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## Emboldening lay Catholics

EUREKA STREET TV

*Peter Kirkwood*

In this fiftieth anniversary year of the opening of Vatican II, a number of interviews on *Eureka Street TV* have featured critical reflections from prominent Catholic thinkers and activists on various aspects of the Council.

This interview is with journalist, author and broadcaster, Clifford Longley, who is one of the UK's leading lay Catholics. He was invited to Australia by the progressive Catholic organisation, [Catalyst for Renewal](#), and he delivered a series of lectures in May this year on the legacy of Vatican II.

In the interview he focuses on the issues and challenges in developing a mature Catholic laity in the light of the teachings of the Council, and the video also features excerpts from the inaugural Rosemary Goldie Lecture he gave on this topic.

(Continues below)

It's fitting that his talk was delivered in this context, as [Rosemary Goldie](#) was one of Australia's leading lay Catholics. She was a theologian and lay activist, and one of the first women to be named an official observer of Vatican II. She died in Sydney in 2010 at the age of 94.

After the Council for several years she was Under-Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, one of the first women and lay people to serve as a bureaucrat in the Curia. In this capacity, in the 60s and 70s she helped organise a number of major international lay congresses in Rome.

After this she was appointed a Professor of Pastoral Theology at the Lateran University in Rome. While large in intellect and influence, she was tiny in physical stature, and Pope John XXIII referred to her affectionately as 'la piccinina' which translates from the Italian as something like 'a little slip of a thing.'

Clifford Longley was born in the UK in 1940, and has had a distinguished career mainly as a print journalist. He worked as a general reporter on a number of newspapers before specialising from 1972 onwards in the coverage of British and international religious affairs.

He wrote a weekly column on religion for *The Times* from 1972 till 1992, and from 1992 to 2000 for the *Daily Telegraph*. This made him the longest continuously appearing columnist in British national papers, and in 1986 he was honoured with an award for 'Specialist Writer of the Year' in the British Press Awards.

During this time, as well as his work as a columnist, he was leader writer and religious affairs editor for these newspapers. Since 1994 he has been a columnist, contributing editor and leader writer for the prestigious weekly Catholic journal, [The Tablet](#).

In more recent times he has also made regular appearances on radio. Since 2002 he's been a contributor to [Thought for the Day](#), and since 2004 he's been a panelist on [The Moral Maze](#), both on BBC Radio 4.

Longley has also been a consultant to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, and has been on the advisory council of the [Three Faiths Forum](#). In 1998 he was made an honorary fellow of St Mary's College at the University of Surrey.

As well as his prolific writing for newspapers and journals, his books include *The Times Book of Clifford Longley*, *The Worlock Archive* and *Chosen People*.

## The beauty that was Peter Steele's mind

### EULOGY

Morag Fraser



Peter Steele SJ — priest, poet, teacher, essayist, homilist, and friend — died on Wednesday 27 June 2012.

During *Eureka Street's* first months, in 1991, Peter Steele gave its editor some riding instructions. Media magnate was not his style. As Jesuit Provincial, he'd had to learn the rigors and language of authority, but cant, prescription, or proscription — they weren't his style either. 'Publish the very best writing you can lay your hands on', he said. That was it.

But it was more than enough. From a poet and a man as subtle, mercurial and profound as Peter Steele, the words were both guide and challenge. Anyone who had experienced his classes at Melbourne University, read his books, shared a meal or heard one of his pithy, grounded-in-life homilies, would understand what he meant, know how freighted his words were. How they pointed to integrity and *Ã©lan* in the wielding of language.

We were sitting at the time in a pub in Richmond. It was called the All Nations, an old city hotel jammed in between Housing Commission high risers and the flats that were home to the Vietnamese who'd come here by boat in less politically expedient times. There was an old tailor's dummy in the dining room corner, costumed and feathered to conjure the pub's heritage of hospitality. She became a kind of totem for *Eureka Street*. And Peter Steele became its guardian angel.

He'd grimace, or just laugh at my description. And in an ideal world, we would then have an argument or a meander about the varieties and meanings of angels. And how some of them are swooping, formidable presences, always at one's back. Peter's friend and fellow poet, the ever questing, unbelieving Peter Porter, wrote about angels in a way that struck home for both of us. In *An Angel In Blythburgh Church* Porter's angels, in their 'enskiéd formation', are mute but exhortatory. He calls one a 'stern-faced plummet'. 'The face is crudely carved, simplified by wind / It looks straight at God and waits for orders.'

Over the years, I've waited for Peter's orders to be transmitted to me, down here on the ground. They've come in code, in the poems, in the essays and reviews that he wrote for *Eureka Street*, and in all his books and talks and homilies. I am still deciphering the code, and will for the rest of my life, with the kind of exultant gratitude that one feels in the face of a budding magnolia, or a rainbow, or the western sun.

These past weeks, as Peter has been visibly dying, his flesh pared back to bone but the smile and the flash of his glance insisting that he is still the man we know, he has become a gathering place for so many. People have come to visit. They have written, whispered in corridors, sung his songs, smiled and cried, waiting on him. Poets and friends have written and rung and emailed from all corners of the world that Peter once ranged across and took in so avidly. It's hard to eat a meal, mend a glove, see a bird, trace a thought or intuition and not have Peter Steele spring into mind. He has inscribed in his prose and poetry so much of our fugitive longing, apprehension, our raw humanity. Often at a distance himself, he draws one close to understanding, and affirmation of a shared state of being.

Peter sometimes wrote about sloth, and turned the accusation inward. It's presumption to judge any fellow's scouring of his own soul, but it used to make me smile. I was the editor who received Peter's immaculate copy, always on time, to length, and according to his brief.

I knew that if we found even the slightest literal (once or twice in thirteen years) Peter would look pained or even unbelieving. He was a driven craftsman. Technique obsessed him, but technique always as the conduit of meaning. He knew the soarings and harrowings of human experience, but how to shape that in words? 'James Joyce', he wrote in one essay, 'reporting that he had spent the morning on a sentence, and asked whether he was looking for the *mot juste*, said that, no, he had all the words — he was looking for the order.'

Peter found it, the order, over and over, and died, I am sure, still looking for it. What he leaves for us, who now have leisure to read all his words, and to puzzle through the maze of beauty that was his mind, is the heart to do the same, to keep trying, over and over, in his words, 'to find out what the devil is going on.'

Bless you, Peter Steele.

## Euthanasing the disabled

### HUMAN RIGHTS

*Moira Byrne Garton*

Last week, the Supreme Court of the Canadian province British Columbia released its decision in the *Carter v Attorney General Canada* case. The decision [lifted the ban](#) on physician-assisted suicide, and followed a [courtroom battle](#) late last year. While some lobby groups [welcomed the decision](#), other groups lamented the development and encouraged residents of British Columbia to write to their politicians in [protest](#).



Many people assume that objections to euthanasia or assisted suicide are only grounded in [religious beliefs](#) relating to the sanctity of life and a belief in the divine breath that animates human existence. Some supporters of euthanasia state that human life is [not sacred](#). Other supporters of euthanasia acknowledge the mystery of life and death and see assisted suicide as a personal decision and a means of self-determination; a legitimate way to decide to end their suffering.

But there are many objections to euthanasia or assisted suicide based solely on public policy reasoning, rather than religious belief. Some argue against assisted suicide for based on precedent and the so-called 'slippery slope'. Others argue against it because it places medical professionals in a difficult ethical predicament. And others argue against it out of concern for vulnerable groups such as [elderly or disabled people](#).

In fact, [people with disabilities](#) are a significant protest group in euthanasia debates. However, their minority representation, vulnerable status and the limitations of both people with disabilities and their carers means their voice is frequently muffled in public discussion. This is despite the compelling reasons for the opposition of many in the disability sector to euthanasia in all its forms.

Dr Gregor Wolbring of the University of Calgary presents these reasons by refuting each of the four safeguards proposed by euthanasia advocates. He argues that the scenario proffered by the right-to-die movement — a terminally ill, mentally competent adult patient in physical pain who seeks to make their own decision about their death — is a carefully chosen case designed to elicit sympathy for the cause. Such a case masks the sinister implications of euthanasia for people with disabilities.

In response to the first criterion, that euthanasia must relate to a terminal condition, Wolbring cites numerous euthanasia supporters who have broadened the definition of 'terminal'. Terminal patients are variously incorporated with those who are in constant suffering for which there is not hope for recovery ('incurable'), those who are fearful of dependence and who wish to avoid possible 'indignity', or with people perceiving their medical condition to be 'violating their fundamental values'.

Wolbring also quotes right-to-die advocates arguments that euthanasia should be available to 'severely disabled', or 'any competent individual who has a good reason to die'. In Australia, South Australia's [Voluntary Euthanasia Bill 1996](#) characterised those requesting euthanasia as being 'hopelessly ill', which was defined as having 'an injury or illness that ...] seriously and irreversibly impairs the person's quality of life so that life has become intolerable to that person.'

The second gauge proposed by euthanasia advocates and refuted by Wolbring is

euthanasia being only for a person who can provide informed consent, a 'competent' adult. However, Wolbring notes the Canadian murder cases successfully defended by parents who have 'euthanased' their disabled children.

On the third point, that euthanasia is designed to end physical pain, Wolbring notes how emotional pain is now included by a number of jurisdictions, for astonishingly broad reasons such as 'physical condition' (after all, gender, race and other minority groups are 'physical conditions'.')

I would add the remaining irony in the inconsistency of approach to various people wishing to end their lives. A young, fit, healthy person wishing to kill themselves is offered psychiatric treatment, whereas an old, disabled or ill person who wishes to end their life is accorded the 'right to die', even if they are psychologically affected. This includes grief or depression over an inability to adjust to a disability.

The final argument, that euthanasia offers self-determination, is more difficult. On the one hand, people with disabilities would be discriminated against if they cannot make their own decisions as would others in society. On the other hand, it is discriminatory to accept that acquiring disability is grounds to end one's life.

For example, the position of other people with a perceived poor quality of life such as some indigenous groups, drug addicts, prisoners and homelessness would not be acceptable as a basis for suicide. Moreover, it would be discriminatory to not assist people to [come to terms](#) with their disability when they wish to die, just as it is discriminatory not to assist people to come to terms with their sexuality or mental illness when they are [suicidal](#) as a result.

Interestingly, although at the end of last year a poll indicated that two thirds of Canadians supported medically-assisted dying, media polls after the British Columbia decision reflected the opposite view. Euthanasia advocates [attributed](#) this to pro-life lobby groups stacking the poll results. I prefer to hope that maybe Canadian people are more circumspect after physician-assisted suicide became case law.



## Women heroes of Muslim-Christian unity

### FILMS

*Tim Kroenert*

***Where Do We Go Now? (M)*. Director: Nadine Labaki. Starring Claude Baz Moussawbaa, Leyla Hakim and Nadine Labaki. 110 minutes**

A funeral procession of Muslim and Christian woman along a wide, unpaved road, their feet falling in time with the stirring score. Gradually they begin to employ subtle choreographed movements and gestures, as, stone-faced, they rhythmically slap photographs of (presumably dead) men against their hearts.

It is one of several endearing — almost Bollywood-like — musical sequences that punctuate key moments in the otherwise dramatic Lebanese film *Where Do We Go Now?* The sequences leaven the at times earnest film but also reflect the role and attitude of the female citizens of the remote Lebanese village where the story is set.

The women here are responsible for maintaining unity among the mixed religious populace, even as inter-religious conflicts rage beyond the village boundaries. It's a role they embrace with determined optimism. But the 'unity' they maintain is tenuous and to some extent a fantasy. The destination of the women on the dirt road is a segregated cemetery where numerous village husbands and sons lie buried, youthful victims of past conflicts.

At the beginning of the film, peace is in place. But it isn't to last. Television comes to the village courtesy of a rudimentary satellite rig and an ancient TV set, which the mayor describes quaintly as a step into the 21st century. With television comes news of conflicts that seem bound to inflame dormant tensions among the hot-headed men.

The brutishness and herd mentality of the men — seemingly blind to the futility and counter-productivity of further violent in-fighting — is frequently contrasted with the level-headedness and conscientiousness of the women.

When the mosque is vandalised — part of an escalating chain of slight and counter-slight between the Muslim and Christian men — the women are shown dutifully cleaning and restoring this sacred space, while the men, elsewhere, snipe and bicker about the best means of taking revenge.

When a Christian man takes out his anger at his Muslim fellows by literally kicking the legs out from under a crippled child, two women, a Christian and a Muslim, rush to help the child back to his feet.

Ultimately full-blown violence does threaten, whereupon the women concoct increasingly extreme measures to keep the men subdued, and bloodshed at bay. The film's uneven tone (ranging from the deadly earnest to the slapstick) is remedied by its inventiveness; the plot twists sometimes shocking, sometimes

humorous, always surprising.

In the end it's clear that for peace to be more than a delusion, division needs to be neutralised at its source, and god conceived as a matron of togetherness, rather than a mannish mascot for mutual massacre.

## The end of equal opportunity in Victoria

### POLITICS

*Moira Rayner*



Equal opportunity commissions were set up in the 1970s because governments accepted that people who lacked equality before the law, or who were marginalised or persecuted because of their race or sex (and later, disability), were not in a position to sue. As a resource for those who could afford to use them, courts were going way beyond their reach, and their confidence.

The new commissions gave the disadvantaged the right to make a complaint to an independent authority which could help the respondents understand the clearly established human right to equal opportunity. It would also establish the facts, and then facilitate confidential conciliation.

That way, attitudes could and did change, because the new Commissioners and their Boards had real powers. They could investigate, as well as protect people against victimisation, and insist on dispute resolution.

The Commission also had authority. The Commissioners could dismiss frivolous or misconceived complaints because they were the gatekeepers to the tribunals.

In 1978, airline boss Reg Ansett didn't fancy employing the best qualified pilot because she was a woman (and he as a businessman didn't want a girl flying him about). [Deborah Wardley](#) (pictured left) took him on through the Victorian Equal Opportunity Board. Ultimately she won in the Victorian Supreme Court, and the significance of well-toothed watchdogs became nationally and internationally appreciated.

Victoria was a leader in those days.

However the state's current Attorney General Robert Clark is no defender of the rights of the weak. Yesterday came the [news](#) that the [Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission](#) (VEOHRC) members had resigned *en masse*, because he refused — after a three month delay — to accept their unanimous recommendation for their new Commissioner. He wants somebody else.

So much for the credibility of the new Commission.

In 2011 Clark gutted the Equal Opportunity Act by removing the autonomy of the Commissioner, who is now a public servant reporting to the Commission. This is the Board whose decisions he has now also dismissed. He also amended the Act so that the Commission must not only be answerable to the executive instead of the parliament, but also cannot instigate the investigation of complaints of systemic discrimination without the approval of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT).

The Commission's only 'power' is to 'educate' the public (Reg Ansett didn't learn anything until his defence was dismissed). Those who submit 'issues' may enjoy the feeble opportunity of voluntary, hands-off mediation.

No longer does the Commissioner have the authority of the Act. The respondent no longer has to offer any explanation for the treatment that is the subject of the complaint. Nor is he or she obliged to participate in mediation. The aggrieved — either side - can bypass the Commission entirely. Those who perceive that they have been treated unfairly by a bully or bigot must establish their claims in the VCAT.

The vaunted power of the Commissioner to conduct investigations without a complaint in cases of apparent systemic discrimination was neutered by Mr Clark's inserting a statutory obligation that the Commission obtain VCAT's permission

An 'equal opportunity and human rights' commission that can be overridden by an Attorney General who states publicly that he does not 'believe' in the Victorian Charter of Human rights and Responsibilities lacks even symbolic value. The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission is the only body with the responsibility to advise on how the charter should be interpreted in court cases. It also monitors its operations and reports to the Minister.

The Commission members have resigned, and rightly so. The Commission is a shell, a betrayal of the purposes of Rupert Hamer, the great Liberal Premier who set up the Equal Opportunity Board and appointed its first Commissioner. He established it in 1977 in the name of the conservative, liberal values of giving voice to the voiceless, justice for the marginalised, respect for the rule of law, and guidance on their civic responsibilities to employers, educators, service providers — and governments..

The Baillieu government has fulfilled the desire of the Kennett government when, in 1993, it acted to remove the autonomy and authority of the then Commissioner for Equal Opportunity.

I had drawn the public's attention to the attack on the Equal Opportunity Office's powers, by seeking an injunction to prevent Mr Kennett's government from decommissioning all women's prisons, and placing the women prisoners in the Jika Jika division of Pentridge Prison. There they would have been doubly confined within a unit described, after a fatal fire in it just five years earlier, as unfit for human habitation.

I did so because I had the power, vested in me by the Act and the then Equal Opportunity Board President Margaret Ritzkalla, to investigate allegations of discrimination made by women prisoners detained in a men's prison, to report and to seek to resolve the issue by negotiation. My research showed that women detained with men in prisons designed for a single sex were not only discriminated against by such double detention but their health suffered, so badly that they tended to kill themselves.

I tried to resolve it as the Act then required, without success.

When I asked for the injunction — and told the people of Victoria that I had done so, and why — the people of Victoria spoke with one voice. They agreed that the plans were cruel. The projects were abandoned without the need for an injunction.

There was a price, which has come to be paid this week.

At about the same time, I had received complaints from Aboriginal students who had been excluded from secondary schooling after the closure of Northlands Secondary College. There they had achieved great success in education. Northlands then a unique learning environment for students who had experienced dispossession and exclusion and poverty. Aboriginal students thrived and succeeded there because of its supportive environment, innovative and flexible teaching methods and its strong connections with students' families and the local community.

The Kennett Government closed it down in order to save money, the same argument put for the closure of women's jails. Mr Kennett publicly instructed me to reject the complaint because in his view there was no right to complain about the discriminatory effects of government decisions driven by economic policy.

There was no way to resolve this through conciliation either. But after the Board said it was indirectly discriminatory on the basis of race to set up an education system without a 'Northlands Secondary College' in it, the children went on to the Victorian Supreme Court to assert their right to complain and be heard. .

In a monumental decision brought down two years later, the Victorian Court of Appeal upheld the right of Aboriginal children, who had been deprived of equitable access to education by the one school that took their experiences properly into account, to enjoy the fruits of the decision in their favour. Meanwhile, the Kennett Government set up 'koori' colleges especially for Indigenous students. Unfortunately we know the result: a cohort of Northlands pupils was lost.

The VEOHRC is an empty shell, because of the conscious act of a man who 'believes' that human rights are a bad idea, and that their watchdog should be tamed. I hope that Mr Clark's personal choice for Commissioner does not accept the accolade that he would bestow upon him. There is no honour in this position.

In 1993, a couple of weeks after I moved to prevent the closure of women's prisons, I found myself made 'redundant' in the 'restructure' that was quickly announced. I have never regretted it. Sometimes a job is more important than the individual who holds it. But the other price was the rapid undoing of the powers of those administering the Act. It is now complete, and people of Victoria are the weaker for the 'human rights watchdog' that has been made a lapdog.

To those affected by this process — this interference with the 'independent' equal opportunity and human rights 'commission', this swatting down of the body

meant to create democratic conversations about power, by the man responsible for the rule of law in Victoria — I say this: you have a role in the battle for our representative democracy. Take up that struggle.

Equal opportunity and anti-discrimination bodies have been attacked and undermined from the day they started. They were then, and are now, watchdogs on human rights and civil liberties that were accessible to ordinary people, respondents and complainants. We have watched these bodies decay, and high-profile litigation take their place. This is not the way to settle disagreements about respect, equality, justice, discrimination, or victimisation.

This is the way the watchdog ends: not with a bark, but a whimper.

## Knowing the needs of refugees

### POLITICS

*Susan Metcalfe*

For a brief moment last week, we were spared the usual bluster about asylum seekers from politicians and commentators. But with the gloves now off we learn that the recent deaths at sea were the fault of Julia Gillard, Tony Abbott, Kevin Rudd, Malcolm Fraser, social justice advocates, the moralising left, the right, the Greens, the carbon tax, and apparently me.



Trying to shame people with blame in the aftermath of a tragedy can be a self-serving exercise and much of what is written serves only to reinforce tired political agendas. But all of us must accept some responsibility for the debacle that is Australia's approach to asylum seekers and we must work together to find solutions.

In Saturday's [Age](#), Nick Dyrenfurth took aim at refugee supporters, who he claims have failed in their moralising about refugees. But Dyrenfurth is just another in a long line of commentators to preach his own brand of morality and to denounce others with the claim that he knows something the rest of us have failed to notice. One thing I learnt quickly when I entered the refugee debate many years ago was that everyone is an expert.

But it should be mandatory for anyone writing on the subject to spend solid time in detention centres before calling on others to sugar coat their views and to research the multitude of campaigns and contributions to a debate lasting more than a decade. Dyrenfurth ignores the hard and sometimes invisible work of Australians who have given up time, money and personal lives, to try to shift public perceptions — often successfully - and assist refugees over many years.

But more problematic is the refusal of our politicians to acknowledge or take steps to address a refugee's dilemma before he or she steps onto a boat. Too poll driven to even explain the human desperation that leads to boat journeys, our major parties swing with the most favourable political breeze.

When Kevin Rudd came to power in 2007, many Australians hoped he would position boat arrivals within the global context that John Howard had refused to provide. But Rudd failed to live up to expectations, preferring to appeal to voters on all sides of the debate with his focus on the 'vile' people smugglers.

The Coalition has been similarly motivated and with each tragedy comes the message that Coalition policies aim to save lives. But only the naïve could believe that cries to 'stop the boats' are anything more than a pitch to particular Australians; those who don't necessarily lack compassion, but are more concerned with improving their own lives.

Last week was Refugee Week in Australia; a time to focus on the needs of millions of refugees worldwide. But Shadow Immigration spokesperson Scott Morrison had little to say about desperate people and chose instead to converse [on Sydney radio](#) about refugees arriving with jewellery and ...œwads of cash... . It was a grating reminder of Philip Ruddock's past attempts to defame refugees with claims that they threw their children in the water, asked for two-in-one shampoo, double-dipped with charities, or purchased mobile phones.

The Opposition is adamant that its approach to asylum seekers has at least been consistent, but this is simply not true. When the Pacific Solution was dismantled in 2008 we heard barely a murmur of dissent from a demoralised opposition. In 2009, the then-shadow immigration spokesperson Sharman Stone [told the ABC](#): ...œwe don't need the Pacific Solution now, that's Nauru Island and Manus Island, because we have the Christmas Island centre completed. A very well structured and appropriate facility...|...

After years of stuff ups and severe damage caused to refugees under John Howard's leadership (resulting in millions of dollars in compensation), Australians were seeking a more humane approach. And for a time, the Coalition was happy to play along.

But as the boats kept coming and the tabloid pastime again kicked in — focusing on anything but the tragic stories of the people on the boats -Tony Abbott arrived to resurrect past policies.

Abbott's populist approach has forced the Government to embrace the Pacific Solution it once found so repulsive, but his stance is now so bizarre that he is denying support for his own Nauru policy. And his opposition to a Malaysia arrangement stands in stark contrast to John Howard's attempts to send refugees from Nauru to Malaysia, and of course to his own Indonesia push back plan.

Never has the Coalition's obstruction mentality been so clear as in Scott Morrison's appearance on the [ABC's 7.30](#) on Monday night. During the interview with Leigh Sales, Morrison indicated that even if the government agreed to all of the Coalition's policies and dropped its own Malaysia arrangement, the Opposition would still not offer its support. Only if he and Tony Abbott were allowed to govern could these measures be implemented successfully, he claimed. It's all about getting elected.

I would not personally oppose sending asylum seekers to Malaysia under a genuine regional arrangement, as long as adequate protection and conditions, a fair process, legal and human rights, and the potential for resettlement within a reasonable timeframe were guaranteed. But dumping refugees on tiny islands while we wait for their mental health to break down, before bringing them to Australia, makes no sense. Malaysia has a central role to play in a long term regional solution; Nauru does not.

It is obvious that the lure of boat journeys would diminish significantly, although



not completely, if safer options and more resettlement places were provided for refugees in the region — just how desperate would you have to be to risk death on the ocean rather than remain where you are? But would a focus outside of our borders win votes for either of the major parties? In the short term, probably not.

If John Howard had invested in long term regional strategies during his four terms in office, instead of seeking short term political gain, we might today be facing a different landscape. The tragedy of a refugee's life does not begin when we pull his or her body from the ocean and unless we can provide better alternatives to boat travel we will always end up back here trying to find someone to blame.

## The not so good Samaritans

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas



## Love in the fifties

FICTION

Mary Manning

It is February 1952. I am with friends at Jim's place when we hear the news that King George VI has died. Jim's mother who loves the Royal Family is in floods of tears. She brings us a plate of ham and pickle sandwiches then hurries off to mourn with her British neighbours. We listen to solemn BBC radio voices telling us how sad this is for everyone in the British Commonwealth.



Our lives have changed twice in a few weeks. Our school days ended before Christmas and now our King is dead. It seems our party is dead too. Jim and his

friend Mervyn whisper seriously in a corner. A dark-haired boy I have not met before keeps looking across at me. We're all very subdued until my sister Phil leaps up and starts dancing around the room while singing in an opera singer voice:

A party's not a funeral  
Just cos the King is dead  
So let's get in a party mood  
And have some fun instead.

It's like she's let off fireworks. Everyone starts laughing and kidding around. Jim gets a bottle of Pimms from the cocktail cabinet and mixes us drinks. He tunes the radio to music and we dance: Goodnight Irene, goodnight Irene, I'll see you in my dreams.

Goodnight King George sings Phil and she slips off to be with Robert, her boyfriend who our parents have forbidden her to see. Dad says she's too young, Mum says he's not suitable. She thinks Jim is suitable for me as we are both in the church tennis club. I like being with Jim but sometimes wish I had a boyfriend who would cuddle and kiss me in the park, someone less harmless.

Woozy with Pimms I find myself in a dark corner with the dark-haired boy. He winds himself around me like a boa constrictor and puts his hand up my skirt. I hate being handled like this — there's nothing romantic about it. I manage to get away from him and then I stay close to Jim and Mervyn where I am safe.

Jim walks me home from the party. We walk apart — how I want to hold his hand — talking of safe things like exam results and study plans. I lean against the gate and he puts one hand each side of my shoulders but away from my body, like a cage. The party drinks have made me bolder than usual.

'Are you going to kiss me?' I ask.

He leans towards me and brushes his lips against my cheek.

'Is that all?'

'Yes, Eile, that's all. We'll talk about it another time.' But Jim never did talk about it.

'Eileen, come into the study when you've finished tidying up the kitchen. Your father and I have something we want to talk to you about.' What I have done that deserves a formal meeting in Dad's gloomy study?

I feel I'm about to be interviewed for a job I have not applied for. This is all very strange as my parents rarely talk to me privately let alone seated formally behind a closed door. Dad hardly talks to me at all and then only briefly about wasting money or leaving unnecessary lights burning. He never kisses or touches

me. Mum chatters to me and Phil when we are captive in the kitchen doing dishes or peeling vegetables, but it's mostly about unsuitable clothes or bad manners so we don't really listen.

She asks if I had a good party.

'Everyone was too sad about the King to have fun.'

'We're all sad, but it's your sister we want to talk about.' She puts her elbow on the table and rubs her nose with her index finger. She nods towards my father as a signal that he should take part in the inquisition.

He frowns at me. 'Didn't your mother tell you and Philippa to walk home together?'

'Jim walked me home.'

'So where was Philippa? And more to the point, where is she now?'

'You'll need to ask Phil.'

'Call her by her given name please. You make her sound like a boy.' Trust him to bring in one of his favourite gripes.

'Was she with that boy? That apprentice with cement on his boots.' Mum's face reddens with anger. 'Couldn't even finish his Intermediate Certificate.'

Dad puts his hand in the air like a footy umpire. 'Florence, that's enough. We are talking about Philippa, not Robert.'

I've had enough of this conversation. 'If you want to talk about Phil or Robert you should do it when they are here. In the meantime I told Jim I'd meet him at the beach so I need to go now.' My voice is controlled but inwardly I am seething. How dare they drag me in here and attack other people.

I pull on my bathers, shorts and a shirt and pedal my bike furiously towards the beach, imagining my parents thinking of suitable punishments for insubordination, bad manners, inappropriate behaviour, lack of respect or whatever archaic crime they can drum up. Then I am lying next to Jim on the rough wooden planks around the baths sobbing my heart out.

Jim pats my shoulder without talking. He can't cope with something as intimate as comforting a girl in distress in a public place.

A distraction occurs near us. A boy has speared a stingray and dragged it up onto the planks. It is suffocating and shuddering in pain. One after another it pushes out tiny stingrays which flap for a time before dying in the sun. The boy scoops the dead ray and its babies and throws them over the railing into the sea. I shed a few more tears for all these deaths but feel better when Jim and I swim across the deep end of the baths and back. We rest on the planks and talk about the way stingrays the size of card tables manage to slip under the bars.

When I get home my father is sitting outside the bike shed as though he has been waiting there all afternoon. He takes hold of the handlebars of my bike and rubs his hand against the chrome.

'Nice bike. You look after it well.'

'Thank you, Dad.'

'Eileen, there is something I need to say.' He starts to wheel the bike into the shed, stops and looks down at the ground. 'Your mother and I are proud of you for being so loyal to your sister.'

I don't remember him using words like proud and loyal before, unless he was talking about war or history. Never in relation to himself or me. I am suddenly choked up with an emotion like sadness or love.

'I was an apprentice myself when I met your mother.' Is this a roundabout apology for Mum's outburst about Robert or for their suspicions about Phil? I wonder if he's been practising this conversation all afternoon. It's time he practised hugging me instead of stroking my bike. Why does he find it so hard to show emotion? Why does Jim?

Now it is June 1953. Yesterday Queen Elizabeth 11 was crowned in Westminster Abbey. Mum has the newspaper spread out on the kitchen table and she reads bits aloud while preparing lunch. 'Listen to what the Queen said: 'Throughout all my life and with all my heart I shall strive to be worthy of your trust. Isn't that just beautiful.'

Robert shows up at the door to take Phil to Luna Park and under the spell of the Queen's vow my mother invites him to stay for lunch. She has boiled up half a pig's head which she now arranges on a carving plate with parsley in its half snout, its one ear and one eye socket. Around it she puts boiled parsnips and potatoes.

'You need nourishing food for the physical work you are doing, Robert.'

'Thank you Mrs B but we've arranged to meet some friends so we need to take off now.'

I pick at my food before excusing myself. I want to reread the letter Jim has sent me. He has small neat writing.

Dear Eileen, You have been my friend for a long time now and I have always valued your friendship. I love being with you at dances and parties, or at the beach like we were that day when we saw the stingray. I love being with you anywhere as you are one of my best friends.

I want to tell you that I cannot be more than a friend to you.

Over the last year Mervyn and I have become more than friends. We are in love and intend to spend our lives together. I think you will have worked this out for

yourself, Eileen, as you are so aware of other people.

The distressing thing is that my feelings towards Mervyn are considered immoral in most circles including my own family. If we make our relationship public we will risk being accused of crime. So in the eyes of most people we are breaking God's laws and the laws of the land. I have come to believe that loving another person cannot be seen as any kind of crime.

Mervyn and I intend to spend our lives together and believe it is our right to follow our own emotions.

You might think it strange that I am telling you this in a letter instead of to your face but I would find that just too difficult.

I will miss you, Eileen.

I have known that Jim is different without really understanding why. My friends and I sometimes talk about homosexuals but in our minds they are actors or artists who mingle in circles we know little of. I do not associate them with the kind of love Jim writes of.

It is March 1954. I wave to Queen Elizabeth in the afternoon and meet my first real love in the evening. I do not see Jim again but I still have his letter.

## **Xanana on the wall**

POETRY

*Tessa McMahon*

### **An Adjustment Needed Here**

The bed on which I lie  
is scientifically sprung  
approved by chiropractors —  
soft cushioned  
sheeted in crisp cotton  
white counterpaned  
and blessed from on high  
by Klimt's clichéd Kiss.

Blazoned across its width  
a woven tais —  
orange and tropical pink  
sunset stripes night shadowed.

Made by a woman —  
Timor-thin  
cross-legged on concrete  
canvas-bound  
to her stick-framed loom  
Xanana on the wall  
children in the drains  
poverty's jackboot in her back.

### **Fifty Years after Nirje**

Client 1

*A person with an intellectual disability  
developing 'creative talents'*

strokes hard pale crayon  
on shiny resistant cardboard  
to make innumerable  
barely perceptible  
little lines

four hours stroking  
nothing marks.

Client 2

*A person with an intellectual disability  
in 'meaningful employment'*  
tears at used plastic bank bags  
with blunt awkward cutters

ninety minutes  
for a cupful  
of shredded fiscal secrets.

Three cheers for Client 3 !  
*A person with an intellectual disability  
engaging in 'age appropriate activities'*  
flashes rebellious independence  
refusing, at 38, to colour in any more  
cartoon puppies.

### **Penance Grove — Monga Forest**

How right, to bend, to bow the head  
beneath arched fronds  
to brush the brow with blessed drops,



and almost genuflect,  
when entering Penance Grove.  
The boardwalk,  
foreign in genus and form  
is humble in its quiet response  
to reverent footfall,  
submitting to the forest's gentling  
of petal, twig and leaf  
ascending to fern-spanned apse,  
saving holy ground.  
In verdant graveyard, moss-padded,  
amputated stumps, lie and lurch -  
abandoned monuments.

Pinkwoods weep  
and bees intone their requiem.  
Black-trunked in mourning,  
rejected tree ferns  
stand in testament to those gone,  
backyard blitzed,  
their destinies stolen,  
to lace a forest, to age in grace,  
or host pinkwood seeds  
in moist velvet crevices.

A bittersweet paradise  
accepting its name, forgiving,  
in slow resurrection.

**Baltic Amber**

Beautiful, light-eyed Lithuanians.

In convent quadrangles  
where naïve 1950's schoolgirls  
giggled and gawked

*they* strolled together —  
those honey-haired young women,  
with unashamed sensuous grace  
their animated conversations  
tantalising  
in secret tongues.

Fierce memories of homeland  
war-honed ambition  
resolute dreams  
fixed  
in gleaming keepsakes  
of strung golden resin.

I saw their tall defiant beauty again  
in that small audacious country  
on the hill of fifty thousand crosses  
in Trakai's island castle —  
their slumbering burn  
in Baltic amber.

## Religion and non-religion both alive and well

COMMUNITY

*Gary Bouma*

[Census figures](#) on religion in Australia released last Thursday once again paint a picture of change in the religious composition of Australia.

The headline change of course is the rise in those declaring that they have 'no religion' from 18.7% to 22.3% of Australians. 'No religion' is the leading category of response in 5 of 8 capital cities — Perth, Adelaide, Canberra, Hobart and Darwin. It also leads in 5 out of 8 states and territories — WA, SA, TAS, ACT, and the NT.

However, remember that to declare 'no religion' is not to claim to be an atheist. There were 31,000 Atheists in 2006 and the number for 2011 has not been released yet.

This looks like a tale of the demise of religion, but wait there is more, much more.

Anglicans are now the third largest group in all states except Tasmania. Uniting identifiers have declined to 5.0% and Presbyterians/Reformed to 2.8%. Eastern Orthodox came in at 2.6% with strong showings in Sydney where they were 5<sup>th</sup> and Melbourne where they were 4<sup>th</sup>.

Buddhists have risen to 2.5% and Muslims to 2.2%. Muslims are the 4<sup>th</sup> largest group in Sydney. There are now more Buddhists and more Muslims than Baptists (1.6%) and more Hindus (1.3%) than Lutherans (1.2%). Hindu growth was outstanding at 86.5%, due to migration.

So while the continued rise of those declaring 'no religion' provides evidence for the demise of religion what evidence is there for religious vitality?

First, most religious groups other than Anglicans, Uniting and Presbyterian have increased in numbers even though they may have decreased in their percentage of the population due to the fact that they grew less than the population growth rate of 8.3%. For example, Catholics increased by about 300,000. This suggests that Catholic identity has survived the negative press and public reactions to clergy sexual abuses.

Second, the proportion of the population 'not responding' declined 17.3% from 11.2% in 2006 to 8.6%. To me this indicates that religious identity including declaring that one has 'no religion' has become more interesting to Australians in recent years. Religion has certainly been in the news in ways it was not before.

Third, Anglican and Uniting/Presbyterian/Reformed declines have slowed substantially. Anglicans had declined 4.2% between 2001 and 2006, but only 1% between 2006 and 2011. Perhaps they stopped dying. Further analysis of the age

distribution of religious groups is needed to see what is happening. By the way, Anglicans in Sydney declined at the same rate as Anglicans in Melbourne.

Fourth, the rise of increasingly substantial newer religious communities continues in Australia as Buddhists near Presbyterians in numbers and Buddhists and Muslims each outnumber Baptists and Lutherans. We will certainly see more of Hindus now that they have become 1.3% and more numerous than Pentecostals (1.1%).

Fifth, the growth zone for Christians is in a category called 'other Christians'. Pentecostals grew at the same rate as the nation to maintain 1.1% where they have been since 1996, but the 'other Christian' category includes some mega-churches and other evangelical or charismatic groups.

So while non-religion is growing, religion is certainly not dying out. There may indeed be more of a polarisation between those who do and those who do not identify with a religion. There is certainly greater and more substantial religious diversity. This in turn will have an impact on social policy.

While Presbyterians have long been seen as a normal part of the religious landscape the fact that they are about as numerous as Buddhists must shift the perception of Buddhism. The fact that Hindus are more numerous than Lutherans, and Muslims more numerous than Baptists must shift the way these groups are viewed, included, and taken seriously. Australia has been comparatively good at devising ways to attend to diverse religious groups.

This census is a wakeup call to keep up the process and to accelerate it as diversity moves from a variety of very small groups at the margins to substantial communities with a legitimate claim to being part of the core.

## **Australia's 20 year search for the right asylum policy**

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

*Frank Brennan*

Last week's tragedy of another mass loss of life at sea between Indonesia and Christmas Island focuses our minds yet again on an intractable public policy problem for Australia — our search for a coherent, workable and moral asylum policy. Tonight I will be unashamedly simplistic in my conclusion: decent offshore processing wherever it might occur is no solution unless there be a regional commitment to regional resettlement for those proved to be refugees. If there not be a regional commitment to regional resettlement, those found to be refugees will still be guaranteed a first-world migration outcome and that will not stop the boats. Desperate people with the prospect of permanent settlement in Australia will endure a long wait anywhere — whether it be Malaysia or Nauru. What they will not pay for is a boat journey which results in their being put at the end of a queue which is 90,000 long. That's not decent offshore processing. That's indecent offshore dumping.

In 2009, I was privileged to chair the National Human Rights Consultation Committee. During that inquiry we commissioned some very detailed research on Australian attitudes. A random telephone poll of 1200 Australians disclosed that over 70% of us think that the mentally ill, the aged, and persons with disabilities need greater protection from violation of their human rights. Quizzed about a whole range of minority groups, there was only one group in relation to whom the Australian population was split right down the middle. While 28% thought that asylum seekers needed greater protection, 42% thought we had the balance right, and 30% thought that asylum seekers deserved less protection. By way of comparison, 32% thought that gays and lesbians needed greater protection, 50% thought we had the balance right, and only 18% thought that gays and lesbians deserved less protection.

Australia is a long time signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 protocol. It is one of the few countries in the region having ratified the Convention. Indonesia and Malaysia are not parties to the Convention. Since the Vietnam War, there have been periodic waves of boat people heading for Australia seeking asylum. These boat people often pass through Malaysia and/or Indonesia. Under the Convention, parties undertake three key obligations:

Not to impose for illegal entry or unauthorized presence in their country any penalty on refugees coming directly from a territory where they are threatened, provided only that the refugees present themselves without delay and show good cause for their illegal entry or presence.

Not to expel refugees lawfully in their territory save on grounds of national security or public order.

Not to expel or return ("refouler") refugees to the frontiers of any territory where their lives or freedom would be threatened.

Given the wide gap between the first and the third world, it is not surprising that some people fleeing persecution will look further afield for more secure protection together with more hopeful economic and educational opportunities. Having the status of a refugee has never been accepted as a passport to the migration country of one's choice. Then again, the international community has never been so callous or short-sighted as to say that during a mass exodus one has access only to the country next door in seeking protection even if you have family, friends or community members living in a more distant country.

The responsible nation state that is pulling its weight will not only open its borders to the refugees from the adjoining countries but will expect some flow over from major conflicts wherever they might occur. It is no surprise that Afghan and Iraqi refugees have turned up on the doorstep of all first-world countries in recent years. Nor is it surprising that Sri Lankans fleeing the after-effects of protracted civil war have arrived in countries like Australia. With the ease of international travel and the services of people smugglers, it has become very difficult to draw the distinction between refugees who are coming directly from a territory where their life or freedom has been threatened and those refugees who, having fled, have already been accorded protection, but have now taken an onward journey seeking a more durable solution or sustainable migration outcome. First-world governments say they cannot tolerate the latter because they would then be jeopardising their own migration programs and weakening their borders every time there was a refugee-producing situation in the world no matter how close or how far it occurred from their own shores. This problem is not solved by drawing careful legal distinctions, because one person's preferred migration outcome is simply another person's first port of call where they thought there was a realistic prospect of getting protection for themselves and their families.

The problem cannot be solved by refugee advocates pretending that it does not exist or hoping that it will simply go away. Neither can it be solved by governments pretending that all persons who arrive on their shores without a visa are secondary movers. When mass movements occur during a conflict, it is necessary for governments to cooperate, ensuring that adequate protection can be given to persons closer to their home country before then closing off the secondary movement route except by means of legal migration. When countries of first asylum are stretched and unstable, other countries must be prepared to receive those who travel further seeking protection.

The long term work for humane accommodation, transparent processing, and prompt durable solutions still needs to be done in Indonesia which is the main transit country to Australia. DIAC's 2010-11 Annual Report states: ...œA further \$866,000 was utilised for the second year of the UNHCR Refugee Status

Determination processing project in Indonesia.... Furthermore: ...œThrough the Regional Cooperation Agreement with Indonesia, the department provides funding to IOM to provide practical support, such as accommodation, food and emergency medical assistance to irregular migrants intercepted in Indonesia. This work also arranges voluntary repatriation of irregular migrants....

In the present debate on refugee policy, many people forget that the Howard government created a nexus between the number of successful onshore asylum claims and the number of places available for humanitarian offshore cases. Usually we take 12-13,000 humanitarian applicants each year. Advocates like myself unsuccessfully argued that even those countries without a net migration program would be required to provide a durable solution for refugees within their jurisdiction, and that therefore there should be no nexus. We need to admit that there is presently no strong community demand for the nexus once again to be broken. The nexus is judged by the community to be morally acceptable as well as politically expedient. This means that every successful onshore asylum seeker takes a place which otherwise would have been available to an offshore humanitarian applicant. Offshore humanitarian applicants do include very needy, deserving refugees without access to people smugglers.

This means that the Australian system without discrimination gives preference to three groups of onshore asylum seekers over offshore humanitarian applicants. Those three groups are transparently honest visa holders whose country conditions deteriorate after they have arrived in Australia, visa holders who make less than full disclosure about their asylum claims when applying for a visa to enter Australia, and unvisaed refugees who arrive by boat often having engaged the services of a people smuggler. Strangely it is only the third group which causes great community angst even though most of that group, unlike the second group who come by plane with visas, are transparently honest about their intentions and their status.

When boats are not turned back, those asylum seekers arriving without visas should be detained only for the purposes of health, security and identity checks. Once those checks are successfully completed with a decision that the known applicant poses no health or security risk and if there be too great a caseload for final determination of claims within that time, these asylum seekers should be humanely accommodated while their claim process is completed. Community groups should be invited to assist with the provision of such accommodation to those applicants most likely to have a successful refugee claim. Those unlikely to succeed should continue to be accommodated by government or its contractor being assured availability for removal on final determination of an unsuccessful claim. I continue to concede that their refugee claims need not be subject to full judicial review provided we have in place a process which accords them natural justice and complies with the requirements set down by UNHCR. Given that we are a net migration country, those who establish a refugee claim should be granted a permanent visa, thereby being able to get on with their lives.

Until the treatment of asylum seekers in transit countries such as Indonesia is enhanced, we Australians must expect that some of the world's neediest refugees will engage people smugglers and come within reach of our authorities. For as long as they do not excessively skew our migration program, we should allow those who are proven to be genuine refugees to settle permanently and promptly so they may get on with their lives and make their contribution to our national life. Let's not forget the honest assessment of immigration detention centres by Professor Patrick McGorry, a previous Australian of the Year: ...œYou could almost describe them as factories for producing mental illness and mental disorder... . Community partnerships with government could assist with the accommodation and transition needs of those asylum seekers most likely to succeed in their claims. In hindsight, we know that proposals such as temporary protection visas and the Pacific solution are not only unprincipled; they fail to stem the tide nor to reduce the successful claims. We always need to ask, ...œWhy is it right to treat the honest, unvisaed boat person more harshly than the visaed airplane passenger who fails to declare their intention to apply for asylum?... If the answer is based only on consequences, then ask, ...œWould not the same harsh treatment of the visaed airplane passenger have the same or even greater effect in deterring arrivals by onshore asylum seekers?... The Qantas 747 does not evoke the same response as the leaky boat, does it? Though the Australian public tends to fixate on the boat people (now called IMAs or ...œirregular maritime arrivals... ) for skewing our humanitarian intake, the facts tell another story. In 2009-10, 4591 boat people applied for protection and 5987 plane people applied for protection visas. In 2010-11, it was 5,175 boat people and 6,316 plane people. For the first three quarters of this financial year, it was 4,503 boat people and 5,343 plane people.

The Opposition has recently suggested that the problem with boat people is that they get more favourable consideration by public servants assessing their claims because they arrive without documentation. On 22 May 2012, DIAC officers made it clear to Parliament that this problem was being overstated. Senate Estimates were informed that ...œpeople often have left documentation with somebody and they can make a call and get that documentation forwarded... . People stepping off a boat often arrive without documentation but ...œliterally within days, or a matter of some weeks, documentation can and does emerge... . And it's not as if the public servants are soft on refugee determination. Yes, a high percentage of boat people are found to be refugees — BECAUSE THEY ARE. Those rejected in the first instance enjoy a very high rate of reversal of their rejection on appeal. In 2010-11, 71.9% of those boat people who appealed a rejection succeeded in being accepted as refugees.

Both sides of politics know that the vulnerable will continue to arrive on our shores uninvited. The good, decent top end of town needs to maintain the faith of Petro Georgiou who told our Parliament in his valedictory speech:

*I believed that politics was a tough business. There were two dominant parties,*



*they were in conflict, they had power and they had resources. They were strong and evenly matched. They punched and they counterpunched, and sometimes low blows were landed. In my view, however, scapegoating the vulnerable was never part of the political game. I still believe this.*

Independent Rob Oakeshott has introduced to the House of Representatives his own *Migration Legislation Amendment (The Bali Process) Bill 2012*. If passed, this bill would amend the *Migration Act* removing the peg on which the High Court was able to hang the Malaysia solution out to dry. Under the unamended law, the Minister for Immigration is required to declare in writing that any country to be used for offshore processing provides access to effective procedures for asylum claims, provides protection for asylum seekers while their claims are processed, and meets relevant human rights standards in providing that protection. In August last year, the High Court of Australia ruled that the Minister could not make a valid declaration in relation to Malaysia as it was not a signatory to the Refugees Convention, and the Arrangement between the two governments was not legally binding.

Oakeshott is proposing that a new peg replace the old one, and that the new one be designed such that Malaysia could pass muster without High Court interference. His bill would permit the Minister to designate Malaysia as an offshore assessment country because it is a party to the Bali Process which at its last meeting a year ago included 32 countries working on a Regional Cooperation Framework. If Oakeshott intended meaningful public decision making by the Executive government and appropriate parliamentary scrutiny, he has failed. Participation in the Bali process could not be reckoned a sufficient precondition for a country to pass muster with human rights protection and appropriate asylum procedures. For example, Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran are all participants in the Bali process.

The only other precondition in the Oakeshott bill is that ...æthe Minister thinks it is in the national interest... to designate a country as an offshore assessment country. Anxious to avoid any further High Court scrutiny, his drafters have stipulated that the international obligations and domestic laws of a country are irrelevant to the process of designation. In considering whether designation of another country would be in Australia's national interest, the Minister is required to have regard to the assurances offered by that country's government about the assessment of asylum claims and the non-refoulement of asylum seekers whose claims have not yet been decided. These assurances need not be legally binding. The Minister is required to place a statement of reasons before Parliament within 2 sitting days of making a designation. He is also required within 14 days to make a request of UNHCR and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) seeking a formal statement of their views about the arrangements proposed in the designated country. It would make more sense if the minister were required to make the requests and receive the statements before making his decision to designate a country, and before tabling the decision in Parliament. That way the

UNHCR and IOM positions could help to inform both the Minister's decision and Parliament's assessment of the decision. The bill provides that ...œthe sole purpose of laying the documents before the Parliament is to inform the Parliament of the matters referred to in the documents and nothing in the documents affects the validity of the designation... . Parliament has no power to disallow the designation and a failure to table the documents would not affect the validity of the designation. So the Oakeshott peg is designed to ensure that neither Parliament nor the High Court could hang a designated country out to dry, ever again. The bill is simply a convoluted means for allowing the Executive government to declare an offshore processing country without any meaningful scrutiny by Parliament or the High Court. It does nothing to advance the cause of public scrutiny of government decisions to provide offshore processing of asylum claims.

A completely toothless tiger, the bill still provides the opportunity for Parliament to agitate again the debate about Nauru, Malaysia and onshore processing.

We now know that the best advice available from the Commonwealth public service is that Nauru will not work second time around. In October last year, Andrew Metcalfe, Secretary of the Immigration Department under governments of both political persuasions, told Liberal Senator Michaelia Cash in Senate Estimates: ...œOur view is not simply that the Nauru option would not work but that the combination of circumstances that existed at the end of 2001 could not be repeated with success. That is a view that we held for some time—and it is of course not just a view of my department; it is the collective view of agencies involved in providing advice in this area.... . Scott Morrison, the Opposition Spokesman, continues to point to the fact that ...œ30 percent of those who went through the Pacific Solution went home... . They did — because they got sick of waiting and thought John Howard meant it when he said that they would never get to Australia. But those who waited and were found to be refugees all ended up in Australia or New Zealand, except for a handful who had pre-existing connections with other resettlement countries. So this bluff is unlikely to work next time around. People who are genuine refugees will be sure that they will be resettled, and more than likely in Australia or New Zealand. For non-rugby players from Afghanistan either side of the Tasman trench is a good outcome, worth waiting for.

Malaysia is still problematic when you consider the case of the unaccompanied child who comes to Australia fleeing persecution and who would undoubtedly be found to be a refugee. If you send such a child to the end of a queue which is 90,000 long in Malaysia, the solution is immoral. If you leave the child in Australia, you send a signal to people smugglers that children are exempt from the Malaysia solution and thus you set up a magnet inviting other unaccompanied children to risk the dangerous voyage from Indonesia. The Malaysia solution then becomes unworkable. In its recently tabled response to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee Report on the Malaysia Solution, the Government said their pre-removal assessment process ...œdeveloped in close consultation with

UNHCR... demonstrated that ...æthe needs of vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied minors...|were considered and would be addressed... . So would kids be sent to Malaysia or would they not?

While the offshore processing option has been off the table, the Gillard government has done good work revising its onshore processing arrangements, providing an identical procedure for appeals whether an applicant came by boat without a visa or by plane with a non-protection visa, and providing bridging visas for many asylum seekers once their health, security and identity issues are resolved. Also the government has enacted complementary protection legislation which allows a person in Australia to contest their return home when they will face the death penalty, the threat of death or cruel and degrading treatment.

Rob Oakeshott introducing his bill claimed, ...æThe truth is that 148 of the 150 members of parliament in the House of Representatives agree that offshore assessment should be an option for executive government.... Despite the electoral appeal of slogans in this complex policy area, it is time for these 148 members to admit that the existing Malaysia and Nauru options do not pass muster as both moral and workable. Afterall we are one of the few signatories to the *Refugee Convention* in this part of the world; we take our international obligations seriously; and the number of asylum seekers reaching our shores is slight compared with the numbers in Malaysia and Indonesia.

Until we get a truly regional approach to the regional problem of irregular people movement, we Australians need to accept that there is no regional solution just to our Australian problem. While there is no regional approach to the regional problem, we need to do more in co-operation with Indonesia to accommodate asylum seekers humanely in Java with a better resourced IOM, to process them transparently with a better resourced UNHCR, and to resettle them more promptly in a range of countries in the region. Then and only then would we be entitled in co-operation with the Indonesians to return boat people safely to Java before they reached Christmas Island seeking to invoke our protection obligations.

Meanwhile we must expect that the boats will keep coming, reminding ourselves that this island nation continent of Australia has far more robust borders than those first world countries with porous land borders. Consider UNCR's Global Trends 2011 released last week. In Australia, there are 28,676 persons of concern to UNHCR; meanwhile in our two transit countries - in Malaysia, there are 217,618; and in Indonesia only 4,239. Let's look to Western Europe. In Belgium, there are 42,105 persons of concern to UNHCR; in Denmark, 18,009; in Greece, 45,720; in the Netherlands, 87,023; in France, 260,627; in the UK, 208,885; and in Germany, 658,818. And let's consider the two other countries who join us in doing most to accept refugees assessed in faraway places by UNHCR: Canada has 206,735 persons within its borders who are of concern to UNHCR, and the US has 276,484. In a globalized twenty-first century world, hermetically sealed borders are figments of delusional or racist imaginations. We need to maintain a

commitment to a humanitarian migration program accommodating those who could never afford a people smuggler. But we also need to honour our obligations to those who head our way seeking asylum unless and until we can improve our bilateral arrangements with Indonesia and our regional arrangements for a regional solution to a regional problem.

***This is the text of a [Politics in the Pub](#) address at The Lounge Bar, The Uni Pub, Canberra, at 6:00 pm on Wednesday 27 June 2012.***

## An uneasy conversation with Michael Kirby

HUMAN RIGHTS

*Gordon Preece*

The homosexuality debate in church and society is an uneasy and often destructive conversation not entered into lightly. I write in response to the Introduction to and launch address for [Five Uneasy Pieces](#) (FUP) by the distinguished Michael Kirby earlier this month at [Eureka Street TV](#).

On one occasion I enjoyed Judge Kirby's engaging conversation at dinner at New College at the University of NSW. However this is a more difficult conversation where unfortunately he speaks with a more polemical tone.

I also write as co-editor of [Sexegesis: An Evangelical Response to Five Uneasy Pieces on Homosexuality](#). This is a collection of writings by Australasian Anglican scholars in response to FUP's invitation to conversation about Scripture and sexuality.

Sexegesis is literally exegesis or reading out from texts on (homo)sex. We argue that the *Five Uneasy Pieces* (FUP) advocating a revisionist reading of the Bible on homosexuality, do not — apart from Meg Warner and Alan Cadwallader's pieces — really do exegesis.

Instead they generally jump quickly to wider hermeneutical or interpretive issues that relativise the relationship of Scripture and tradition to other authorities. These include science or (selective) experience (of practising gays, not celibate gays), or contemporary ethical and cultural standards like inclusivity, not the historical and global catholicity of the church across time and space.

We don't ignore these authorities, but first emphasise the text on sex, in context. As sociologist Peter Berger once said: 'Whereas Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss, today we betray him with a hermeneutic'.

Both sides thus need to beware: 'Conservatives' if they slip from opposing homosexual acts to opposing homosexual people, lacking grace; The 'liberals' for frankly writing, as Michael Kirby admits, 'very easy pieces'. Well before Malcolm Fraser, Jesus said (Christian) 'life wasn't meant to be easy'. Kirby, and the FUP authors, in Bonhoeffer's terms, are cheapening grace.

Here the rhetoric of the homosexuality debate seriously clouds the issue and raises the temperature. Gay activist and academic Denis Altman notes that making homosexuality into an identity, not an activity issue, was a stroke of political genius. It meant that anyone who opposes homosexual practice appears to be opposing homosexual people or homophobic or hateful, as Kirby's rhetoric, GetUp's, Sunrise's and the Greens' claim, making reasoned debate impossible.

Only in a society practising sexual idolatry as the basis of identity could such confusion arise. As the gay sexologist Foucault said: 'Sexuality has replaced the

soul'. The over-heated rhetoric of denying people their humanity because of inability to fully express their sexuality insults millions of celibates.

Kirby also claims that the Church teaches divine dislike or even hatred of those whom 'God made gay'. Apart from the bigoted and bizarre Westboro Baptist, I know of no mainline church holding this gospel of hatred (though many gays have been sadly hurt by Christians).

Judge Kirby pre-emptively pronounces the verdict on the gay gene issue, when the jury is still out, and claims it makes God to blame, in a kind of hyper-Calvinist genetic predestination to torment. Yet thinkers from a range of disciplines, gender and political persuasions such as UK gay activist Peter Tatchell, sociologist Frank Furedi, geneticist Francis Collins, and bisexual Camille Paglia agree that 'Predisposition and determination are two different things' as bisexuality and people switching sexuality in mid-life show. John D'Emilio, US gay activist and academic, says on 'the convenient truth' of the 'born gay' theory of Kirby and others that the scientific evidence for it 'is thin as a reed'. That doesn't mean that homosexual orientation is simply chosen, though.

Kirby claims that the source of the churches' 'terrible pickle over human sexuality' is 'the age old problem of the text. And the human disinclination in the face of *new* knowledge, to adjust to the necessities of *new* thinking'. This almost automatic rejection of the old or traditional contradicts Kirby's support of the monarchy, or Anglican liturgy, or much law. It denies what Chesterton calls '*the democracy of the dead*'. The vast and panoramic past has a right to vote, against the dictatorial parochialism and diminished perspective of the present.

Kirby and FUP use contemporary context to manipulate ancient text like a nose of wax in Madam Tussaud's. Just because a revisionist interpretation like FUP's is available doesn't mean it's convincing. Just because something is old doesn't mean it's outdated or we wouldn't still use wheels. Kirby and co. confuse time and truth categories.

They also cite the common furphy about Jesus never speaking against homosexuality. In a Jewish context he didn't have to, but upheld God's positive purpose in Genesis of one man one wife for life, or celibacy (Mt 19:1-12). Paul (Rom. 1: 20ff) in a Gentile context of common homosexual practice of all sorts, including long-term committed relationships, upholds Jesus' and Genesis' view of our sexual ecology, equality and complementarity.

Law, Gospel and Epistle agree. It is not a case of five uneasy, separate pieces or texts, but a strong bridge spanning beginning to end of Scripture. We agree with Kirby that this overall context of Scripture is one offering love, forgiveness, and reconciliation bridging all, gay and straight.

## News and entertainment a difficult mix

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



The big news last week was *about* the news. Most alarming was the Fairfax announcement that printed newspapers as we know them will effectively cease to exist within a few short years.

Many readers will miss the familiarity and romance of print. But more disturbing is the likelihood that the dignified authority of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* mastheads will be lost when the more ephemeral, entertainment-oriented electronic edition is

all we have.

The comparative lightness of the online content is consistent with the increasingly widespread trend to blend news with entertainment in electronic and online media in general. In fact the appeal of this is such that many, perhaps most, Australians have their news delivered to them within a form of popular entertainment rather than 'serious' news publications and programs.

It is often breakfast radio presenters such as Kyle and Jackie O who shape young people's perceptions of the world with their mostly offhand and anti-social jokes about events and issues of national and world significance. Or the more socially responsible but nevertheless trivialising news oriented comedy programs such as Channel Ten's *The Project*, as well as short-run series such as last year's *Hamster Wheel* from The Chaser and ABC1's current Friday offering *Shaun Micallef's Mad as Hell*.

These shows are influenced by highly successful and sometimes incisive American news comedies including *The Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*.

Such blending of news with comedy is the subject of a [comment](#) by Californian Jesuit James T. Keane in the latest issue of *America* magazine. Keane writes of the usurping of the traditional network news bulletins by the likes of Colbert and Stewart, who 'deliver news wrapped in comedy, pop-culture references and often an ironic distance from momentous historical events'.

Significantly he is not entirely disturbed by this phenomenon. He argues that it is naïve to assume that Walter Cronkite could be trusted to deliver 'unvarnished truth'. Moreover he suggests the comedies provide a kind of antidote to the xenophobia and introspective consumerism fostered by network news bulletins.

Mainstream news programs routinely report on the ways in which 'our way of life' is being threatened or destroyed and seldom acknowledge that such ways of life are unsustainable or contrary to the public good.

It's a positive that satire provides much-needed perspective on traditional news,

and that it has moved beyond a niche to educate the masses to consume the news more critically. But regrettable that the iconoclastic tone of many of these comedians of the left lacks the values and moral centre needed to counter the xenophobia and play to self-interest of the network bulletins and the right-wing news entertainment programs such as *The O'Reilly Factor* on FoxNews.

If Fairfax Online remains dominated by an imperative to entertain, we should hope that it finds a way of retaining the sense of values that have long given the printed broadsheets their authority.



## Requiem for quality journalism

MEDIA

*Chris McGillion*

I still wince at the memory of the morning after my first day on the *Sydney Morning Herald*. I had been appointed a leader writer and my initial editorial was about to hit the streets.



So I got out of bed at 5 am and paced the house until the corner shop opened an hour later. Then I slipped through the door of the shop, bought a paper and read four times the sage advice on an Argentine political crisis that I had assigned to the country's oldest and most respected newspaper before it finally sunk in that I'd become one of its journalists.

It was a totally inconsequential piece to get so excited about. And yet, over the next twenty years as a Fairfax journalist and columnist, I never quite lost the excitement born of the responsibility I felt toward the public, the thrill of seeing my words in print, and the satisfaction of knowing that, in however small a way, I was helping to shape the thoughts of people across the city every day.

The corner shop is gone now, unable to compete with the shopping complex that was built down the road. The *Sydney Morning Herald* is heading the same way — and for much the same reason.

From next year, together with *The Age*, the *Herald* will cease to be published as a broadsheet and appear in 'compact' (read tabloid) form. For how long is anyone's guess. Fairfax management isn't hiding the fact that the package of measures it announced on Monday is designed to move the company into a digital future. And the decision to close the printing plants in Chullora and Tullamarine in 2014 doesn't bode well for the future of hardcopy newspapers in any form at all.

We all know what prompted these decisions: changes in reader and advertiser habits brought on by the digital revolution. Not all of us, however, fully appreciate the impact of those changes.

One way to look at it is that 65 percent of *Herald* and *Age* readers access the newspapers' content not in hardcopy form but online. Another way is to consider that for every dollar of revenue from hardcopy advertising, the online equivalent is a about 10 cents.

On May 30, journalists at Fairfax went on strike for nearly two days to protest a decision to shift 66 sub-editing jobs off-shore. The industrial action was unprotected but management balked at challenging the strike. The reason, according to reliable insiders, is that the company was saving far more money each day workers were out than it would have made if they were on the job.

Late last year the Centre for the Digital Future at the University of Southern California released the findings of a ten-year study into the impact of internet

technology on US media. Among the report's findings was a prediction that most American newspapers will be out of business within five years.

'We believe that the only newspapers in America that will survive in print form will be at the extremes of the medium — the largest and the smallest', said centre director Jeffrey Cole. 'It's likely that only four major daily newspapers with global reach will continue in print: *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. At the other extreme, local weekly newspapers may still survive, as well as the Sunday print editions of metropolitan newspapers that otherwise may exist only in online editions.'

'The impending death of the American print newspaper continues to raise many questions', Cole added. '...œWill media organisations survive and thrive when they move exclusively to online availability? How will the changing delivery of content affect the quality and depth of journalism?'

Fairfax is now confronting the first of these questions as it jettisons cost-heavy production platforms like a pilot tossing out everything he can to get more lift across the next mountain. Others will be watching Fairfax's fortunes closely: not just newspaper companies like News Limited — which has announced its own restructuring in the slipstream of the Fairfax announcement but with as yet far less detail about what it will mean for jobs, formats and newsroom output. But also magazine producers and television broadcasters — all of which are hurtling toward the same cliff face.

And as for quality and depth? There's no doubt both will suffer not just from job cuts but also due to the cultural shift from a world of lasting tangible hardcopy that rouses you at 5 am to fleeting virtual postings that can keep you awake all night.

But let's hope Fairfax management remembers that in a crowded digital environment, quality and depth are the only things that can continue to distinguish its brands.

## Rain on the Queen's parade

BY THE WAY

*Brian Matthews*



Constant rain, sullen skies and a scarcely articulate commentary did not deter the massive and sodden crowds or diminish the momentum of the Queen's recent Diamond Jubilee celebrations.

Only the bigger picture and the jaundiced eye of history could assign the event its comparative place in the great panoply of royal extravaganzas ...]

Certain eras somehow put their mark on those born into or growing up during them, and this process, while a part of the historical record, is also influenced by myth and anecdote.

Victorian Britain, for example, will no doubt never throw off its aura of vague gloom, narrow propriety and prissiness despite plenty of evidence to the contrary, ranging from the pleasant and pastoral to the lurid and prurient — not to mention the minatory Queen's own fleetingly lighter moments: when assured by a cleric that 'we cannot pray too often, nor too fervently, for the Royal Family', she reputedly replied: 'Too fervently, no; too often, yes.'

The 'Edwardian Age,' on the other hand, remains halcyon in legend and memoir. From the time of his accession at the dawn of the new century, the sybaritic Edward VII seemed to bring a sense of liberation, a release of constraints and tensions. His death in May 1910 did not apparently signal the end of 'the age'.

His son and heir, George V, though less flamboyant and more cautious, did nothing to stall the momentum, and pleasure-seeking, celebration, fashion and high society became inextricably linked with English and particularly London life in much the same blurring, unexamined way that 'naughtiness' became associated with the nineties in Paris.

Unlike Queen Elizabeth II — with the 1992 fire at Windsor Castle completing what she called her *annus horribilis*, unforgettably translated by the *Sun* as 'One's bum year', and then twenty years later the ordeal by water during the Jubilee — both Edward and George were favoured by a succession of stunning summers. In July 1911, the Sussex towns of Eastbourne and Hastings had the highest monthly total of sunshine (384 hours) on record and in August the country 'enjoyed' day after day of temperatures of more than 35 degrees centigrade.

And then there was the famous last summer before the war, the remembered perfection of which was no doubt intensified both by fond and eventually flawed recall and by the shocking starkness of its contrast with what followed. David Fromkin, in his *Europe's Last Summer*, describes 'the hot, sun-drenched, gorgeous

summer of 1914, [as] the most beautiful within living memory ...] remembered by many Europeans as a kind of Eden.'

Even allowing for the idealization that has blurred the picture since, there seems little doubt that what came to be known as the Edwardian period in England — 1900 to 1914 — shaped the self-image of a generation by virtue of its benign atmosphere, its relative or at least perceived calm, and its confidence — however misplaced it turned out to be — in the possibilities of the future.

Bliss was it, no doubt, in that time to be alive and 'to be young was very heaven'. You needed to be twenty something as Edward VII's court got into its stride, to enjoy the world of P.G. Wodehouse's Bertie Wooster and Barmy Fotheringay Phipps and Bingo Little — 'young men in spats'. But, as George Orwell pointed out in his wintry way, 'Bertie Wooster, if he ever existed, was killed round about 1915.'

'Out of the world of summer, 1914,' says Paul Fussell in his classic study, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 'marched a unique generation. It believed in Progress and Art and in no way doubted the benignity even of technology. The word *machine* was not yet invariably coupled with the word *gun*.'

For both historical and meteorological reasons, therefore, the funeral of Edward VII was a royal event at least as spellbinding as the Diamond Jubilee. In the words of historian Barbara Tuchman:

So gorgeous was the spectacle on [that] May morning of 1910 when nine kings rode in the funeral of Edward VII of England that the crowd, waiting in hushed and black-clad awe, could not keep back gasps of admiration. In scarlet and green and blue and purple, three by three the sovereigns rode through the palace gates, with plumed helmets, gold braid, crimson sashes, and jewelled orders flashing in the sun. After them came five heirs apparent, forty more imperial or royal highnesses, seven queens ...] and a scattering of special ambassadors from uncrowned countries. Together they represented seventy nations in the greatest assemblage of royalty and rank ever gathered in one place and, of its kind, the last. The muffled tongue of Big Ben tolled nine by the clock as the cortege left the palace, but on history's clock it was sunset, and the sun of the old world was setting in a dying blaze of splendour never to be seen again.

Ah, they don't do royal occasions like that any more. And as for what the rain-distorted face of history's clock was showing during the Diamond Jubilee — well, no doubt we'll soon find out.

## **G20 is also about food security**

### POLITICS

*Jack de Groot*

The two day Group of 20 (G20) nations summit focused on addressing the European financial crisis through economic solutions for Eurozone leaders including greater fiscal discipline and the integration of Europe's banking system aimed at restoring community confidence.

The Australian Government has played a key role both in the creation of the G20 forum and in these specific discussions relating to the situation in Europe. Indeed, at the two day summit in Mexico, Prime Minister Julia Gillard said all nations had to pull together, and reminded us of Australia's promise to provide an extra \$US7 billion to the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

As a heads of Government meeting, it could be argued the G20 focuses on international financing and puts people at the service of the economy rather than the global economy at the service of all men and women, especially the poorest of the poor.

With a billion people going hungry every day, the G20 should be home to development and poverty alleviation.

It is the right of all human beings to live in dignity, to know they won't go hungry, to know their food sources are secure and malnutrition will not be their realities. In every society food security does not make up just material 'nutritional' elements, but also social, economic, political, cultural elements connected to food use, production and trade.

More food does not equal more food security. Hunger and poverty have clear-cut, structural root causes that need to be addressed and it will take a true stand in solidarity with the world's poor to institute real and lasting change.

To start with, there is inequity in access to resources and unfair market conditions which favour global communities over local communities. These injustices are exacerbated by unheard voices, unresponsive institutional environments, a lack of technical solutions that underscore the importance of 'local knowledge', while at the same time the complexities of local conditions are not being acknowledged in policy decisions. So hunger persists.

Specifically, there needs to be better regulation of markets, strengthening of local food production and mandates which will increase food security.

Communities need better access to, as well as participation in, local markets. For example, markets for smallholder farmers could be improved to provide a supportive environment in which they can engage better in local economies.

Increasing food reserves in developing countries, curbing speculation on food

prices and introducing social protection schemes could also be implemented to address food security in a holistic way.

The Federal Government has a sophisticated understanding of food security and should be commended on its commitment to good development practice and first class agricultural programs in developing nations that deliver long term outcomes to at least some of those who need it most.

Australia is set to hold the 2014 G20. So as Prime Minister, Ms Gillard has taken the podium as the leader setting the agenda moving forward.

And whether it is Ms Gillard, Tony Abbott or someone else as the new PM, Australia needs to demonstrate a commitment to the development agenda. We need to take a leadership role and encourage other powerful and relatively wealthy G20 nations to get on board.

Australia needs to approach G20s using principles of cooperation, to involve local communities in decision making, solidarity and responsibility. Action to eliminate hunger must promote new ethical, juridical and economic parameters to build relationships of fairness between countries at different stages of development.

The G20 should also be a place for civil society leaders such as faith based groups. These groups are at the heart of community development and overcoming poverty and they must be included in conversations.

This is a forum with a real opportunity to show valuable and lasting leadership on the issue of food security. The Australian government should treat the G20 as an opportunity to engage in giving voices to the world's most vulnerable people and to put their needs and claims at the top of the agenda. It is this relationship between global decisions and local participation which can truly help poor and vulnerable people help themselves out of poverty.

## Teen girl's post-traumatic guilt trip

### FILMS

*Tim Kroenert*

***Margaret* (MA 15+). Director: Sarah Polley. Starring Anna Paquin, Matt Damon, Mark Ruffalo. 150 minutes**

Can you make amends without accepting responsibility? This ethical oxymoron is at the heart of *Margaret*. Bright but self-centred student Lisa (Paquin) contributes to the death of a pedestrian (Janney) when she actively distracts a bus driver (Ruffalo), causing him to run a red light. Subsequently (and notwithstanding some self-examination) she attempts to mitigate her guilt by punishing the driver's wrongdoing, rather than repenting her own.

It's a rather solitary quest. Lisa's life contains a dearth of dependable role models. Her actor mother Joan (Smith-Cameron) is distracted by a revived career and a new relationship with a French-Palestinian suitor (Reno). Her absentee father proffers platitudes over a long-distance phone line. One teacher (Damon) attempts to mentor Lisa in her dilemma but is too accepting of her flirtatious advances to be considered a disinterested advisor.

Throughout the film, the semantics of justice and revenge are tested on both the personal and extra-personal level; notably, within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the conflict between Islam and the West that was seemingly galvanised by September 11. These are debated hotly in Lisa's high school ethics class and among adults too. In both settings the ethics of tit-for-tat and perspectives constrained by self-interest are weighed and wasted.

Writer-director Lonergan has done an impressive job weaving these broad and abstract themes into a tangible and warmly emotive human story, spearheaded by a tour-de-force performance by Paquin who, at nearly 30 years of age, captures perfectly the vicious self-absorption and viscous vulnerability that make up the as-yet unformed adulthood of the 17-year-old protagonist Lisa.

Lisa's behaviour is welded to the idea of performance. She plays the coquettish underachiever in one class, the high-minded demagogue in another. She invites a friend to 'take' her virginity; he condescends to her appallingly, yet is unwittingly playing to the script in her head. Following one moment of gross self-aggrandisement in her quest to avenge the dead woman, she is justifiably accused of being enamoured of the drama of the situation.

But the film suggests this is not malevolence on Lisa's part but learned behaviour: at one point, her mother Joan's rage during an encounter with the recalcitrant Lisa is juxtaposed pointedly with her huffy (in-character) entrance onto a theatre stage. Each of these two women is struggling, in her own way, to shed the skin she presents to the world in order to more firmly accept her own human vulnerability and allow her better to identify with the other.

Ironically, this occurs while they are audience members at an opera. Self-awareness and compassion are awakened by their empathetic engagement with the fictional characters on stage. This reflects the ideal that entertainment, well intended and effectively executed, can promote the betterment of individual and collective humanity. Which is one of the lofty goals of *Margaret* itself.



## Blue people

NON-FICTION

*Michael McVeigh*

Have you ever thought about what life would be like for people who saw everything as if looking through a blue-tinged lens?

For these people, everything in the world would be a shade of blue. Their car would be a shade of blue. The sky would only be distinguishable from the ground by its shade of blue. In the mirror, they would see their skin, teeth, eyes as shades of blue. Others might be able to distinguish people by the colour of their skin, but for them all people would be different shades of the one colour.

The rest of the world might associate emotions with certain colours, but for the blue people those associations would be meaningless. What does a phrase 'green with envy' mean to a person who can only see blue? How can a person who can only see blue understand a phrase like 'red hot'? How would they feel when they heard other people saying they were 'feeling blue'?

Thinking more deeply about this predicament raises another question: Would only being able to see the colour blue also inhibit the range of feelings available? Blue is seen as a soothing colour, while red tends to inflame the senses. These are genetic predispositions, ingrained in our being. So would a person who could only see blue appear calmer than other people? Would they be less quick to anger? More introspective?

If seeing in shades of blue did affect the way they reacted to the world, would it also affect their emotions? Someone who struggles to feel the fiery emotions that come tinged in red might struggle to feel the same passions as other people. How could they understand anger? How could they understand love? Other metaphors might take the place of colours. We can still burn with love without seeing the red fire. But, washed and immersed in a cold blue universe, would love still burn as strong?

You might say that the blue people would be just like those born without sight. A blind person learns to rely on other senses. Those who never know sight can still feel love, anger, jealousy, pain, hatred, excitement, amusement, arousal. The strength of these feelings is undiminished for the lack of visual metaphors. But those who see the world in tinges of blue aren't lacking in a sense—they are being deceived by a sense. They don't have a hole in their universe. Their universe is lying to them. Or more accurately, their body is lying to them about the universe. So what effect do these lies have on their realities?

It's one thing to be deceived, another thing to be physically unable to perceive the truth. To know that the universe you see is a lie, but that no matter how hard you try you will never know just how much of a lie. How would they know where the fake blue ends and the real blue begins? Once the deception is revealed they

might, like the blind person, learn not to trust their sight and to rely on their other senses. They might learn to ignore the blue universe. Or perhaps they have come to love that universe. Perhaps they will continue to hold onto the blue universe, as diminished and as deceitful as that universe is.

Should we pity the blue people of this world? Should we pity those whose vision is shrouded so that they cannot know anger, nor hatred, nor excitement, nor love the same way that we know it? Are the blue people of this world fully human if they cannot feel it, if they cannot embrace it, if they cannot be immersed in it, in the same way as us?

Or are we just as impoverished as the blue people? Are we just as blinded by the lenses over our own eyes?

## A temporary halt to Grexit and Drachmageddon

### POLITICS

*Gillian Bouras*

**Plus cachange...** |the more things change, the more they remain the same. That's the way it seems to me, anyway, although many commentators on Greek affairs consider that the old certainties have crumbled.

But I have been here for over 30 years, and to me uncertainty has been a constant presence. So has a sense of fragility. When I arrived in 1980, parliamentary democracy post Junta was barely six years old.

Bank loans were impossible to obtain, so that people wishing to buy property arrived at auctions with plastic bags crammed full of drachma notes. Women had few rights: if their marriages failed, their husbands retained their dowries.

The first time I ever went to a Greek polling booth was in October 1981, when Andreas Papandreou, founder of the PASOK party, won a landslide victory and became the first Socialist Prime Minister of Greece. I was aware that momentous events were unfolding, but was mesmerised by the sight of national servicemen on guard at the door of the school/polling booth.

They stood rigidly to attention: their guns bore fixed bayonets. I gibbered: *Why?* The answer was that in the past ballot boxes had occasionally been stolen. Yesterday afternoon, in the inner Athenian suburb of Exarchia, notorious for its cells of anarchists and activists, ten masked people entered a polling booth, attacked the two policemen on guard, smashed the ballot box, and, for good measure, set fire to it.

In 1981 I did not have the right to vote. Now I have, and as a good Aussie sheila who naturally believes in compulsory voting I try to do my bit by urging people to exercise their rights. Some people, like my old neighbour, don't need to be persuaded. He was up bright and early yesterday: the polls opened at 7.

'All set, *Kyrie* Vassili?' I asked.

'Absolutely. It's our duty, isn't it?'

And he brandished his walking-stick.

There were quite a few walking-sticks in evidence, as it happened: *Kyrios* Vassilis and his age group can remember the hideous years of the Civil War and the dictatorship of the Colonels. They can remember the fear and the helplessness.

I haven't discussed the matter with such people, as one has to be careful not to open old wounds, but I wonder what they think of the heightened profile of Golden Dawn, the neo-Nazi party that seems to believe that violence against immigrants



and liberals is legitimate. I wonder what they think about the strong rumour that the police get Golden Dawn to do their dirty work for them.

It is now 222 days since Greece has had an elected government, during which period it has had two caretaker Prime Ministers and two elections. The population has endured five years of deepening austerity, with its predictable consequences: unemployment, homelessness, a rising suicide rate.

A government did not result from the May election, and since then much of the world has been transfixed by the rise and rise of Alexis Tsipras, leader of SYRIZA, the Radical Left Coalition, who seemed to be poised to engineer what has come to be known as the **Grexit**.

The **Grexit** and its consequence **Drachmageddon** have been temporarily staved off. But a government was not formed in May because party leaders could not agree, and this failure remains a fear. Tsipras has already informed New Democracy leader Samaras that SYRIZA will remain in opposition. Samaras, who won by only a slim margin, thus needs to negotiate a coalition with PASOK and the Democratic Left.

Some analysts are scathing: Greek ones mention the failure of the political class, and deplore the inability to reach a consensus. They also mention the Greek tendency to reach dizzy heights (courage in the Second World War) and then plunge to horrifying depths (the Civil War that followed.)

An Athenian political scientist has commented, appropriately enough, that Mr Samaras has won only a Pyrrhic victory. The *New York Times* considers that any government is likely to be weak and short-lived.

Historically, one of Greece's most successful exports has been people. And it is becoming the case again: it was recently estimated that 7 out of 10 Greeks in the 18-24 age group intend to seek their future elsewhere. In 1965 the father of my children left Greece because of poverty and lack of prospects. Or even hope. All he had was his youth. **Plus ca change.**

## A visit to detention

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas



## Syria's massacre of innocence

POETRY

Various

### Syria

Bruised tears and siren wails  
accompany the footage;  
babies swaddled in stained carpets,  
mothers arranged in silent queues  
until battered trucks eek them towards mass graves

seething with quick lime.  
Embittered hags spit venom at compatriots  
rasping for retaliation.

Deep down I know  
the hands which pressed triggers,  
wielded knives at innocent throats  
were once the gentle sons of others  
playing in sand pits  
shadowed from scorching winds  
while I ferried my own  
to schoolyard bunkers and safe horizons.

— *John Collard*

Massacre of innocence  
Syria's senseless murderous regime  
and terrorist atrocities  
go to the heart of the loss  
of respect for sheer existence.  
Whole families — mothers, fathers, children  
purposelessly slain for an Idea  
that has escaped the world.  
In little islands of memories  
lived one breath of people  
who lived by the season of nature's calling  
— a few attuned to the country's rhythm  
have survived to teach the high priests  
of postmodernity and inventors of powerful  
destructive weapons to descend  
from their bejeweled thrones of clay,  
clutch real dust and soil with their bare hands,

wash off the stain of their wasted soul  
in the sea of life, shake themselves and  
awaken the cells, capillaries and  
lifeblood of their Original Face.  
It's time to fly the Dove  
with the green clover upon its mouth  
to vanquish the shadowy world of delusion  
that seeks to enthrone a realm  
of meaninglessness,  
helplessness and hopelessness  
through vacuous geopolitics  
and intra-ethnic religious race.  
Where else could the one-eyed redeemer  
resistance fighters turn to but to retreat  
from the death knell of their spiralling,  
revolving annihilation and return  
to their Maker's authentic face?  
— *Deborah Ruiz Wall*

**you**  
as the child  
is wrapped  
  
a baggage  
of history  
  
patterned  
as if the sun  
  
had tattooed

the nursery

curtains over  
an o so small

body, squirming  
under the trust of hands  
— *Rory Harris*



## **Economic hard times even tougher for refugees**

### POLITICS

*Andrew Hamilton*

Refugee Week invites us to see asylum seekers and refugees as faces, not problems. It is also a time for taking stock.

Internationally, asylum seekers who have had to flee persecution in their own lands have had little to rejoice about this past year. Chronic violence fed by religious and ethnic tensions continue to drive people to seek a safe and peaceful life outside their own lands. Conflicts in the Middle East and in Africa threaten to displace more refugees.



The readiness of developed nations to help and receive refugees and asylum seekers has come under greater strain. In Europe xenophobia has been intensified by the effects of the financial crisis. Dysfunctional financial systems create dysfunctional populist attitudes to immigrants and refugees. In Greece, for example, the Golden Dawn party threatened to expel migrants from schools and hospitals if elected.

Hostility to foreigners and especially to asylum seekers has also led to measures that put people's lives and security at risk. In England it was recently revealed that asylum seekers returned forcibly from England had been severely tortured on arrival in Sri Lanka. The Home Office judgment that it was safe to return asylum seekers to Sri Lanka had been sharply criticised by those familiar with conditions there.

In Australia, asylum seekers are now seen entirely through the political lens of a government seen as powerless to stop boats arriving on Australian territory. They are regarded like an infestation that reflects on the competence of the sanitary department. So the focus of public discussion is placed on the unsavoury past of some refugees admitted to Australia and on people smugglers who posed as asylum seekers. This focus, with its imputation that the government has been negligent, is unlikely to change as the next election draws near. It will continue to feed xenophobia.

The Coalition has promised new measures to deal with 'the problem'. Discriminatory treatment of those who arrive without identification papers, offshore processing, the return of temporary protection visas, a new level of bureaucracy to limit the number of favourable decisions will not address the existing difficulties. They will only further weaken the link between policy and reality, and increase the suffering of asylum seekers and the cost to the Australian community.

The results of the refugee week stocktaking are pretty gloomy. But gloom is not overwhelming. In Australia access to the courts by people who seek asylum in

Australia has been vindicated in recent decisions. This week a High Court case has heard arguments challenging the scandal that people found to be refugees can be kept imprisoned for a lifetime on the basis of a security assessment which they can neither know nor challenge. Whether this situation is decided to be legal or not, its human baseness will be exposed.

But refugee week reminds us that what matters is the humanity of the asylum seekers themselves. Many live with extraordinary resilience in the face of all that they have lost in their own lands and of all that they have suffered in Australia. The resilience and the joy of those who have won protection and can begin to live fully again are worth celebrating.

The collapse of the unlamented Malaysia Solution, too, was followed by the release of many asylum seekers into community detention. This has been a blessing for those released and also for the community groups who have come to know and to work with them. It has made visible the human face of asylum seekers.

Finally Refugee Week makes claims on the future. For many years a priority has been to end routine and prolonged detention. The long term damage detention causes has become increasingly evident, and its abolition is more urgent. Promotion of conversation about asylum seekers based on reality and not on mean myths remains a priority. And so does international cooperation directed, not at excluding asylum seekers from making a claim on developed countries, but at enabling refugees to live human and productive lives.

## **Aboriginal solidarity with refugees**

GUEST EDITORIAL

*John Falzon*

In May this year, Ray Jackson, President of the Indigenous Social Justice Association, issued passports on behalf of Australia's First Peoples to the two Tamil men indefinitely detained at Villawood Detention Centre. He said:

Locking people up doesn't solve any problems, it only causes harm. We have seen that time and time again with Indigenous people, and now the government is making the same mistake with asylum seekers. This has to stop. The Australian Government must stop imprisoning Indigenous people, and they must stop imprisoning asylum seekers. I am proud to welcome people in need into our community.

This week is [Refugee Week](#) . It's a good time to reflect on this powerful coming-together of the First Peoples and the people who have recently come to Australia seeking refuge.

At the same time we are witnessing a mass campaign opposing the Stronger Futures legislation. The Australian Catholic Bishops and Religious, for example, stated:

Social inclusion does not result from intervention, imposition, discrimination and exclusion. We call for an urgent shift from punitive controls to measures that restore community control, rebuild Aboriginal initiative and capacity, improve living conditions and show respect for Aboriginal languages and culture.

This is a beautiful expression of solidarity that comes at a time when the dominant discourse in Australia is swift to blame the First Peoples for the exclusion to which they have been subjected.

Lasting solutions can only come from the Excluded. As a member of the St Vincent de Paul Society from the NT told me: 'The Intervention will go down in history as being as shameful for the Australian Government as the Stolen Generations. No one was consulted. No one was listened to.'

The First Peoples have not been listened to. They have not been respected. Many have been forced to live like refugees in their own country: exiled, controlled, humiliated and imprisoned.

As Walter Shaw, from the Tangentyere Council, put it so plainly, again making the connection between the ongoing reality of colonisation and our shameful abuse of the rights of asylum seekers:

Aboriginal people, above all else, need to be empowered to solve our own problems, because non-Aboriginal people keep coming up with the same 'solutions', and they keep making it worse.

Australians don't like their nation painted as a war-torn country, or a place ravaged by hunger or disease. But that is what Central Australia — my country — has become.

People from some of the most disadvantaged nations on earth choose to jump on a rusty old boat and risk their lives over dangerous seas. They come with nothing more than the shirt on their back to seek asylum in a country they believe offers them the best shot at a way of life everyone deserves — a life where basic human rights and dignity are respected.

These are the very same rights denied to my people.

The words that are being spoken by the people forced to the edges of Australian society are born from a strong and positive vision for Australia. They speak with authority and their message emerges from their collective wisdom and experience.

None of us can learn what is right if we fail to listen to what is wrong.

## Three short stories about refugees in Australia

### COMMUNITY

*Troy Pittaway*



The first story begins in a three-bedroom Department of Housing house. Inside is a family of seven: single mother and six children aged three to 17. The house is in terrible shape, because the father, who abused alcohol and was violent, left without paying any of the DHS payments, dumping the mother with the accumulated debt. DHS will not do any repairs until the payment has been met.

The house is tiny. The mother shares her bed with four children, while the two teenagers live in the other rooms. There is no privacy, no quiet area for the older boys to study or be alone, little space for the younger children to play.

But they are not unhappy. This is far from the worst experience of their lives.

The eldest boy Juba, then aged five, and his mother, Esther, had to leave their village in South Sudan. After weeks of aerial attacks, the Sudanese army from the north was approaching to burn their village and kill the survivors.

So they began walking, in the general direction of a refugee camp they had been told about. They didn't know how far away it was or even if it really existed.

After days of walking along sandy roads in desert-like conditions, they sat down. They had run out of food and water and Juba could no longer go on. Esther laid him down in the grass. Knowing he wasn't far from death, she decided to run to find water. Juba recalls lying there, thinking he would die soon.

A few hours later Esther returned bearing milk from a cow that she had found. The milk saved Juba's life. Not long after this they arrived at a UN refugee-processing site and reunited with their extended family. They lived as urban refugees in Egypt before receiving humanitarian visas and being moved to Melbourne.

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The next story takes place at Dandenong Magistrates Court south-east of Melbourne. A young man in his 20s is facing charges of driving while under the influence of alcohol. He arrived in Australia with his mother and three brothers and sisters six years ago.

He remembers the civil war in his home country that left seven million people displaced, two million people dead and many more injured. He remembers the gunfire, the screams of women and children as they ran from their village. He remembers learning to handle a gun before he was a teenager, and walking incredibly long distances, and spending three years in a refugee camp in Uganda.

These events, scorched onto his memory, happened to him during those years when in other, more fortunate countries, people his age were studying at school, chasing after girls and working part time at Macca's.

On arrival in Australia, he was too old for school, so received some English language classes and was left to fend for himself. He couldn't find work, wasn't educated, and was deeply troubled from his experiences.

Alcohol became a way to pass the time with his friends who were in the same situation. They would sit and drink, unsure of what the future held, trying to forget the nightmare.

Until, after drinking a little too much, he gets into his car, is pulled over and ends up in front of a magistrate, about to enter the Australian criminal system.

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The last story takes place on a basketball court in another Melbourne suburb. Here, more than 30 teenagers, boys and girls, are engaged in the fun and competition of sport.

The UN has advocated sport as a community capacity building tool, and in my experience, it is one of the best tools available. Southern Sudanese teenagers love basketball and soccer, and as I look out at the court I see young people experiencing great joy.

I see a young man who saw his best friend killed in front of him, when rebels who killed teachers and students alike attacked his refugee school.

I see a young girl who remembers her grandmother lying on top of her all through a night when her village was attacked by the Northern Sudanese army; the next morning they went outside to find her grandfather had been killed and the village half burned down.

I see a young man who was found wandering by the side of a road, without family, alone, and was picked up by the woman he now calls mum and taken in as one of her own children.

All these young people, each with their own story, shooting hoops, having fun. Enjoying life.