

**27 June 2006**



**EDITORIAL: A more sustainable Australia needs better public policy**

*By Michael Mullins & James Massola*

The online magazine New Matilda may be Eureka Street's competition, but it shares with us the conviction that better public policy is the key to achieving a fairer and more sustainable future. The long-term good of the nation is at the heart of New Matilda's recently-launched Reclaiming our Common Wealth. It's a campaign that aims to inject into a regime of policy development, a degree of rigour, and values such as good citizenship and ethical responsibility.

The questions posed, and suggestions made, go beyond the 'What's in for me?' approach that dominates our national Zeitgeist. The questions are more profound, and more vexing, than current political leaders would have us believe. The document Reclaiming our Common Wealth would see our laws formed not on the basis of whim, or political expediency, but something much deeper.

During its 16 year history, Eureka Street has tried to play a part in setting the agenda for national public debate. We have not gone to the extent of formulating policy like New Matilda. But many of our articles have policy input as their underlying agenda.

For instance, in this issue Frank Brennan highlights the need to work out policies that address ethical questions that accompany the medical breakthroughs promised by embryonic stem cell research. He warns against the dangers of a fundamentalism or intransigence in some religious leaders, that is disengaged from the conscience of the nation. But the same time, he says some of the promoters of the research 'have played fast and loose with the processes of political deliberation.'

If Brennan sees fundamentalism and impatience as the enemies of good policy, Francis Sullivan identifies timidity and loss of nerve as major stumbling blocks. He

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assesses the efforts the the ALP's Craig Emerson to arrive at a series of policy positions that could 'withstand intellectual scrutiny and at the same time could reverberate with the instincts of an old social democratic party'.

The collection of articles in this Eureka Street goes beyond Australia, with Elizabeth Ascroft presenting a snapshot of Cambodia that many will find uncomfortable, 13 years after the UN sponsored and managed democratic elections. And former longtime editor Morag Fraser ambles through a London, both known and not known, to her, and considers the impact of the bombings one year ago.

## Shooting tourists in Cambodia

*By Elizabeth Ascroft*

On the streets of Phnom Penh it is difficult to miss the tuk-tuk (mini-cab) drivers who offer a tour of the city and surrounds. By far the most offered tour is to the 'Killing Fields', or Choeung Ek Genocidal Centre, the site of Cambodia's largest mass grave, where some 20,000 men, women and children were murdered. The area is a lasting testimony to Pol Pot's bloody four-year reign.

The Killing Fields are surrounded by farms and villages, once flat, now made hilly by the excavation of the graves. At the entrance of the fields is a tall pagoda, the interior stacked with skulls, left as evidence of the atrocities. It's a dusty, hot and unspeakably sad place. Once there, the tuk-tuk drivers suggest that you round off your trip with an excursion to a near-by shooting range, just 1km away from Choeung Ek. There you have the opportunity to fire a weapon of your own choice.

This side trip is said to be vastly popular amongst backpackers. The range receives some forty visitors a day. Upon arrival at the shooting range, which is a small brick building with guns mounted on the wall and beer for sale, the prospective shooter is presented with a laminated 'menu' with the words 'no photos' clearly inscribed. Choices range from AK47s (US\$30 for 25 rounds) to Tommy guns (US\$25) and hand guns (US\$13) – which one American visitor passed over as they are 'widely available in the States.'

In addition to this assortment of guns, grenades and heavy artillery can be fired as well. Although live animal targets were once available, the practice has been (officially) stopped following the public condemnation by King Sihanouk in 2001. These days the gun of your choosing is fired into small brick corridors with paper outlines of a human torso and head, mounted in front of sand bags. Meanwhile, Cambodian soldiers who administer the range entertain themselves with Bocce.

The tourist firing range has its roots in the surplus weaponry found in Cambodia. A violent history has made weapons more readily available. The coup in 1997 is only the most recent incident which has helped make widely available these many kinds of weapons. The range provides an alternative source of income to poorly paid soldiers. The tourists who takes advantage of the opportunity to fire an AK47 thus engages with, and puts to profitable use, the products of a violent past. They are also taking advantage of continuing economic hardship.

The visitors' books of the Genocide Museum are filled with statements of regret, and with the resolve to 'never let this happen again'. When one's mind turns to the trip that many visitors have then made over to the shooting range, one does not see this little 'jaunt' as a massive mark of disrespect, and a dishonouring of, all the victims of the Khmer Rouge. The incongruity is more simple. It is difficult to understand why tourists, after witnessing the remnants of mass murder, would want to fire a gun. Honour for the dead is incompatible with the firing of guns for pleasure.

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Some of the tourists to whom I spoke said that their visit to the firing range provided a 'good release' after the stress of visiting the Killing Fields. Others said that it afforded them the opportunity to take part in the 'untamed, lawless or crazy' Cambodia they'd heard about; a chance to indulge in some adventure tourism before they headed back into town for a beer. But the presence of the firing range next to the memorial of the killing fields is as incongruous as would be a shooting range adjacent to Sachsenhausen or Auschwitz; or a nuclear power station built at Hiroshima or Nagasaki.

It says much that both historical atrocity and recreational gun use, the emotional saturation of the horror of Cheoung Ek and the 'cathartic' experience of firing a weapon, have become two sides of the same coin to the tourist seeking to 'discover' Cambodia.

*Elizabeth is a Melbourne based freelance writer, with a special interest in South-East Asia where she has both lived and travelled extensively.*

## It comes down to Trafalgar Square

*By Morag Fraser*

It's just two weeks away from the first anniversary of the London bombings, and no one is taking any notice. I seem to be the only person gawping at scars on the walls of the Tube, and even I wouldn't dream of asking whether the blackened sections of this old warhorse of an Underground are terrorist damage or simply the liver spots of old age.

The girl sitting opposite me on the Northern line wouldn't hear my questions anyway: she's wired up to a different reality. The ad on the East Finchley station wall is her endorsement: 'Without product XYZ Sally would have to spend the whole of her 40-minute commute staring at the gob of bubblegum on the seat opposite. With XYZ she can be away in her own head.'

Maybe she thinks I am a gob of bubblegum because we don't make eye contact during our 20-minute commute. Humanity might break out if we went the extra 20, but I'll never know. I get out at Kings Cross and resolutely don't look at the walls.

The sad fellow opposite us on Saturday afternoon's crowded Piccadilly line is more social: he shares his choice of heavy metal with the whole carriage by turning up the volume on his mobile phone. No one reacts though because the poor chap is obviously far-gone in delirium or melancholy and his England World Cup jersey (£49 for the souvenir version) is seriously askew.

The red cross of St George is everywhere. Someone's made a killing on the little white plastic widget that enables the patriot or the mere soccer fanatic to fly the England flag from their car window. Rolls Royces and bashed old Morrisies are decked out alike in the democracy of team support. And England wins. In the late afternoon you wonder if any Londoner is at work because every pub has its gleeful gathering of fans, pints in hand and smiles creasing their faces.

In Trafalgar Square, Nelson is all shrouded over. I get a shock as I turn the corner from St Martin's and see scaffolding and industrial gauze rearing into the sky instead of the old imperturbable figure of the nation's Admiral. But it's nothing sinister: just routine repair and part of the upgrading of this most famous of pedestrian precincts. The traffic is being permanently diverted away from the front of the National Gallery so that even more tourists from Russia, Japan, Australia, Slovenia, Zimbabwe, Sweden—the whole world—can loll in the sun (it's 30 degrees and London's hottest day this summer) or be videoed clambering over the lions.

I remember a different Trafalgar Square. In 1990, after the poll tax riots that signalled the end of the Thatcher era, the buildings were still smoking and the air smelt of charcoal. It was Easter, and cold. Homeless men and women lined up at the St Martin's soup kitchen. But within a day, London repaired itself. By the time a visiting head of state rolled in procession up the Mall, the Square was cleaned up,

pavements hosed, the burnt buildings clad in canvas and three-ply. It's a cliché that this old city is famously resilient, but no less true for being so often said.

In *The Guardian* one columnist praises a new book written by a survivor of the 2005 bombings. It's exemplary, he says, because the author refuses to have either hero or victim status imposed upon him. He simply won't be fodder for the fear campaigns of the British tabloids and he won't be spun into a symbol by politicians.

The column is impressive in its ability to deflate in advance any hysteria that might be whipped up in the days to come. The Queen's 80th birthday celebrations add a phlegmatic coda: television shows a woman going about the routine business of state—routine even when the apparatus of state wears a busby. It's Britain just getting on with job, inured to violence, looking always to the next step.

And whatever may come in the next few weeks, the portents seem good: in Cumberland there are reported sighting of red hawk chicks, the first seen since in England since the reign of George the Third.

*Morag Fraser is the former editor of Eureka Street. She is currently Adjunct Professor in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at La Trobe University, and writes for a diverse range of magazines and newspapers.*

## Lessons learned from Icarus

*By Brian Matthews*

I found myself thinking the other day about Breughel's painting, 'Landscape with the Fall of Icarus'. It could have been the ducks that caused this train of thought. Last winter, four wild ducks arrived, set up camp around the dam and, in the spring, produced half a dozen ducklings. The whole entourage then took up foraging residence for the summer, until some hidden signal triggered their departure and they were gone as abruptly as they'd arrived.

Well, this year, just as the frosts are getting seriously down to their secret ministry in the creaking cold moonlit nights, the ducks have returned, with new recruits. Fifteen of them ritually take over the lawn and garden each morning for a long, leisurely breakfast in the slowly warming sun. Absurdly, we find ourselves detouring and tiptoeing so as not to disturb them. Who owns this place, anyway? Haven't these ducks ever heard of the ANZ bank? But if, inadvertently, we do scare them – a banging door, an injudiciously sudden appearance – they lift off, all fifteen of them, in perfect unison. As if radio controlled, they swoop in formation through a couple of wide arcs that bring them down to the dam where, webbed feet splayed like the baffle plates on a Boeing's wings, they glide onto the no doubt freezing water. The landing is not actually visible from the house, but it's audible – a succession of splashes as the squadron arrives home.

And that might have been what reminded me of Breughel. I was thinking about the ducks and their splashing drop into the dam while I was doing the ironing. (Don't ask. Sometimes even the best organised guard is lowered: it only takes a moment's lapse of concentration, the fortress is breached and the defenders over-run with jobs, chores and tasks). The point is that, in Breughel's painting, the fall of Icarus – a sensational event caused by his flying too close to the sun and melting the wax with which his father, Daedalus, had glued his wings – takes place in spring and nobody pays much attention. The farmer goes on ploughing, the shepherd watches his sheep, a fisherman peers into the depths, an elegant ship plunges on under its ballooning sails. Off to the side, perhaps in the corner of the eye, Icarus hits the water and his legs flail comically before he sinks forever.

In his marvellous poem, 'Musée des Beaux Arts', W.H. Auden reflects on Breughel's curiously offhand account of a big event: 'About suffering they were never wrong/The Old Masters: how well they understood/Its human position; how it takes place/While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along.' This is what happens in Breughel's 'landscape'. 'Everything turns away/Quite leisurely from the disaster,' Auden says.

How people react depends on the fabric and urgencies of the lives on which the boy's fall impinges. If you're ploughing at the time, it's quite reasonable for that to occupy wholly your attention – the weather might change, you don't want to get caught by nightfall, and so on. If you're looking after your flock of sheep then you focus on them vigilantly: sheep being what they are they'll be through the fence or over a cliff if you did otherwise; and if you are sailing, the fall, however clearly seen, is a

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diversion and will not be allowed to become an interruption. Life, even grossly sybaritic life, goes on.

Breughel's message – and Auden's – is: like it or not, life goes on. In grief, for example, we must accept that, despite the loss of a loved one and the shock or injustice of the death, carrying on – becoming immersed in tasks, having a drink after work, making love – is not callous. You might call it the Icarus Effect – lives go on as if a boy had not suddenly plunged out of the sky into the water. You keep working, you sail on, you continue fishing, you look the other way among your flock of sheep – as if nothing had happened. You do this because, to some extent, you can't afford to do otherwise. Not only pragmatic imperatives – like ploughing or shepherding – but also reasonable emotional caution dictates that you take account of T.S. Eliot's observation that humankind can only stand so much reality.

There's a lot of reality around at the moment – at Guantanamo, in Baghdad, in East Timor, in Australian workplaces ... To be fully human, we must observe, take account of, if possible influence, these realities as best we can; but at the same time life, ordinary quotidian life, must go on. In our age perhaps more than ever before, it is impossible to pretend that Icarus did not fall from the sky, yet it is a human imperative to keep sailing calmly on.

*Brian Matthews is the award winning author of A Fine and Private Place and, most recently, The Temple the Road: The Life and Times of the MCG.*



## East Timor rebuilding must focus on young people

*By Peter Hosking*

‘Our suffering in 1999 allowed us to secure our freedom. This just divides our nation.’

‘My home was burnt by the Indonesian militias in 1999. I worked hard to rebuild it, but it has been destroyed again. It is hard being a victim.’

Since February 2006, issues that previously bubbled beneath the surface in East Timor have begun to boil over. A dispute within the defence forces attracted other disgruntled groups. Public grievances led to violence on 28 and 29 April and the disintegration of the police force in Dili. The situation deteriorated during May with a collapse in security on 23 to 25 May. The arrival of foreign troops helped bring under control the use of weaponry by those associated with the defence and police forces or their collaborators. However, much routine police work is required to protect adequately the people.

While the Timorese military factions cantoned themselves; rampant intimidation, looting, and burning of houses by gangs based on dubious ethnic allegiances continued. The number of dead is unknown. It has been estimated that over 30 people were killed and about 70 injured. Hooligans have burnt some 400 homes and ransacked others. Mobs pillage neighbourhoods and engage in threats and stone throwing against rivals.

Amidst the violence, people fled their homes in Dili and less than a third of the population slept in their own homes in early June. Over 50,000 went to the districts until the security situation in Dili stabilised. The districts remained relatively settled although there is extra pressure because of the influx of people from Dili. There was a further 60,000 living in temporary shelters around Dili. Many of these return to their homes during the day but most still slept in parishes, church properties and other makeshift camps at night. Conditions in these camps vary. Some had difficulty with proper shelter, food, sanitation, and medicines but most are tolerably serviced as provisional situations. Even so, for those who sleep on the ground, it is cold at night, surrounded by mosquitoes, and hot in the midday sun, surrounded by flies.

Many agencies have responded to the emergency. The Ministry of Labour and Community Reinsertion has assisted those who fled the upsurge in violence around their homes. Religious orders provide refuge, pastoral care and material assistance. Aid agencies supply rice, hygiene kits, tarps, sleeping mats, mosquito nets, cooking sets etc. Oxfam looks to water and sanitation. The Red Cross led by former truth commissioner, Isabel Guterres, is concerned for the victims of violence including care of the dead. Caritas both provides emergency relief and is implementing a peace building and reconciliation programme.

Although the situation in Dili is calmer, it remains uncertain. If it remains relatively peaceful then people will return to their homes. Children have begun to return to normal school life. But those who have lost homes are hurt and resentful, and acts of revenge are possible. If they occur, then conditions will get worse. People fear the

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guns that remain both in unauthorised hands and in those of the mandated forces that have used them for murder and harm.

Many are disappointed that political leaders seem more concerned to protect their careers than their people. Many are sad and confused about the ‘forces’ behind the factions that attacked people and property. Faith in their leaders will not be easily recovered. Many had great hopes for Timor during the struggle for independence. Now they are disheartened by the unnecessary and unexpected violence, and fear for their country’s future. The psychological impact is immense. Recovery will involve establishing safety and trust, as well as enhancing community networks, especially the spiritual and pastoral ones so important in the culture of East Timor. Political management and economic development will challenge both the people of East Timor and the international community.

After the military, police, political leaders and others have acknowledged their faults, it will take time to re-build again. The leaders of communities must work through the steps to truth and reconciliation. This involves confessing mistakes, showing remorse, seeking forgiveness, and trying to repair the harm committed. Apart from the destruction and looting, moral leadership has been weakened. The work ahead enormous, but the capacity for heroic leadership resides in all people - politicians, public officials, church servants, village chiefs, international figures, teachers, catechists, advocates of human rights, family members, and so many companions of good will.

Addressing the needs of the youth is a priority in the next stage of the development of East Timor. Thousands have been idle and unemployed for too long. Many need vocational training. Reconstruction work itself will be a source of employment for some time. Youth represent the prospects of the nation. Responding to their needs and offering a new spirit of hope is a key priority in contemporary nation building.

Donate to the “East Timor Appeal” through Caritas ([www.caritas.org.au](http://www.caritas.org.au)) or Jesuit Mission ([www.jesuitmission.org.au](http://www.jesuitmission.org.au))

*Peter Hosking SJ is a former East Timor country director for Jesuit Refugee Service.*

## **Dam all consultation**

*By Anthony Hallam*

On 26 April 2006 the Queensland Government announced that two dams would be built in South East Queensland; one on the Logan River, and the other on the Mary River at Traveston, near Gympie. The announcement regarding these two dams was made with little consultation or study. In the 1990s, the same location on the Mary River, Traveston, had been surveyed as the possible site for a dam, but the area was deemed unsuitable. The land at Amamoor, ten kilometres from the proposed dam site, has been set aside for a water storage facility, but this option is not being explored by the Queensland Government.

If the dam is built, the effect on people, townships, ecology and the indigenous heritage of the Mary Valley area will be nothing short of catastrophic. The Mary Valley is an excellent dairy farming area. There are also many orchards, and a small wine industry. The Mary Valley offers a very quiet alternative to Brisbane and the Sunshine coast.

The Government has proposed to resume 820 properties for the dam which will have a 150,000 megalitre storage capacity. Approximately 1000 people will be directly affected by the construction of the dam. These people will lose homes, agricultural land, sections of their property, and in some cases, their livelihood. The township of Kandanga, which is about 30 kms from Gympie, will be affected the most drastically. Approximately two hundred people live in Kandanga; the dam will result in half of the township being flooded, with the rest of the area being left within the two hundred metre buffer zone. This renders the entire area unliveable.

The faith life of the Mary Valley will also be seriously affected. The Kandanga cemetery will be flooded, as will an indigenous Bora ring of the Gubbi-Gubbi clan. With a reduction in the number of people in the Mary Valley due to the dam, the religious communities of the Catholic, Anglican and Uniting churches of Kandanga and Imbil will be impacted severely, both in population and in religious services.

The dam will also cut the Bruce Highway, south of Gympie, for about five or six kilometres, cut roads in the Mary Valley, and render telecommunications systems unuseable. Another expense that will arise from this already costly project is a major increase in infrastructure spending to divert Bruce Highway and other access roads to the Mary Valley. More people will lose property and homes due to the re-alignment of Bruce Highway and these service roads.

The people of the Mary Valley have been outraged by the announcement of the Dam project. The cavalier attitude of the Beattie government has not helped. When the subject is raised, locals become angry and scared at the prospect of losing their homes and their livelihoods. There is also great ire at the prospect of losing their place on the land. A community counselling service has been established by the people of the Mary Valley so that people affected can receive local emotional support.

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The response of the people of the Mary Valley has been to organise protest marches in Brisbane. Bob Brown, the Greens Senator from Tasmania, has led a flotilla of canoes down the Mary River to highlight the issue. Petitions have been signed and local meetings, both civil and religious, have attracted great numbers, given the population of the region. Kate Molloy, the state member for Noosa, voted against the dam at a recent Labor Party conference, and is in jeopardy of losing her endorsement from the Labor Party.

What is most puzzling is the attitude of the Queensland Government. Whenever the issue is raised, Peter Beattie responds with statements such as: 'this dam is going ahead' or 'people can protest all they want; this dam will still be built'. The lack of consultation from the Queensland Government has been staggering, and the concerns of the people of the Mary Valley have been ignored. The people of the area realise the South East corner of Queensland is in the grip of drought. It is clear that something has to be done to alleviate the water crisis in Queensland. But the people of the region have been told that the dam will be built, and no other options will be considered. Statements such as 'Lose your home for Queensland' have left the people of the Mary Valley angry and alienated from a Brisbane-centric government.

Good governance is about making hard decisions. But these decisions have to be made in the right way. Transparency and consultation are crucial to this process. By not listening, planning, or seeking the agreement of people of the region, the Beattie government has made grave errors. This issue will not go away, and the Beattie government is rapidly losing support within the Gympie and Mary Valley regions.

*Tony Hallam is a secondary school teacher in Gympie and teaches students affected by the dam.*

## Could Australia become another island in the Indonesian archipelago?

*By Paul Osborne*

Australia is in danger of becoming one of the many thousands of islands in the Indonesian archipelago.

I'm not talking about some kind of a reverse continental drift or a conspiracy theory out of the One Nation policy handbook.

It's all about the federal government's attitude to asylum seekers.

Prime Minister John Howard has flagged additions to his Pacific Solution policy, which now are likely to go to parliament in August after the winter recess.

The policy change was triggered by the diplomatic implosion over the immigration department's decision to grant temporary protection to 42 West Papuan asylum seekers who arrived by boat earlier this year.

Indonesia withdrew its ambassador over the decision and many political figures, from the president down, expressed outrage and made threats.

It was claimed the decision to grant a handful of visas was because of the Australian government's support for West Papuan independence.

Mr Howard has travelled to Indonesia to mend the rift, armed with proposed legislation to ensure that any asylum seekers arriving by boat on the Australian mainland will be processed offshore and, if found to have a legitimate claim, given protection preferably in a third country.

The prime minister has argued the policy, which extends the already controversial Pacific Solution well beyond its original form, is in Australia's national interest and is all about protecting our borders, as well as stopping refugee queue-jumping.

But Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone gave the game away when she said in an interview it would be folly to ignore our relations with Indonesia in making such a decision.

While Mr Howard has now agreed to a raft of amendments to the laws, after a backbench revolt, the central thrust of the legislation remains in place.

The diplomatic intention behind the laws - appeasing our northern neighbour - also remains.

Australia played a key role in securing the freedom and independence of East Timor after years of repression and bloodshed under Indonesian rule - a role that is continuing in the wake of fresh, internal political tensions.

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Support for East Timor's independence has not gone down well in some Indonesian political circles, but few in the Australian and global communities would argue that the move was anything other than morally right (even if sloppily executed).

Now, just the suggestion that the government could support West Papuan independence has the government kowtowing to Indonesia.

Mr Howard and Senator Vanstone have strongly argued that the decision to grant the visas was not about support for West Papuan freedom from Indonesia - which the government does not support - but purely and simply an assessment of the asylum seekers' claim based on its merits.

But the statements have not been enough - hence the Bill in Mr Howard's back pocket when he flies to Jakarta.

There are three problems with this approach. One, is that West Papua is in crisis. Independence activists are being killed and repressed by Indonesian authorities, with and without the government's aid.

A solution is needed, either through independence and/or a long-term plan to ensure sustainable economic development and basic freedoms and stamp out corruption and violence.

The second is that Australia is in serious danger of surrendering its sovereignty by allowing another country to force its hand on policy matters, such as migration.

The third is that the Pacific Solution violates Australia's international obligations to deal with people who arrive on our shores fairly and decently, on our own soil, using our own resources and open to scrutiny from our own legal and oversight systems.

Mr Howard admitted to parliament that the only way Australia's legal system could apply to offshore processing centres is if the case relates to an Australian official involved in misconduct or other breach of law. Otherwise the local law of the land would apply.

The prime minister is hoping to ride another Tampa-style wave to the next election.

But disgruntled backbenchers, Labor and the minor parties may have something to say about that.

*Paul Osborne is a journalist with AAP in the Canberra Press Gallery.*

## Industrial relations is the Church's business

*By Brendan Long*

Last Sunday Cardinal Pell dropped another very large pebble into Canberra's political pond. He expressed concern that the new industrial relations regime would put downward pressure on minimum wages. The ripples could still be seen the next day in the flurry of questions in Parliament.

It follows his speech to the National Press Club before the Work Choices Bill passed the Parliament. There he had no praise for the changes, and expressed some apprehension about them. He emphasised the need to protect those on low incomes and called for a slight increase in the minimum wage. He stated that he would welcome a modest increase in union influence.

This might sound radical for a commentator on public life more usually associated with a more conservative perspective. But widespread Catholic concern over these reforms should come as no surprise. From its conception the Australian approach to industrial relations has been a brew in which Catholic social thought forms a key ingredient, especially the ideas propounded by Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical *Rerum Novarum*.

Now that the changes are law, the Government has to deal with a Catholic Church that has been seriously rebuffed. The Government's welfare changes, to which the Senate amendments were very modest, have also annoyed the Church.

But the Government also failed to win over the economists. Speaking recently at the Economists Conference, Mark Wooden, of the Melbourne Institute, doubted that the proposed changes would reduce unemployment. In the continuing opposition to the laws might God and mammon form a rare alliance?

The Government has tried to bridge the divide by appointing Ian Harper to the proposed Australian Fair Pay Commission. He is a formidable economist and a committed churchman. What better political bandage to cover the ungainly sore that church figures have bared on the new arm of the Government's economic reform!

But the sore goes much deeper than Government believes. The Catholic Church's apprehension about the IR changes does not simply express ecclesiastical zeal directed to political purposes. The tradition of thought and reflection at stake here is not only deeply entrenched not just in the Catholic Church, but is also incarnated into the values and institutions with which Australia has come to feel comfortable.

Harper may be able to appeal to some religious ideas in order to support his economics. But the key point made by the Catholic Church is that the priority of economics over social concerns must be inverted. Economics are a means to an end. So the subordination of the religious to the economic that is embodied in Mr. Harper's appointment, risks sharpening the emerging lines of division.

The narrow mandate given to the Fair Pay Commission will further aggravate tensions between the economic and socio-religious viewpoints. The purpose of minimum wages is to combat poverty and to build into society a basic minimum for a household or family. But in his office, Professor Harper is required to focus on economic concerns.

If the Fair Pay Commission is not to be a covert mechanism for reducing real minimum wages, it will need to work more broadly than its current legislative mandate allows. Its decisions will need to be set within an overarching strategy to combat poverty. It will also need to be co-ordinated with reform of the tax and the family tax payment systems. This will ensure that Treasury does not seize back any minimum wage rises through high effective marginal tax rates.

Mr Howard and Mr Andrews believe that in the end the churches will not stand up to the business leaders they have coopted, but will retreat to their cathedrals and central theological concerns. They have failed to realise that in the contemporary Catholic Church the proper relationship between economics and the good of society is a central theological concern.



## How do Christians deal with violence in the Bible?

*By Andrew Hamilton*

When terror preoccupies us, the comparative study of religions becomes a popular sport. We sieve Christianity and Islam to weigh their peaceable against their violent characteristics. As also happens when we try to detect national characteristics in football teams, the local boys usually come out looking good - at least to themselves.

The uncommitted may find the teams more evenly matched. Sharia Law tags the Inquisition; Jihads run through Crusades. They may conclude that on both sides faith has nourished nobility and barbarity.

When the comparison of conduct proves inconclusive, it is natural to turn to the texts sacred to each faith. Christians may detect violence in the Koran. Whereas in the Bible... Well, what of the Bible? For Christian readers the Bible has always posed difficult questions. They believe that the Scriptures are God's word, but find there an endorsement of violence that seems subhuman, not to say subdivine.

To point the question sharply: those who read Scripture in public habitually conclude by saying, This is the Word of the Lord. Is it possible in good faith to do so after such texts as these:

'Thus says the Lord of hosts... "go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, infant and baby at the breast, ox and sheep, camel and ass"'? (1 Samuel 15)

Or, after the curse addressed to Babylon:

'Happy shall be he who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock'? (Psalm 137)

Christian interpreters of Scripture have addressed these barbarities in various ways. Some have denied the apparent brutality. An older Catholic Commentary sees in the instruction to massacre a severity necessary when dealing with any barbarous people. For an older Reformed commentary, the command displays the righteous anger of God against sin.

Other interpreters have seen that such texts are inconsistent with the Christian understanding of God. Marcion, an early Christian leader, offered the most radical solution. He excised from Scripture the whole of the Old Testament (as well as most of the New). He attributed texts like these to the God of justice. The New Testament is the Word of a different God: the God of goodness, the God of Jesus Christ.

Marcian's elegant solution was rejected, but the problem of violent texts remained. Many Christians broadened their perspective. They noted that people look to the Scriptures for guidance and illumination, moving easily beyond the literal meaning or historical setting of the texts. So, Augustine compares the babies smashed against rocks to the evil desires that we should crush in their beginnings.

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This approach to Scripture was helpful in enabling people to meditate on difficult texts. But if it became a general principle of interpretation, God's involvement in the history of Israel and in Jesus Christ would be made ethereal.

More recent theologies have placed Scripture firmly within God's relationship to the people of Israel, and later to the Church. Scripture, which gives authoritative words to that relationship, is both God's word and a human word.

This tying of Scripture to a community allows room to deal with violent texts that appear to contradict a Christian understanding of God. If the Scriptures represent a developing relationship between God and human beings, they may move from a crude to a sophisticated understanding. We can distinguish what is central from what is peripheral, the material from the spiritual. The Lord who endorses massacres like Haditha is a God poorly understood.

To say that one representation of God is authentic, but that another is inadequate, however, we need a standing point from which we can measure and evaluate them. Christian theologians have named many of them – the core of the Scriptures, the teaching of Jesus Christ, the Church's lived experience of faith, the best insights of the age, to name only a few. All involve a measure of subjectivity. All demand reflection, conversation and judgment.

For many people this subjectivity erodes the sense in which Scripture is God's word. They turn back to strong doctrines of Scriptural inspiration and inerrancy, and accuse others of drinking Bible Lite.

When Christians deal with violence in texts, they are soon forced to raise the siege on others' castles, and to defend their own. In this game, strikers may strut their stuff, but goalies are where the action is.

## It's time to engage the 'conscience of the nation' on bioethics

*By Frank Brennan*

I make no claim to being a bioethicist. I daresay Thomas More made no such claim, and would not, even were he alive today. Even those of us who are not bioethicists are entitled to our opinions about the desirable law and policy affecting bioethical issues and about the political morality of those advocates who urge a particular law or policy on bioethical issues.

I make no claim to speak for the Catholic Church. But inspired by Thomas More, I trust I take my inspiration from Catholic moral teaching as I then wrestle with questions about what is the appropriate law or policy on vexed issues in Australia. As a Jesuit and a lawyer I take some heart from that scene in Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons* in which Thomas More's daughter, Margaret, says, 'Father, that man's bad.' More answers, 'There is no law against that.' His son-in-law, William Roper: 'There is! God's law!' More: 'Then God can arrest him. . . . The law, Roper, the law. I know what's legal, not what's right. And I'll stick to what's legal. . . . I'm not God. The currents and eddies of right and wrong, which you find such plain sailing, I can't navigate. I'm no voyager. But in the thickets of the law, oh, there I'm a forester.' Alas we must sail in the currents and eddies of right and wrong as well as tracing our path through the thickets of law and public policy.

In recent months, I have been drawn into public discussion about bioethical issues twice – first with the release of the Lockhart Review on stem cell research and then with Parliament's debate on RU486. On each occasion I have been assisted in my own thinking by the public utterances of Bishop Anthony Fisher who is well schooled and learned in bioethical issues and the Catholic tradition.

I have bought into the controversy over stem cell research because I have thought that the Lockhart Committee exceeded its brief, and am convinced that some of the advocates for embryonic stem cell research have played fast and loose with the processes of political deliberation.

Involved tangentially in these issues, I have become concerned that the church risks marginalising itself and rendering its message incomprehensible. There must be acknowledgment by church leaders of the margin of appreciation afforded conscientious Catholic lawmakers and policy makers on issues about which there is no moral or scientific unanimity in the Catholic Church, let alone in the Australian community generally.

In the field of bioethics, our next national debate will be about the recommendations of the Lockhart review on stem cell research and experimentation on human embryos. Some church leaders are convinced that even the deliberate creation of excess embryos so as to assist an infertile couple with IVF is morally wrong. But even they would need to admit that the conscience of the nation is not with them on that. If the Catholic view will not permit even the creation of embryos in these circumstances, then the moral purity of the view will do nothing to command the respect or assent of

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most lawmakers wanting to know the appropriate legal limits to impose on citizens of all faiths and none when it comes to embryo experimentation.

Some religious persons claim to have a comprehensive world view, confident that their religious tradition provides them with insights and moral clarity about all social questions. These citizens need to be cautious lest they disrespectfully foist their views on other citizens who see the world differently and in good faith.

There will be ongoing public disputes in drawing of the boundaries of humanity – at either end of the life cycle. Is the embryo to count as the property of the individual who is free to do with it as she wishes or is it to count as an entity deserving of respect and protection by the state against the citizen who wants to view this entity merely as a collection of cells to be experimented upon or aborted?

The Catholic Church hierarchy has been the group most consistent in proclaiming the right to life of the embryo. If the embryo has a right to life, obviously it is in need of legal protection because it is the most vulnerable of the ‘human family’. Vatican statements have been quite consistent in developing a coherent argument from this premise. But those who do not accept the premise are then troubled by the conclusions drawn by the Vatican. They are also fortified in their view that the Vatican’s conclusions and formulae do not resonate with their own moral sense about the status of the human embryo.

There are many people who are philosophically competent and compassionate who argue that the disposal of a beaker of human embryos is not the moral equivalent of sending thousands of people to a gas chamber. Such people are not necessarily immoral or amoral.

If over half the embryos naturally produced in the womb fail to implant, should we be in mourning that over half the human race never develop beyond a couple of cells? The Vatican says, ‘In consequence of the fact that they have been produced in vitro, those embryos which are not transferred into the body of the mother and are called ‘spare’ are exposed to an absurd fate, with no possibility of their being offered safe means of survival which can be licitly pursued.’ Their fate is no more absurd than the fate of the majority of embryos which are never successfully implanted naturally.

True to my religious tradition, I am happy to view a human embryo respectfully as a human being in the earliest stages of development. I need to concede that in a democracy under the rule of law, the majority of citizens are entitled to work on the presupposition that a human embryo is not a human person but is an embryo deserving more respect than a pig embryo because it has at this stage only the potential to develop into a human being, into a human person.

Some church authorities argue that the state should never produce excess embryos even if the scientist is anxious to maximise the prospects of implantation of a healthy embryo. They need to counsel their own church members not to participate in IVF programs that produce excess embryos. They would know that many of their own church members do avail themselves of such programs because they are seeking life,

seeking the fulfilment of their marriage remembering the hope on their wedding day that they would be able to bear and nurture each other's children.

Religious leaders are entitled to agitate against laws and policies that would permit IVF procedures for infertile married couples when such procedures entail the knowing production of excess embryos. But there is little likelihood of such a position winning acceptance with many politicians given that they are popularly elected and each of them would have in their own electorate couples who want to avail themselves of this procedure convinced that there is nothing immoral in the procedure. In proposing a ban on such a procedure, the church authorities would be wrong to claim that they speak for all their members.

In the field of bioethics as well, we now face a national debate about the recommendations of the Lockhart review on stem cell research and experimentation on human embryos. The Australian Parliament and the Council of Australian Governments now need to decide what legislative changes, if any, are required in response to the Lockhart review of the 2002 laws prohibiting human cloning and regulating research on human embryos.

Lawmakers have been wrestling with this new technology debating where to draw the line on human cloning, attempting to regulate scientists in their search for cures to many diseases using human embryonic stem cells as well as adult stem cells. Embryonic stem cells are presently taken only from human embryos. Thus the harvesting of embryonic stem cells presently requires the destruction of the embryo.

In Australia, as elsewhere there has been a consensus among lawmakers that cloning to produce children should be prohibited. The contest has been over the limits to impose on cloning for biomedical research, sometimes mistakenly called therapeutic cloning.

On the vast plain of embryo research, there are two Rubicons. The Australian community may well have crossed the first in 2002, given the lack of community reaction to the Parliament's decision to permit experimentation on excess embryos which were created with the intention of their being part of a project aimed at successful implantation of one of the batch, and with the strict requirement that there not be any more embryos created than were required for a successful implantation of a healthy embryo. But there is a second Rubicon. That is where we now stand.

Beyond this second Rubicon is a city where the scientist is justified in creating human life merely so that he might experiment upon it and destroy it without the need for any respect of the dignity of that potential human life. Some of the Australian community are not even prepared to cross the first Rubicon. Our parliament having crossed the first Rubicon in 2002 and having deliberately stopped short of crossing the second, there is still no evidence of a change in community standards that would warrant the second crossing. There is still, of course, also the prospect that embryonic stem cells could be produced without the need first to produce a human embryo and then destroy it. This would to some extent render obsolete the debate over embryo research.

Not all Catholics, and not all bishops, will agree with all the arguments I have put this evening. We need to engage in respectful dialogue attentive to the different realms of science, morality, law, public policy, and public administration, helping each other as we set about sailing amidst the currents and eddies of right and wrong, and cutting through the thickets of the law.

*This essay is taken from the text of the 2006 Sir Thomas More Lecture, which was a response to the Lockhart review. The full text is available at:  
<http://www.eurekastreet.com.au/Uploads/File/606/fbrennanthomasmorelecture.doc>*

## Train lovers stoked and ready to go

*By Paul Daffey*

When I arrived at the Victorian headquarters of the Australian Model Railway Association, Gary Danson was busying about with cleaning duties while fellow club member Geoff Tate was leafing slowly through old railway magazines in the club's library. It was a midweek afternoon. We were the only ones in the old RSL building.

Danson is one of life's whirlwinds, darting here and there, his strides hitched low and an old beanie flopping around on his head. His strength is organising. He takes care of the logistics of the club's model-railway exhibitions in halls around Victoria.

Tate's strength is artwork. He paints the scenery that offsets the many miles of train tracks in the club's main 'layout', as the elaborate set-up of tracks in the basement is known. At the time of my visit, Tate was painting a miniature bridge for the layout.

While the men bring varied strengths to their duties as club members, both came to their love of trains at the same age. Both claimed that they were three years old—four at the most, said Danson. He was on a train trip from Melbourne to visit family in the Riverina, in New South Wales. It was not only the trains that fascinated him; it was the comings and goings at the station at Cootamundra, where trains diverged to different regions of NSW.

Tate was three when he went with his family to Melbourne's Spencer Street Station to see off his father, who was resuming army duties at a camp near Albury during World War II. A giant pair of hands hoisted young Geoffrey on to the footplate of the engine. The boy stood fascinated as the railway workers set about shovelling coal, checking gauges, preparing the Spirit of Progress to lurch into life.

Now, at 69, Tate says visions of a steam engine lurching to life form part of the soul of every train-lover. The engine's hissing and panting suggests that it's living and breathing. The visible workings of the engine lend further opportunity to imbue it with a sense of life. Danson likens the steam engine to a dragon.

The diesel engine, by contrast, is considered anonymous. 'It's a box,' says Danson. 'You don't see the workings.'

During Tate's working life, he had a series of jobs, including several years as a signwriter. 'When I worked in the city, I spent every spare minute looking at the yard.'

Danson grew up the oldest of five in a small house opposite the train line in Bentleigh, in Melbourne's south-east. He didn't mind being forced to sleep on a couch at the front of the house because it meant he had a view of the trains. 'I could watch them all night,' he says.

During the recent Queen's Birthday long weekend, Danson, who is 58, and three other members of the model-railway club drove to South Australia. 'Chasing trains,' explains Danson.

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After going to a model-railway exhibition in Adelaide, they headed to Port Augusta, which, as the junction for trains heading north towards Darwin and west towards Perth, has a big and busy railway station. Danson and his friends spent several hours on the Saturday night watching trains shunt in and out of the Port Augusta yards.

One of the highlights was seeing freight trains bound for Darwin that were two kilometres in length. Another highlight was seeing the steam engine that chugs along the Pichi Richi line between the Spencer Gulf and Quorn, on the fringe of the Flinders Ranges.

Back at the model-railway clubhouse in Glen Iris, Danson says model railways are just another way of enjoying trains. The maintenance of the clubhouse and the layouts becomes worthwhile when club members sit down to drive the trains.

A bench seat is elevated high enough for drivers to look over the main layout, which is about 20 metres by 15 metres. The controls are on a panel. Clocks are speeded up by a factor of six, lending the chance to have the trains run as if on a real-life timetable. On the Friday night after my visit, it had been decreed that the timetable to be used would be from the United States in the 1980s.

Danson is a retired teacher, having taught politics, economics and geography in schools around Melbourne's southern and eastern suburbs. One of his many roles at the club is to oversee its 20 junior members, who range in age from 10 to 16 years. 'Their eyes just light up when they see this layout,' he says.

The model-railway club is putting on an exhibition at the Glen Iris clubhouse over the last weekend in August. Before then, one of Danson's many tasks is to make sure that the club's Thomas the Tank Engine layout is in good running order.

My son, at almost two, is mad on Thomas the Tank Engine. I look forward to seeing his face when Thomas comes to life.

*Paul Daffey is a Melbourne freelance journalist, whose book *Local Rites: A year in Grass Roots Football in Victoria and Beyond* was published in 2001.*



## Fair Go, FairWear

*By Daisy Gardener*

The sewing machine features prominently in many immigrant homes across Australia; It is a major source of income for some households. Often every member of the family will help out in making large batches of clothes, which will end up in sold in stores across Australia.

First generation immigrant women make up the majority of outworkers who sew garments from home, often for as little as \$2 to \$3 an hour. Their numbers are estimated to range from 50,000 to 300,000 nationally. In Australia, outworkers sew up to 90 percent of Australian Made clothes for major retailers, designers and for the firms that supply work wear and school uniforms. To fill their work orders, they often work up to 18 hours a day and 7 days a week. They have effectively replaced workers based in factories as clothing companies have found them a cheaper option.

Due to their working in isolation and often poor command of English outworkers are vulnerable to exploitation and are in need of protection. They need legislation that protects their right to be recognized as employees and to receive wages and conditions equivalent to their factory counterparts. This legal recognition is vital in holding companies accountable for their practices. The clothing industry in Australia has historically insisted on treating outworkers as contractors, often entering into sham contractual arrangements where outworkers receive well below the legal minimum wage.

FairWear, a community coalition campaign made up of churches, unions, community groups and outworkers has worked for the past decade to expose and prevent the exploitation of outworkers. Working in coalition with many groups including Oxfam, Brotherhood of Saint Laurence and the Textile Clothing and Footwear Union, FairWear lobbies for fairer wages and conditions for outworkers.

Recent campaigning on outwork issues has focused almost exclusively on efforts to preserve State and Federal protection for outworkers under the Governments' changes to workplace laws. These protections include the right of an outworker to a minimum wage equivalent to their skill level, the ability to claim unpaid wages from employers and the capacity for the Clothing Textile and Footwear Union of Australia to prosecute companies who fail to provide outworkers with legal minimum working conditions.

In her testimony to the Senate Inquiry into Work Choices (November, 2005), Helena Chong voiced the fears of outworkers : 'We are scared of how bosses will exploit us further when we become independent contractors and their current treatment of us becomes legal...The outworkers I know generally get \$4 an hour and even \$3 an hour. ... We are supposed to be employees now, but we are not treated that way. However, as long as the law clearly says we are employees then the union and government inspectors can make the bosses pay the award rates when they follow the supply chain through and prove our bosses are not paying us properly. ... Give us back some hope for our future. Don't legalise our exploitation but help to end it.'

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A strong community campaign last year was able to maintain major protections under the new Work Choices legislation. But outworkers and outworker advocates now face new challenges under new Independent Contractor's legislation and the Government's attempt to rationalize awards.

Whilst the Independent Contractor Bill tabled in Parliament last Thursday protects outwork State and Territory deeming laws by admitting that the '(...) Bill may particularly disadvantage contract outworkers, who are currently entitled to employee protections(...)', FairWear are concerned that loopholes exist in the Bill that will leave the door open to unscrupulous employers.

Debbie Carstens from FairWear said of the legislation, 'Migrant women outworkers sewing in the isolation of their homes don't understand the legal technicalities of the difference between an employee and an independent contractor, but they do understand how their employers will use all available pressure and threats to convince them to accept wages and conditions below the legal minimums'.

In coming weeks the campaign will be working with the Federal Workplace Relations Minister, Kevin Andrews to address loopholes which could lead to increased vulnerability for outworkers in the Bill, before amendments are brought to the autumn session of Parliament.

At the same time as legislative debate is set to continue in parliament around the issue of independent contractors, a voluntary code of practice, which has been adopted by key textile industry groups has been significant in creating systemic change for outworkers. The Homeworkers Code of Practice successfully monitors the conditions and locations of local clothing manufacture and authorizes the use of the NoSweatShop Label. Companies who display this label as well as being 'Australian Made' are working in ethical ways. The Code is an initiative that is supported by established fashion icons such as Collette Dinnigan and is promoting a new ethical upswing in the industry.

Outworkers will only enjoy fair wages and working conditions when their rights are both enshrined in law and full respected in their working environment. The Federal Government has a corresponding responsibility to maintain the current level of protection for outworkers, and to provide further strong incentives for companies to comply with these laws. When strong laws are in place and ethical industry practice is commonplace, \$2 an hour will hopefully become a thing of the past.

*Daisy Gardener is an industry advocate for Fairwear Australia. She is currently completing a Masters at RMIT in the Politics of Development.*

## Erosion of tribalism leads to Origin trouble

*By Tom Cranitch*

The pinnacle of rugby league in Australia, the Queensland v New South Wales state-of-origin series, will be decided next week in the native AFL code's heartland of Melbourne.

New South Wales will be coached by Graham Murray, a man who had to enter the deep north of Queensland as chief tactician for the Townsville-based Cowboys club, before earning the right to take the reigns of his home state's side. The Queenslanders will be led by imposing former player, Mal Meninga, who spent the best part of his rugby career ensconced in Canberra with the Raiders club. So revered was he in the nation's capital, his foreshadowed tilt at politics in the ACT's Legislative Assembly was set for success, until he pulled out in the midst of a media interview.

The beauty of origin football is that it allows these geographical blips in a person's career to be conveniently set aside and for the player to be remembered for their finest moments in the code. The considerable downside, as manifested by the "retirement" of the concept of origin football in Australian Rules, is that when married with a prominent and fluid national club competition, the tribal significance of the concept becomes diluted.

Despite recent chatter by opinion shapers within the AFL fraternity, origin football is a long way off any re-introduction, let alone elevation to something other than a quirky sideshow or pre-season tournament. In rugby league where it has had nearly three decades of sustained success, the cracks in the series are apparent for those bothering to look behind the hyperbole produced by the media and administrators (both guided by vested interests) to dissect what is going on.

To understand why the origin series has been the showpiece of rugby league since its introduction in 1980, one must appreciate Queensland's obsession with beating New South Wales. Queensland-based rugby league historian, Dr Greg Mallory, argues that this attitude is partially derived from the northern state's response to the "stealing" of local players by poker-machine rich Sydney clubs from the 1950s onwards which saw some of Queensland's best players thriving in blue jerseys. Juxtaposed by the sunshine state's well-illustrated social parochialism, the tribal dye was cast in very clear terms.

My support for the Maroons was born in the pre-origin days of the 1970s. Despite the Queenslanders' obvious passion and spirit, our skill levels and professionalism were below par. To get within a handful of points of the southerners was a major achievement in any game. Queensland failed to win a series in the 1970s; the decade saw them win just two, and draw two, from 29 matches. A 14-13 loss at Lang Park in 1977 for me still ranks as my favourite interstate encounter, when – despite leading for most of the match (a rare experience) – the superior fitness level of the Blues overpowered us in the dying minutes.

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The return of players to Queensland such as Arthur Beetson and Kerry Boustead and the emergence of a quite remarkable stable of home grown talent in Meninga, Gene Miles and the mercurial Wally Lewis, laid the foundation for Queensland to dominate origin clashes in the 1980s and to remain competitive in the 1990s. However, the widespread exposure through pay television of the National Rugby League (formed at the closure of the Super League war in 1998) and the pitching of Queensland-based NRL clubs in virtual origin clashes most weeks against Sydney teams, has eroded the emotional capital in rugby league's origin franchise.

History shows that in the evolution of Australian sport, once the tribal factor has been removed or significantly reduced, the sport or concept is vulnerable to alternatives. Cricket administrators had to do quickly back track when in the 1994-95 one day international cricket series, they introduced an Australia A team in direct competition to the national side to improve the appeal of a lack lustre international program. The experiment was short-lived when the two met in the finals series and Aussie cricket fans were divided in their loyalties, with more backing the underdog "A" side.

In spite of the cracks, next week's match is certain to be a television ratings winner in the eastern states, and will sell out at Docklands. And, despite my grim concerns for the future of origin, I will be there in the throng of supporters with my eight year-old son, cheering fervently for a Queensland victory and trying mightily to instil in his young mind the passion I felt three decades earlier. However, unless tribalism is revitalised in rugby league, I can't see how his generation will persist with the concept.

*Tom Cranitch is CEO of Jesuit Communications Australia. His greatest sporting feat was scoring two centuries for his Brisbane sub-district club, the Banyo Bloods, in the 1987-88 season.*

## BOOK REVIEWS

### **Beyond Left and Right**

*By Francis Sullivan*

Vital Signs, Vibrant Society: Securing Australia's Economic and Social Wellbeing,  
Craig Emerson  
UNSW Press, 2006, ISBN 0868408832, RRP \$29.95

Social democratic politics is light on content these days. Traditionally the voices of 'the left' have called for a better distribution of economic benefits. To ensure equity, they rely on government rather than private provision, and on heavy regulation. But as western societies age, income tax bases decline and universal public entitlements escalate in cost, the approach to pressing issues of public policy by many social democratic political parties have become limp, even outmoded.

They have been slow to embrace the benefits of market solutions in human services. They even demonise markets, if only to gain 'product differentiation' in the political debate. Yet public policy solutions require more than 'spin' and posturing. Well-reasoned analysis and rational robust frameworks susceptible to close scrutiny and assessment ultimately prevail. Only then will alternative policies receive support and will their architects gain credibility.

In the Federal Labor Party, many policy architects present their brand of 'plans' for Australia. Recently the most famous was former leader Mark Latham. Current shadow ministers Wayne Swan and Lindsay Tanner have also made valuable contributions across the economic and social challenges facing Australia. Now Dr. Craig Emerson, chair of Labor's economics committee, has weighed into the debate with an intelligent and provocative book. It clearly approaches social and economic issues from the right of the party. His starting point alone will win him friends and foes. But it will also put some energy into a staid policy making process that is more influenced by timidity than nerve.

Emerson's challenge was to outline a series of policy positions that could withstand intellectual scrutiny and at the same time could reverberate with the instincts of an old social democratic party. He has embarked on a project which can help shape a 'New Labor' on the political scene.

In *Vital Signs, Vibrant Society*, Emerson has demonstrated not only the breadth of his insights but also the landscape a modern political party must traverse if it is to gain popular appeal. He does not limit his discussion to macro economics. He also moves, somewhat less confidently, through specific segments of the economy, including the unfamiliar areas of health and aged care. Here his critics may find fertile ground. Emerson's propensity to accept the private provision of services and to encourage personal savings and insurance schemes will unsettle his party colleagues. Although he does not abandon Labor's most prized policies, namely Medicare and free public hospitals, Emerson encourages a different future. Labor will provide incentives for

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private enterprise in health care, expect more individual responsibility in aged care, and allow two-tiered structures where better-off people will have the liberty to purchase more.

Some will say that Emerson's perspective is more realistic than that of many to the left of his party. Others will say he risks moving too far to the right in the political spectrum. Most will recognise that he grapples with the real stuff of public policy making – how to provide essential services in a way that preserves social equity and economic efficiency. For that reason his contributions deserve serious attention.

Emerson's book comes as the political landscape is developing new contours. The political spectrum has divided those pursuing public entitlements for all from those restricting public subsidies to some. Now a new politics has emerged. It is more pragmatically based and seeks the middle ground in preference to the ideological high ground.

Other critics have claimed that the politics of 'left' and 'right' has passed. Some even describe a 'third way' of negotiating public discourse and policy making. But social democratic parties are slowly accepting the realities of market driven economies and the task of pursuing a just distribution of benefits. This demands that they acknowledge that markets can work and that governments have a role in eradicating social disadvantage and lack of opportunity. Individual responsibility and community obligations must find a balance. It acknowledges that government support is limited, but community initiative is often untapped.

This is the foundation stone of Emerson's contribution. It is refreshing, and undoubtedly will help shape a future Labor administration's approach when it is given the opportunity.

*Francis Sullivan is the Chief Executive Officer of Catholic Health Australia.*

## Keeping God's politics honest

*By Dave Hoskin*

God's Politics: Why the Right gets it wrong and the Left doesn't get it, Jim Wallis  
HarperCollins, 2005, ISBN 0060558288, RRP \$35.00

Jim Wallis' *God's Politics* is a timely examination of how American neoconservatives have monopolised religious activism. The interesting thing is that while this should sound familiar--after all, in the past year Australia has seen conservatively driven debate on subjects like abortion and intelligent design--it forces the reader to realise just how alien American politics can seem.

Years of alliances and cultural imperialism may lull us into believing otherwise, but Wallis' analysis of his country's political idiosyncrasies cannot help but highlight our differences. Put simply, *God's Politics* identifies the way in which many Americans' faith is conflated with their status as global superpower. This gives rise to the idea that the USA is literally a chosen nation. It breeds what Wallis terms 'easy certainty': a lack of interest in self-critical reflection, and ultimately a nation with a God complex.

When this 'chosen nation' is proved mortal after all, things get even more dangerous. One of Wallis' most incisive observations is how the American vulnerability exposed by 9/11 felt so painful and so unnatural. The comfort of easy certainties was cast shockingly into doubt, and the hatred of this unfamiliar vulnerability demanded the swift re-establishment of the 'natural' order. In pursuit of this goal, faith and patriotism were bound even more tightly together. Bad theology led to worse politics.

In an environment so dominated by fundamentalism, a book like *God's Politics* gives progressive Christianity a much-needed American accent. But unlike so many critics of the Bush administration, Wallis demonstrates a commitment to provide alternative political solutions. He does not merely voice his discontent. This kind of pragmatism is rare in contemporary political criticism. It is combined with Wallis' commitment to putting himself on the front line (among other things, he is active in combating poverty, and has visited Palestine in an attempt to find a non-violent solution). Together these qualities give him a credibility that few of the usual commentators enjoy.

Wallis decries the ways in which wedge politics have made reasoned religious debate almost impossible. In particular, he notes that although abortion and gay rights are important issues, they crowd out debate on any other topic in an extremely frustrating way. He may appear squeamish in burying his discussion of both these issues at the back of the book. But his argument that subjects like poverty should take precedence for people of faith is unassailable.

He also insists that piety does not guarantee good policy, and urges people to base their vote on results rather than on whether particular candidates share their faith. He recognises that if religion must play a part in politics, voters should at least ask how

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their beliefs can be applied consistently. A candidate who opposes gay marriage may sound attractive, but if he also favours warmongering and tax cuts for the rich, we might appropriately vote for someone else.

The chief failure of the book lies in its inability to clearly articulate precisely how to separate church and state. Wallis rightly points out that it is impossible for moral debate to take place in a vacuum, but fails to provide a convincing model in which a variety of beliefs can co-exist politically. Although he notes astutely that the public debate should be won by explaining ‘why the policies you advocate are better for the common good’, this is an ideal. It lacks the pragmatism of his other arguments.

The fundamental difficulty with it is that politicians are supposed to serve their entire constituency, not simply the ones that happen to share their religious beliefs. Few politicians do so. But if we genuinely expect them to pursue the common good, it is hard to believe that their religious convictions will never give rise to a conflict of duties. Wallis repeatedly instantiates figures like Martin Luther King or Desmond Tutu as workable political examples. He fails to realise that neither man was ever elected. This does not prove that religion should be banished from the public square; it means, however, that religion fits into democracy far less comfortably than Wallis contends.

On a more trivial level, Wallis' name-dropping becomes intrusive at times. When he rails against pop-culture phenomena like Survivor and against Janet Jackson's wardrobe malfunction, he only sounds priggish. But these minor flaws are redeemed by Wallis' emphasis on finding common ground, on formulating workable policy as opposed to simply winning arguments for their own sake, and on performing works of faith rather than paying lip service. For all my occasional misgivings, in this book Wallis urges dialogue, recognises that there a multiplicity of viewpoints, and most importantly, is willing to listen.

*Dave Hoskin is a graduate of the University of Melbourne and the Victorian College of the Arts. His writing has appeared in Metro and Pathway, and his short films have screened at festivals around the world*



## FILM REVIEWS

### Impersonating genius for gain

*By Sebastien De Robillard*

Colour Me Kubrick. Director: Brian Cook. Starring: John Malkovich, Richard E. Grant, Marisa Berenson and Jim Davidson. Running Time: 86 minutes.

Colour Me Kubrick is not quite a work of satirical genius, but it is a very satisfying film. For all of its polish and craft, it lacks a certain something; a quality that could have raised it from being a good film, and up to the level of a great film.

Allan Conway, played by John Malkovich, is a conman in London. He seduces his gullible prey by impersonating famed (and now sadly departed) American auteur Stanley Kubrick. By this false pretense, and freely distributed promises of soon to be attained fame, Conway is able to drink, live and holiday for free. Based on a true life story, the film is set in the mid-nineties. It presages the growing mania for celebrity, and also demonstrates how easily people's hopes and dreams can be used against them.

Director Brian Cook, formerly a first assistant director for Kubrick, sprinkles the film liberally with references to the dead director. Actors, locations, and especially the musical score all recall the him.

The film opens with two rough-looking, bowler hat-wearing men walking down a street. They are looking for the false Kubrick's address. Cook's use of 'The Thieving Magpie' by Rossini heightens the comedy of the scene. They knock on the door of a fine looking English home, only to be confronted by an elderly gentleman who has never heard of Kubrick. The scene recalls Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*, but unlike in that film, the elderly man does not get hurt.

John Malkovich stands out from the rest of the cast as Conway, an openly gay middle aged man who neither resembles nor sounds like Stanley Kubrick. Malkovich is mischievous and adventurous in his playing of the role of a man whose chief goal is to keep himself happily intoxicated. The other performances are serviceable but not outstanding. The cast clearly enjoyed themselves, and their enjoyment is reflected on the screen in their energetic performances.

The film comments pointedly on 'modern society' at times, without becoming sanctimonious. This man can go a long way by dropping names or taking on a fancy job title such as 'film director'. And in doing so, he becomes slightly ridiculous. By name-dropping, and false praise, Conway abuses his victims' confidences – but do we really feel sorry for them? Generally his victims prefer not to press charges, for fear of public ridicule. As long as they bear in mind the movie is about Conway, and the legend surrounding Kubrick, rather than the director himself. Kubrick fans will enjoy this pithy, sharp film, but others may leave feeling vaguely unsatisfied.

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*Sebastien de Robillard is a freelance writer. He is currently spending this month getting better acquainted with his couch watching every game of the World Cup, after spending the last six months travelling through Italy.*

## Animation rescues a limp plot

*By Donald Russell*

Renaissance: 105 Minutes, Rating: M

Director: Christian Volckman, Starring (Voices of): Daniel Craig, Catherine McCormack, Ian Holm, Jonathan Pryce

Set in Paris in 2054, the animated science fiction film, *Renaissance*, is visually stunning. In the film, Ilona, a genetic researcher for the sinister corporation Avalon, disappears. Police Captain Karas (Daniel Craig) is charged with the task of finding Ilona. Avalon considers her an asset that they need at any cost. Karas and Ilona's sister, Bislane, soon discover, though, that they aren't the only ones looking the missing girl. What she knows is immeasurably important for Avalon and for the future of the human race.

The plot of *Renaissance* is pure film-noir, and not particularly compelling: Karas is the uncompromising cop, Bislane the troubled sister, Ilona the seemingly innocent victim. The prescribed mysterious researchers, corporate villains and henchmen all appear. A formulaic film that fails to delve into the relationships between most of the characters. Nor does it explore in depth the more interesting allegorical elements of the narrative, such as the comparison of Avalon to modern pharmaceutical corporations, and society's obsession with beauty and ageing.

While the narrative elements of *Renaissance* are average, the film shines brightly in one area. The black and white animated visuals are incredibly good. From an early scene where Karas rescues a child in a shootout, to the future visions of Paris's most famous landmarks such as Notre Dame, the Eiffel Tower and Sacré Coeur, the design of the landscapes and the movement of the characters captivate the viewer. The visuals alone make this a remarkable and sometimes eerily beautiful film.

The animation in *Renaissance* uses the motion capture technique. In it actors wear specially designed suits that track the movement of their bodies. The actors are then digitalised and placed in the animated world of the film. The technique gives a highly realistic appearance to the movement of the characters. As a result the 'performances' of the characters in *Renaissance* are extremely fluid and natural.

The animators have also strongly emphasised lighting and shadow. With a turn of the head or the dancing of light across a face, the visual landscape on screen changes, sometimes drastically. The shading and contrast are so developed that it is easy to become mesmerised by *Renaissance*'s visual aspects, and totally to forget the plot of the film.

Fans of animation, science fiction or visual art must see this film. But anyone looking to escape for a couple of hours will also enjoy it.

*Donald Russell is a freelance film critic and writer based in Melbourne.*

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## Sleep

*By Kate Llewellyn*

1.

To enter the bed we kneel  
And fall into the white abyss.  
Sleep is a form of fainting,  
The altar of the pillow swirls with wisps  
Of fading consciousness - a priest  
Comes down the aisle flicking dreams out  
From an ancient ewer.

2.

Watch a sleeping man,  
Even then they still seem awesome  
To me with an air of tragedy  
Like a fallen horse.  
His conversation with the night  
Is not the same as mine,  
Our personalities are the sheets  
On which we sleep  
And no amount of washing  
Wears them out.

3.

Soft snores from sleeping children  
The flicker of a limb -  
Their depth of sleep - entranced, they seem  
To travel sucking their thumbs  
In the carriage of their cot  
Across the ruts of history.

4.

A ward of sleeping women  
Is a peaceful boat.  
Jaws unleashed like brassieres,  
They lie trusting on the deck.  
Their devoted illnesses sleep beside them,  
Only the doctors' notes clipped like love letters  
To the bed  
Reveal the destination of each affair.