events, and ideas that defined the 1960s and mid-

1970s as an era of precipitate transformation the world over.

The final paragraph of Wilson’s account is an intriguing segue into the *Sixties Series*’ fourth book: an ominous scene featuring an SAS officer who served in Vietnam with Max Gallagher, Danny’s best friend (and, by now, his sister Angela’s fiancé). The officer is mysteriously casting an eye over Danny and his new girlfriend Freya, who bears the name of “a Norse goddess of love, war, and sex”.

With his eight-book *Sixties Series*, Wilson has produced, from a Catholic, conservatively principled, and robust perspective – informed first-hand by his experience of the years about which he writes – a chronicle that might be classified as “a literature of crisis” – a personal and societal re-creation and critique of the Vietnam War and Vatican II-marked years.

The word “crisis” seems particularly apt – not so much in the sense of a confronting upheaval, but more so as a moment of evaluation and choice known biblically as *kairos*: a process in response to events that requires intellectual and spiritual attentiveness and discerning judgement in the light of God’s revealed purposes for all creation – for followers of Christ, an exercise indispensable to ecclesial witness and evangelisation.

The events and issues that Gerard Charles Wilson raises though his narrative focus on the Catholic world will resonate strongly with all readers who appreciate and seek further, seriously studied and interestingly conveyed insight into times that have left an indelible historical imprint.

Reviewed by John Kelly

For more information on the author and his books, visit his website: gerardcharleswilson.com