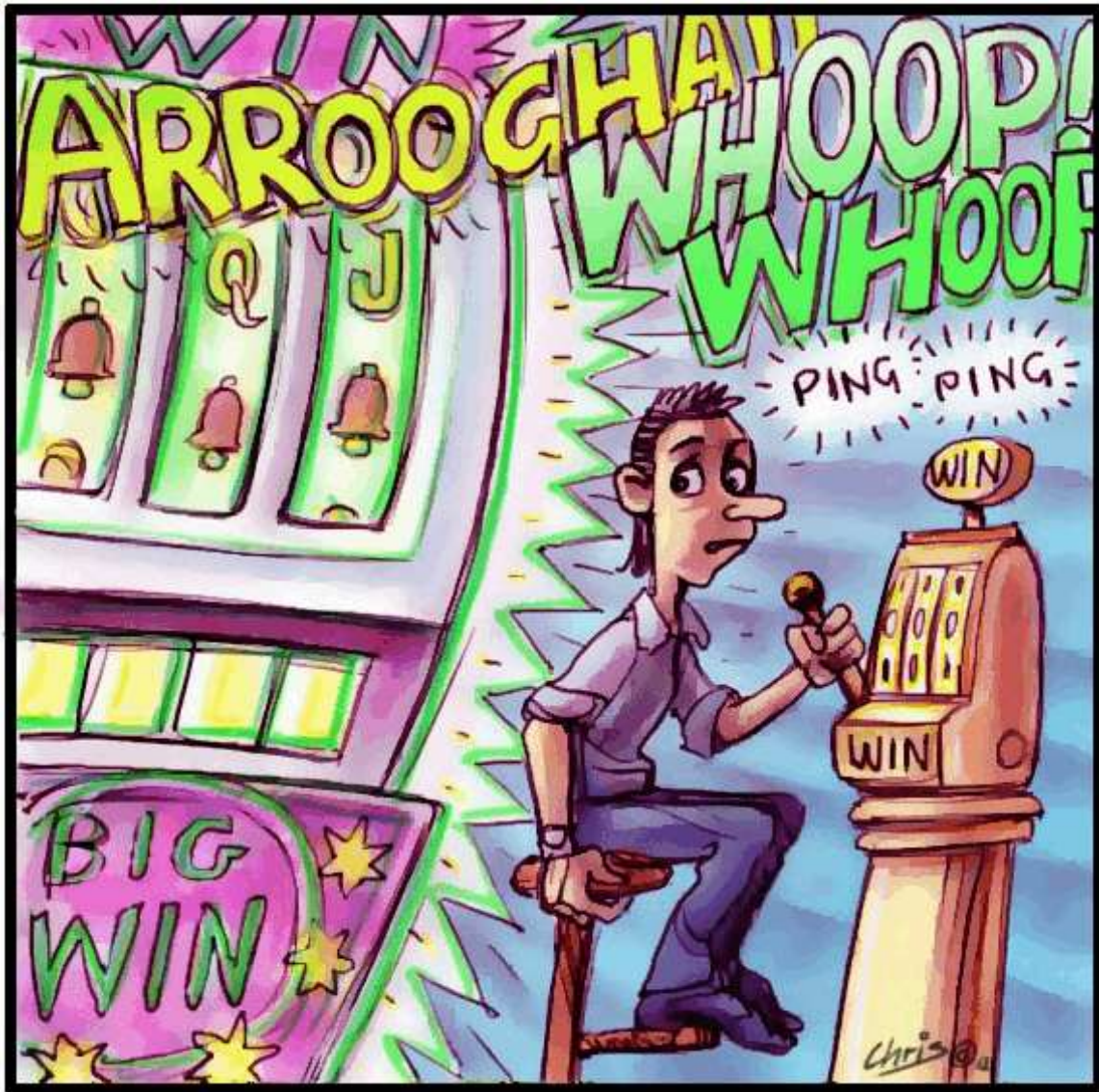


Putting the soul back in the media carnival sideshow <i>Caroline Zielinski</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>3</u></a>
Advice to Bishops on Royal Commission <i>Geoffrey Robinson</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>5</u></a>
Australia's bad job of asylum seeker policy <i>Andrew Hamilton</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>8</u></a>
Quadriplegic sex and dignity <i>Tim Kroenert</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>10</u></a>
Why the Church should thank the media <i>Michael McVeigh</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>12</u></a>
Royal Commission a sign of the times for the Church <i>Pat Power</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>14</u></a>
Broken shoes and dead ends in China's leadership transition <i>Binoy Kampmark</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>16</u></a>
Feminist mothers' domestic dilemmas <i>Madeleine Hamilton</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>18</u></a>
No lowly scapegoats in 'necessary' Royal Commission <i>Moirra Rayner</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>20</u></a>
Dreaming of redemption <i>Various</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>23</u></a>
Church sexual abuse in the media <i>Michael Mullins</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>31</u></a>
Debunking the global financial con job <i>David James</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>33</u></a>
Why we'll never agree about abortion <i>Lyn Bender</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>36</u></a>
Supermarket witches and the Australian pumpkin boom <i>Brian Matthews</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>38</u></a>
Beyond the Obama euphoria <i>Jim McDermott</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>40</u></a>
Amish psychopaths and Gandhian action heroes <i>Tim Kroenert</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>42</u></a>
Religious persecution is not a contest <i>Andrew Hamilton</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>44</u></a>
Sting in the tail of Gillard charities red tape reduction <i>Paul O'Callaghan</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>46</u></a>
Blindsided by a saint at the Catholic Worker <i>Brian Doyle</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>48</u></a>
The other race <i>Fiona Katauskas</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>51</u></a>
Painful lost years for unmarried mothers <i>Gillian Bouras</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>52</u></a>
Meeting mortality <i>Anne Elvey</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>54</u></a>
Cup Day losses to soar with betting apps <i>Michael Mullins</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>58</u></a>
America's choice through Australian eyes <i>Tony Kevin</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>60</u></a>



---

Eureka Street is published fortnightly online, a minimum of 24 times per year by Eureka Street Magazine Pty Ltd

Requests for permission to reprint material from the website and this edition should be addressed to the Editor.

PO Box 553  
Richmond  
VIC 3121  
Australia

Responsibility for editorial content is accepted by the publisher.

Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned.

Tel +61 3 9427 7311  
Fax +61 3 9428 4450  
Eureka@eurekastreet.com.au

©2012 EurekaStreet.com.au

©2012 EurekaStreet.com.au

## Rebuffing the religious right

### VIDEO

*Peter Kirkwood*

Barack Obama's election win last week was a rebuff to America's ultra-conservatives, including the religious right. Extremists in this camp are motivated by a fundamentalist reading of the Bible, particularly the Book of Revelation. They see the Second Coming as imminent, and view God as vengeful and violent.

They see God as being on their side, and interpret a range of contemporary events as confirming their militant version of religion. For instance, they welcome conflict in the Middle East as a sign of the impending apocalypse.

The man featured in this video is a leader in countering this sort of militant fundamentalism. [John Dominic Crossan](#) is one of the world's best known progressive scripture scholars, and has spent his adult life trying to lead Christians to a more thoughtful and educated view of the Bible.

In this interview he argues that Christianity at heart is a religion of peace. The video also contains excerpts from a talk he gave recently at Sydney's Pitt Street Uniting Church entitled 'Is God violent? How to read the Christian Bible and still be a Christian.'

It was the concluding lecture in a series jointly organised by a number of Australian progressive Christian groups including the [Centre for Progressive Religious Thought](#) and the [Progressive Christian Network of Victoria](#).

Crossan was born in Ireland in 1934, and was educated in Ireland and the USA. He trained to become a priest in the Servite order, was ordained in 1957, but left the priesthood in 1969.

He received a Doctorate of Divinity from Maynooth College, Ireland, in 1959, and did post-doctoral research at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome from 1959—1961 and the École Biblique in Jerusalem from 1965—1967.

After leaving the priesthood, he became a lecturer at DePaul University in Chicago and remained there until retirement in 1995. He is now a Professor Emeritus in its Department of Religious Studies.

Perhaps Crossan is most famous for his role as co-founder with Robert Funk of the Jesus Seminar which is part of the US based progressive Christian think-tank, the [Westar Institute](#).

The Institute is controversial in the realm of Christian theology as many of its members question traditional orthodox Christian teachings. For instance, they tend to interpret Jesus' miracles, including the resurrection, as symbols of inner

spiritual experience of his followers rather than real physical events.

Crossan co-chaired the Jesus Seminar from 1985—1996 when its international gatherings met every six months to debate the historicity of the life of Jesus in the gospels.

He has written some 25 books on the historical Jesus, earliest Christianity, and the historical Paul, a number of which became best-sellers. His most recent are *The Greatest Prayer: Rediscovering the Revolutionary Message of the Lord's Prayer* (2010) and *The Power of Parable: How Fiction by Jesus became Fiction about Jesus* (2012).

## Putting the soul back in the media carnival sideshow

MEDIA

*Carol Zielinski*



There is not enough conversation in mainstream media about the ethical role of journalism in the 21st century. Debates about media revolve primarily around commercial viability and interests, and focus on the impact that technology is having on media as a business.

Nearly two years ago, the UK *Guardian* exposed the systematic disregard for journalistic moral practices and for personal privacy and grief in the now defunct *News of the World* newspaper. The repercussions reverberated through all western nations, especially those where Murdoch media controls the majority of the media market. But the story has long since moved silently from the news agenda into academia.

Yet corrupt or plain lazy journalism practices continue to be uncovered, with the BBC now in the spotlight. On 2 November, it falsely implicated senior Tory politician, Alistair McAlpine, of raping a young boy during his years in office. The ensuing media frenzy resulted in the resignation of the BBC's news chief, George Entwistle.

In an op-ed in Melbourne's *The Age*, [London mayor Boris Johnson wrote](#) that 'the people at the BBC show no real sign of understanding what they have done wrong, let alone making amends'. He details the journalists' tendency to worry only about their own jobs while failing to notice the declining quality of their reporting.

Johnson is quick to show his disgust at the BBC's lack of empathy for the man they wrongly accused. 'To call someone a paedophile is to consign them to the lowest circle of hell.' He attributes this gross media oversight to 'a story that was too good to check'.

In the 24/7 world in which we live, reputations and lives can be ruined in the space of a day. Traditional news outlets scramble to beat online media, sacrificing quality, accuracy and empathy in their quest to be first and to gain (and retain) the largest audience.

Who is to blame? Are the current journalists simply self-absorbed, money-obsessed scandal-seekers, or have they been forced to adapt to a culture of sales, where every story is only as good as the profits it brings in?

Ex-Labor minister Lindsay Tanner says the mass media 'is turning into a carnival sideshow', distorting facts to 'maximise the impact of the story'. Truth, accuracy and fairness play little part other than window dressing, masking the reality of today's media philosophy: money, scandal and celebrity. Political



conversation is reduced to slogans and emotionally charged issues. Stories are written from angles that will generate the most outrage.

Earlier this year, *The Australian's* associate editor Cameron Stewart wrote passionately against the implementation of a 'News Media Council' as recommended by the Finkelstein inquiry to safeguard journalistic ethics.

He said the Finkelstein inquiry had been hijacked by academics out of touch with 'real' media practices, and that academics construct courses that lean more heavily 'on media theory, including critical assessment of the media's role in society, than they do on the nuts and bolts of reporting'.

He argued vehemently against educating journalists at university, and advocated for a media industry where aspiring journalists learn journalism from the ground up.

My biggest concern with his article was the reference to 'critical assessment of the media' as a negative quality in future journalists. This implies journalists are not there to understand, analyse and convey difficult societal trends and information to the public, but to simply 'gather information, structure stories and break news'.

It is this lack of soul and deeper cognitive understanding of the role of the media that has become the norm in a society ruled by profit and speed.

Unsurprisingly, speed proved to be a huge factor in the BBC debacle: the story about a senior Tory 'rapist' began on Twitter and went viral accordingly. The speed with which it circulated was indicative of today's 24/7 culture of news, and within hours the BBC's program *Newsnight* and *The Guardian* were feeding the frenzy.

Lord McAlpine was eventually forced to come out of retirement and deny all allegations, which were proven wrong when the victim of abuse confirmed that the Lord was not, in fact, his rapist.

It will be interesting to see this issue unfold, and even more interesting to observe if it is possible for the media to retain some semblance of integrity in the face of growing economic pressures.

## **Advice to Bishops on Royal Commission**

### RELIGION

*Geoffrey Robinson*

In two weeks' time the Australian bishops will meet in their biannual meeting. It is obvious the Royal Commission into sexual abuse will be a major topic. I respectfully suggest some matters for their attention.

I suggest they invite as many leaders of religious institutes as possible to be present and join in the discussion.

Individual bishops have already promised 'full cooperation' with the Commission, but the gathered bishops and religious need to have a serious discussion concerning exactly what 'full' cooperation will mean. It is vital that all agree in detail on this point.

I suggest that they invite a couple of experts to speak to them on what the Commission will probably require. For example, they might seek out some persons who were involved in the Wood Royal Commission in 1996. They then need to ensure that they are all on exactly the same page.

They need to be aware that one single bishop or religious leader adopting a different idea of what 'full' means can quickly discredit all bishops and religious.

It is obvious that, if a particular case is discussed in the media, the local bishop or religious leader may have to respond. On the national scene, however, there must be one or two bishops or religious leaders appointed as national spokespersons. It must be crystal clear who speaks in the name of all the bishops or religious, and equally clear who does not.

The appearance of Cardinal Pell at a media conference last Tuesday was a disaster for the Church. In saying that, I am referring partly to the words he chose, and partly to the non-verbal messages he poured out. I believe that, beneath the exterior, he is a man who knows compassion, and I know that he has acted decisively on many cases of abuse, but his compassion did not come through to viewers.

It is essential that any spokespersons chosen by the bishops and religious should radiate, by both verbal and non-verbal means, the three virtues of total honesty, sincere humility and profound compassion.

The bishops and religious leaders will need to set up structures through which they can ensure a coordinated response to the matters raised by the Commission. These structures will no doubt cost money. But it would be a tragedy for the Church if the perception were that the bishops and religious were willing to spend large sums of money on lawyers and others to protect them before the Commission, but were being less generous to victims.



This is as much a matter of perception as of reality, and the bishops and religious will need to be constantly aware of it, for they can be certain that the media will.

The Church can never be content with its response to victims and needs to continually revisit this question. I have been perturbed by images on television of several parents of victims who committed suicide saying that no one from the Church has ever visited them. I know the difficulties of following up on each family, but it seems to me that there should be some structures here too.

As a matter of attitude, victims and their families, no matter how angry, aggressive and difficult they may be, are never our enemies, but people who have been deeply wounded by our community.

Moving on to even more difficult territory, bishops and religious leaders need to grapple with the fact that to this day there has never been any serious enquiry into the factors within the Church that may have contributed to abuse. The John Jay study in the United States contained much good material, but it did not answer this need.

For example, there has been a bland assertion in places that obligatory celibacy has not in any way been a cause of abuse, but few people believe this assertion and, as a negative fact, it could never be proved.

Unless and until obligatory celibacy is put on the table for discussion, the question will not go away. The question is not whether it has been the total cause or even the major cause, but whether it has been a significant contributing factor. Personally I find it impossible to deny that it has been such a factor.

There are other factors: the absence of women from the priesthood or from any significant role in responding to abuse; the idea that every sexual sin is a mortal sin and the impossible scruples that this has led to; clericalism and the idea that priests are somehow 'taken up' above other human beings and are 'ontologically different' from them; the feeling of many priests and religious that they must be perfect or at least appear to be; the lack of a true professionalism among priests and religious.

Some of these matters could be dealt with by the Australian bishops and religious, e.g. professionalism, including such matters as better screening processes for candidates; more attention to human development in seminaries and novitiates; psychological assessments, periodic professional appraisals; the presence of a supervisor; obligatory in-service; codes of conduct and a means of dealing with those people who, after every effort, simply do not belong in the priesthood or religious life. Immediate attention could be given to these matters.

Most of these questions are beyond the competence of the Australian authorities, e.g. obligatory celibacy; sexual morality; the role of women and clericalism. Such matters could easily arise in the Royal Commission, and the



bishops and religious leaders need to discuss how they are going to deal with them in a credible way.

Since I have been there among the bishops myself, I have much compassion for them and the religious leaders as they try to pick their way through a closely sown minefield. I do not envy them. They are in dire need of our prayers and whatever assistance we can give.

## **Australia's bad job of asylum seeker policy**

### POLITICS

*Andrew Hamilton*



Three recent developments in Australian treatment of asylum seekers are best studied for their symbolic value. They communicate clearly a dispiriting reality that underlies them.

The situation of asylum seekers on Nauru is a symbol of shambolic policy making. The proposed excision of the Australian mainland is a symbol of ethical jobbery. And the repatriation of asylum seekers without informing them of their rights to claim asylum is a symbol of despair.

You can tell bad policy making by the trail of broken human lives it leaves behind it. Bad policy made on the run almost always disturbs and damages human lives. The image of asylum seekers held in tents in the heat of Nauru, many on hunger strike and at least one now in risk of death, will surely be followed by images of people withering from depression and resentment and needing medical care to heal what has been wantonly broken.

The policy goal is to stop the boats, or to put it more kindly, to discourage people from coming by boat. The asylum seekers have been placed on Nauru before proper preparations can be made in order to ensure that they gain from coming by boat no advantage over other asylum seekers left in Indonesia. Their lack of advantage will encourage others not to make the boat trip.

The Government has yet to announce the precise exchange rate between the currencies of misery and lack of advantage.

So Nauru and Manus Island will hold people who were not stopped by the policy from coming by boat. If the policy actually increases the number of people arriving by boat, as it may, it will have achieved precisely the opposite to what it intended, at great cost to people and in resources.

This is not to mention the further details of the policy yet to be devised: the adjudication of their claims, any review there may be, and what will become of those found to be refugees. One may assume that these processes will be designed to ensure that the asylum seekers have no recourse to Australian law. Both people and the process itself will sink into a morass of arbitrariness. This is not the mark of good policy.

The excision of Australian mainland from the immigration zone simply extends legislation already in place. It is conceptually clever, displaying the same intelligence as the slicing and bundling of financial derivatives that gave us the Great Financial Crisis. There it allowed banks to make money without actually breaking the law.

The excision of Australia from the immigration zone enables Australia to renege on its commitment to offer asylum to those facing persecution by redefining Australia. The use of mind displayed in this game turns trust and justice into dust. This comes from the policy manual composed by spivs and mainchancers.

The repatriation of Sri Lankans without explaining to them their rights as asylum seekers is a symbol of despair in policy making. It is an exercise in naked power.

At the heart of good policy is the use of mind, of discriminating justly between those who should benefit from the policy and those who are not entitled to do so. Australia's subscription to the UNHCR Convention on the Status of Refugees commits Australia to offer protection to refugees who flee from persecution. Refugee policy decides which claimants are fleeing from persecution and how protection can be given them speedily and efficaciously.

To deport potential refugees without allowing them to make a claim is not an exercise of rational policy making but a confession of hope abandoned of ever acting reasonably and rightly. Power is all.

The heart of these three changes to Australia's treatment of refugees lies in an excision: not the fictive excision of migration rights from Australian territory, but the excision of mind and heart from the Australian body politic.

## Quadriplegic sex and dignity

### FILMS

*Tim Kroenert*

***The Sessions* (MA). Director: Ben Lewin. Starring: John Hawkes, Helen Hunt, Wiliam H. Macy.**

Mark (Hawkes), a charming and witty poet and journalist, is commissioned to write a feature about disability and sexuality. Himself a quadriplegic and a virgin, Mark's encounters with people who speak candidly about how disability hinders or enhances their sexual activity, stir his own romantic and sexual frustration.

He visits a therapist who suggests he meet with a 'sex surrogate', a woman who provides specialised sexual services. A devout Catholic, Mark first gains the approval of his local priest, Fr Brendan (Macy), then begins a series of sessions with the surrogate, Cheryl (Hunt). His interactions with her form the bulk of the film.

There is no doubt this is a human dignity issue for Mark. He reports to Brendan the humiliation of ejaculating involuntarily while being bathed. His decision to engage Cheryl's services comes only after his most recent attempt at initiating a romantic relationship. For Mark, the emphasis of his coital longing is on physical *intimacy*.

It is a weakness of the film that the priest is played mostly for comedic value. The sight of respected character actor Macy sporting a dorky mullet hairdo elicits only laughter. At one point Brendan shows up at Mark's house attired in sweaty lycra and headband, apparently having decided to pop in for a visit while out for a jog.

The character is a clown, not a 'fool' whose corny exterior belies his wisdom. When Mark first approaches him for advice, Brendan merely gazes momentarily at a crucifix on the wall before advising him to 'go for it'. During the film he mostly offers platitudes or looks uncomfortable as Mark recounts his encounters with Cheryl.

These scenes represent a missed opportunity to give weightier consideration to otherwise unspoken ethical questions, such as whether it is ever ethically defensible for a woman to be paid for sex — which might be seen to inherently exploit her — in the service of another's dignity ( [even that of a person with a disability](#) ).

The film is not concerned with this question and in truth does not suffer much for it. Cheryl is portrayed as a character with her dignity intact, in control of her encounters with Mark and demanding he respect her person and her privacy. Sex, as she teaches it to him, is a shared act between two equals, not a tool for male gratification.

On the other hand *The Sessions* is on firm ground with its affirmation of the dignity of those who experience disability, and should in fact be commended for its frank and humane treatment of such individuals' sexuality. This is true both of its portrayal of Mark and of the characters whom he interviews early in the film.

The 'sessions' themselves are particularly touching, conducted by the two actors with courage and sensitivity. In recent years Hawkes (*Winter's Bone*) has emerged as a character actor of chameleonesque quality; here he inhabits Mark's immobile but not insensitive limbs completely. It is a career-best performance from Hunt, too.

The film reveals intimacy as a natural result of their physical interaction, even if ostensibly it is reduced to a financial transaction; Cheryl's struggle to keep the relationship professional provides a deeply affecting subplot. *The Sessions* has its flaws but on balance is one of the most effective life-affirming films you'll see this year.

## Why the Church should thank the media

### RELIGION

*Michael McVeigh*

The Royal Commission into child sexual abuse can only be a good thing for the Catholic Church. It is a chance to account for the betrayal and crimes of priests and other church representatives who committed acts of abuse against the vulnerable, and for the careless, even callous way in which many church officials responded to complaints against their own. This will be a long overdue first step in moving forward.



However, while victims have been calling for a Royal Commission for a long time, and while [the bishops have welcomed it](#), the fact that it has taken government intervention for a proper account of the crisis to take place represents in part a failure of the Church's response.

The Church's defenders point to the policies and procedures put in place to protect children, the establishment of the National Committee for Professional Standards, and the Towards Healing processes for providing compensation and support for victims unwilling to make complaints against abusers through the legal system.

Most abuse cases today are from more than 20 years ago, indicating a change in Church practice and in cultural attitudes, providing better protection for young people. The Church's current procedures are part of a laudable move towards a response centred on the needs of victims, and a greater awareness of the problem in general.

But its response has fallen short in other areas.

When Church authorities first got together to address the issue of abuse by clergy at the beginning of the 1990s, they developed a nine-point plan. One of the points was to research whether or not there were particular issues in the culture of the Church that might contribute to people abusing.

Yet more than 20 years later, we're yet to see a serious study of these issues that has grown out of the lessons learned. Nor have we been given an adequate account of the number of abuse cases the various dioceses and religious orders have dealt with through their formal processes, or the nature and distribution of the cases.

While changes have been made in the processes for selecting and forming priests and religious, and while there is a greater awareness of the nature of abuse and paedophilia, we're yet to see a serious institutional effort to explore whether the Church's approaches to sexuality, power and authority, allowed a



climate of abuse to occur. Independent contributions [such as that of Bishop Geoffrey Robinson](#) have been marginalised and largely ignored.

In addition, while there have been apologies to victims — including the 2008 apology from Pope Benedict XVI at World Youth Day, and various efforts by bishops and congregational leaders — the Church is yet to find a structure where true reconciliation can take place.

The Pope's 2008 apology in many ways echoed Pope John Paul II's speech to Indigenous people in 1986. That speech proved to be the beginning of an era of reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the rest of the Church.

It saw the establishment of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council, the creation of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday on the liturgical calendar, and a greater awareness and acceptance of Indigenous culture and peoples in Catholic schools, parishes and other institutions.

The 2008 apology saw no such follow-up for victims of abuse. What formal recognition is made each year for the victims of abuse by clergy? Where are the Catholic bodies for these victims? Where are the priests and religious dedicated to ministering to them and advocating for them both within the Church and in broader society?

In terms of its ability to continue to minister to the Australian people with any integrity, this crisis is the biggest to face the Church. As well as providing protocols for complaints against clergy to be heard, the bishops needed to be leaders in publicly recognising the issue and providing spaces for victims to have their voices heard. The fact that we're still talking about this issue today shows that the Church has failed to do this adequately.

Cardinal George Pell argued this week that the Church has been unfairly vilified by the media. But the media has done the Church a favour in bringing this issue to light and campaigning for a more compassionate response to victims. The Church through inaction has lost its moral authority when it comes to this issue. Until it can provide a proper account of its misdeeds and point to real commitments to victims, the attacks will justifiably continue.

## **Royal Commission a sign of the times for the Church**

### RELIGION

*Pat Power*

The Prime Minister took the only course open to her in agreeing to a Royal Commission into child sexual abuse in our country. There has been more than enough media coverage to convince any fair-minded person of the terrible damage done through the abuse of children.

Over the past 20 years I have listened to people who have suffered such abuse, sometimes many years ago, and every time I hear a heartrending story I see another facet of the horror of this criminal behaviour.

The loss of childhood innocence, the secrecy which means little ones carry a burden they can share with no one, the misguided sense of guilt they often carry for many years, blaming themselves for what someone else has done to them, their shame before God; all of which may be compounded at times when they do try to unburden their troubled souls and find they are not believed or understood.

Some experience failed marriages; speaking to such people it becomes clear that sexuality, which is meant to be God's joyous gift, has been a source of confusion and hurt because of their destructive childhood experiences. Every person's experience will be different, but I believe the present publicity, painful though it be, will give more people the opportunity to unburden themselves and thus take the first steps towards finding healing and peace.

Whatever form the Royal Commission takes, opportunity will be given to those who have suffered abuse to be heard and taken seriously, in such a way that not only will their own individual case be dealt with, but systems can be put in place to afford children greater protection in the future.

I welcome the fact that the Royal Commission's scope will be wider than the confines of the Catholic Church. The abuse of children is a much wider issue. At the same time, I believe it important that Catholics as a church face up to the particular factors that have contributed to sexual abuse among the ranks of clergy and religious.

The work that has already been done in Australia to address the problem should be acknowledged. Since 1996, the documents *Towards Healing*, which outlines the principles and procedures in responding to complaints of abuse, and *Integrity in Ministry*, which provides guidelines for behaviour, and other measures have attempted to provide justice and healing for all involved.

People such as Sister Angela Ryan and Bishops Geoffrey Robinson, William Morris, Peter Connors and Philip Wilson have been at the forefront of such reform.

Most people, including Catholics, would accept that the Church has been overly negative in its teaching on sexuality. Many Church pronouncements have caused

me to question how an all-male celibate voice can realistically enunciate such teaching in a manner which is able to be understood by the whole human family.

Unless women and married people are made part of the governance of the Church, there will continue to be a lack of balance and reality in its teaching, especially around sexuality. I include homosexuality in that critique.

These are painful times to be a Catholic, but if we are humble enough to admit that at times we have got it wrong, sometimes horribly wrong, then there is the opportunity to make reparation and to do all we can to ensure the same mistakes are not repeated.

Opening the Second Vatican Council 50 years ago, Pope John XXIII called on those within the Church to 'read the signs of the times' so as to bring the light of the Gospel on to every aspect of the life of the Church. My hope is that the Royal Commission can become for the Catholic Church a true instrument of grace and healing.

## Broken shoes and dead ends in China's leadership transition

POLITICS

*Binoy Kampmark*



It is a time of leadership transitions. The US has had its monumentally expensive election. There are changes in North Korea, now headed by a leader who has initiated modest internal reforms in an otherwise brutal state.

Then, there is the meeting of the 18th Communist Party Congress in China, where a leadership transition is taking place in strict, choreographed style. Things have been rocky in the Politburo, due to scandals involving murder and systemic corruption. The body is deeply factional and fractious, despite the public face of unity. Social media and the communication cycle have made clamping down on rumours even more difficult.

The executive body of the Congress has formalised a list of names for congress delegates to review. The favourite remains Vice President Xi Jinping (pictured), who has for some time positioned himself to replace President Hu Jintao. Yet [even he has become enigmatic](#), disappearing from public view in September without any formal explanation, failing to make scheduled meetings with foreign dignitaries and troubling China observers.

It would seem that the problems that face China and its citizens are considerable.

Under Hu, the security establishment blossomed, and economic reforms stalled. Party officials, mindful of fears that Chinese growth has become lethargic, released figures on Friday [showing that the sluggishness is abating](#). Output from factories, workshops and mines rose 9.6 per cent in October, from 9.2 per cent in September. Consumer spending has increased while inflation kept down to 1.7 per cent.

'What a lovely dataset to welcome in China's new set of leaders,' crowed HIS Global Insight economists Ren Xianfang and Alistair Thornton. In his drawn-out farewell address, Hu claimed that 'People's quality of life has dramatically improved. Democracy and the legal system has been improved.'

In real terms, the Chinese leadership have been mobilising their citizens for a popular platform for Beijing's sabre rattling in territorial disputes. The attempts to target Japanese companies over the [Senkaku-Diaoyu Islands](#) is one such instance, a mixture of popular indignation and state orchestration. But behind the political agitation lie genuine efforts to forge ties and bypass the heated engagements.

Realpolitik is not a citizen's priority. Chinese students are flocking to institutions in the US and Australasia. American companies seek inexpensive labour in China; its teachers, struggling to find work in their home country, do so in Beijing, one example being Jonathan Levine of New York, who [found employment](#) at Tsinghua University. For such people, 'China bashing' is distinctly off the cards.

There is also acute dissatisfaction with the politburo leaders. Hu's farewell speech has been ridiculed by some Chinese bloggers who have managed to evade the censors. One user of Sina Weibo, China's Twitter-styled platform, [claimed](#) , 'No matter if it's the new or old road, if you put on two broken shoes, how can you walk down a good path?' Another: 'Won't walk down the old path ... We only walk down a dead end.'

Australia's unimaginative perspective on China's growing and jostling power accords with Washington's. In Obama's terms, China can be an adversary or a partner. That is a difficult stance to take, given that China has become America's largest debt holder, while America is China's greatest purchaser. There is a dual strategy of containment and management, an approach that risks failing dramatically depending on how Beijing responds.

The United States is increasing its Pacific presence in naval terms, holding more exercises with South Korean and Japanese forces, and basing more troops in Australia. In real terms, the re-deployment will not see a dramatic increase in vessels, but the belligerent symbolism is unmistakable.

Australia has a very selective interest in China — it buys China's commodities, but is troubled by its increasing global influence, not merely in the consumer market, but in its hunger for resources. That hunger is both an asset and a threat.

The great challenge, [argues Charles Doran](#) , is how to integrate China into the global system without conflict, a case of identifying its 'power cycle'. Powers in their twilight, in the face of powers that seem challenging, often precipitate conflict. A similar view was [expressed by Kevin Rudd](#) to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in leaked WikiLeaks cables — seek to 'integrate' China, and if not, deploy force in the manner of a 'brutal realist'.

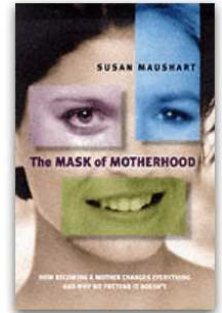
The new China is a complex leviathan, facing internal struggles in terms of economic reform, the role of the party, and its territorial assertions. The striking question for the new leadership will be whether they do, in fact, walk to a dead-ended future with broken shoes, or embrace a different pathway with a new set of footwear.

## Feminist mothers' domestic dilemmas

### NON-FICTION

*Madeleine Hamilton*

Next year, feminist writer Monica Dux will publish a book about motherhood called *Things I Didn't Expect (When I Was Expecting)*. I know this not only because I [follow her on Twitter](#) but also because about 18 months ago, in the name of research, she asked me (and I'm sure many other women) about my feelings towards my post-birth vagina.



While I can only guess the tone and themes of Dux's book, I generally like my written reflections on mothering to be filled with pathos and searing political indictments.

Does it explore postnatal depression (*Friday Forever* by Susan Bradley-Smith), women artists' tortured quest to combine motherhood and creativity (*The Divided Heart*, Rachel Power), social repression by the realities of mothering young children (*The Mask of Motherhood*, Susan Maushart), or the suppression of women's liberation by the natural birth, breastfeeding and anti-childcare movements (*The Conflict*, Elisabeth Badinter)?

Yes? Then here is my library card. I avoid positive-thinking guides and cheery mummy memoirs. If there's no feminist political bent, it stays on the shelf.

But I don't know many other mothers with such criteria. Friends who regularly read (and there's many who have no time or energy) favour escapist genres that have nothing to do with rearing small children. Those who do peruse parenting books often have no stipulation that they be feminist. In some cases they shun such texts.

But there are others who seek out politically themed material. Louise Brand, a 39-year-old gallery curator, likes exploring 'how I have handled motherhood, and how it has affected me' through other women's writing on the subject. She has consequently read Maushart's *The Mask of Motherhood* and Badinter's *The Conflict*.

Likewise, Amelia Carson (artist, poet, mother of three young boys) read Maushart because she is interested in 'the cerebral side of motherhood and the wider discussions of family, woman and motherhood in today's society'.

For 33-year-old professional photographer Mabel Herford (not her real name), who struggled to breastfeed and experienced enormous shame when she switched to feeding her baby girl formula at six weeks, Badinter's book had a revelatory impact. She now feels 'no guilt about using childcare and feeding my baby formula'.

If tired mothers are unable to commit to long books, then what about



feminist-themed motherhood blogs? Thirty-four-year-old lawyer Cristy Clark searched for online material 'because I was looking for voices that reflected my own experiences and perspective'.

Indeed, the search for material that deals honestly and directly with motherhood makes some blogs highly attractive. Without the mediating effects of an editor and publisher, the writer's immediate and uncensored feelings about her children and her parenting role is not only attention-capturing, but seems to reassure frazzled women that they aren't alone in their daily struggles. They soothe through their very rawness.

To artist Lily Mae Martin (who has her own evocative blog, [Berlin Domestic](#)), 'they feel like they are written by real people and make me feel less alone'. For Amelia Clarkson, blogs that 'are more fearless, that share the honest and raw mistakes, as well as the joys and wins' triumph over 'preachy and sentimental' parenting texts.

I don't read many motherhood blogs but recently I've been wondering if my beloved feminist reading list is helping or hindering my day-to-day work raising two young girls.

Maushart's book contains a revelation on nearly every page about the gruelling realities of motherhood that are concealed generation after generation, but how does this actually help me deal with my own baby-toddler-combo-shitstorm? Aside from making me enraged that due to the privileging of men's professional work and their superior earning power it is me, not my husband, who is being subjected to this aural and visual assault?

And when I'm scrabbling around wiping up Weetbix under the baby's highchair and she's twisting her milky fingers into my hair, will it make me feel better to recall how university-educated women don't capitalise effectively on their qualifications due to the years they spent out of the workforce?

No. What I really need is distraction, preferably via a cracking good joke of the 'What the showgirl-said-to-the-bishop' variety.

I admire the style and sentiment of books like Maushart's, but do they, in fact, make me miserable? Similarly, is it possible to get trapped in a loop of hard-times mothering blogs that ultimately reinforce your own already ambivalent attitudes towards your role? As much as it pains me intellectually to concede it, at this stage I know I am much better off perusing the crime fiction, show-biz memoirs and humour sections of the bookshop.

So if it's not new mothers who should be reading feminist books about motherhood, then who should be? That's easy: everyone else!

## No lowly scapegoats in 'necessary' Royal Commission

### POLITICS

*Moira Rayner*

A Royal Commission is or should be a rare sight. A Royal Commission is a short-term, immensely powerful 'star chamber' set up by the executive. They should be few, because governments shouldn't be allowed to force people to give evidence, possibly incriminate themselves and be exposed to public obloquy, without compelling reason.

There is such reason, and the blood has been crying out for justice for far too long. Adult survivors of sex crimes against them as children, by men who presented as the personification of God, have seen their assailants protected by the institutions they worked in. They and their advocates were finally backed up, surprisingly by police. It takes the force to confront the misuse of force.

It started with the Victorian Police Commissioner's submission to the feeble Parliamentary inquiry established by Premier Baillieu this year. He was scathing about the local Catholic Church's obstruction of police investigations and its staggeringly complete failure to report known paedophile priests.

Then Peter Fox, a senior Newcastle police officer, went public and, in his own words, 'threw away' his career by demanding a Royal Commission into these cover-ups. When he was, instead, handed an inquiry into the response to reported sex crimes in his own district, the ensuing public disgust became politically necessary to assuage.

It was the quickest and most effective campaign I have ever seen, and bore fruit yesterday when the Prime Minister announced a Commission into institutional responses to sex crimes against children in their care.

Peter Fox has already been vilified as 'unstable', as it is ever the case for a whistleblower. He was a [brave and decent man](#) on last night's ABC 7.30 Report. So was Frank Brennan, the 'meddlesome priest', [who told the ABC later that evening](#) that responsibility for the repulsed investigations and the wretched decision-making that put the interests of the institution ahead of the love of God, goes high. Very high. There can be no lowly scapegoats here.

This inquiry will be different. It must, because it would be another crime to indulge in titillating tales of torture, rape and beatings, and community outrage against 'beasts' who do these things. The beasts include ourselves.

This investigation will be into the machinations of the institutions which represent the obligation of the state to protect children from exploitation and torture, and to facilitate their recovery. This duty is best set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but that has only been with us since 1990, when Australia ratified it.

But it is also into the wretched writhing of bodies who set themselves up in the name of God and religion and the eternal, who claim privileges in every day life, and who we trusted. Whom children trusted. Who betrayed them.

I have worked my entire professional life for the right of every child to be heard, treated as a human being of innate worth and dignity, and taken seriously. I have appeared in courts, written papers, books and set up a commission for children's rights.

So it is not lightly that I say that our lack of care has taken away childhoods. Adult survivors have had their souls stolen, and every insulting excuse (it was only after Vatican II; we didn't know; a man is entitled to be presumed innocent; a child can't be believed; we sent him away for treatment; we didn't know then what we know now) reminds them daily about the ultimate betrayal of trust.

This Commission must find a way to institutionalise the right of every child to be heard. It isn't about punishing the predators. We have to change, deeply. We must learn to listen to every child, as a moral equal.

One of the informing moments of my career came from the survivors of a family which had finally disclosed that an authoritarian, imposing father had beaten and raped every one of his children under the very eye of their mother, who 'noticed' when he introduced his latest sexual partner, her eldest daughter's best friend, into the bed — and came to me.

I interviewed every one of those children, and told her what they told me. In my presence and in theirs, she swore she didn't know: that it had always happened while she was working to support the family, usually on night shifts. In my presence two of those children said, 'But we told you, Mum.' She didn't hear. Even then, she didn't hear.

This is not to be an inquiry into the monsters who, like that father, take advantage of the needy and vulnerable. I expect it to reveal more than we might like about why men and women just don't hear what children say or inquire into what they might say, who don't notice patterns of behaviour in popular or powerful men, and turn a blind eye to the demonisation of the children who go 'wild'.

I expect it to challenge some, at least, of the many men and women who, in their ordinary work and routine, deny the probability or truth of children's stories, of managers and pastors who choose to defer and refer responsibility to others and who wash their hands of the results of others' failure to achieve justice; who choose, in committees and after conferences with counsel, to decline to participate in investigations; and who may even be naive enough to accompany a paedophile to court: who escort from their desks those who try to act effectively about reporting and protecting the abuse of children's rights; who take comfort in their insurers' advice, and protect the reputations and safety deposit boxes of their respectable institutions.

It will take years — the Irish commission took ten — and millions, and will destroy some reputations and lives and ambitions: and it may not be fair. It will not target just the Catholic Church.

This is a direct call, to reassess the status of children. Compensating damaged adults and listening to them now is not enough. It sends a warning to all those comfortable people who believe in their own virtue. You should not be comfortable. Your sacred space has been defiled. Your institutions designed to protect children instead have given comfort and protection to their rapists and bullies.

May there be hope for the boys and girls who are being groomed and frightened today and tonight. May this Commission's work tie a millstone around the necks of those who have hurt these little ones, by not loving and respecting their rights. May we see a sea change.

## **Dreaming of redemption**

POETRY

*Various*

### **Altar Rock**

#### **I: Brand Highway North**

As angles travel, haystacks refract hectares,  
bales become ziggurat temple stones,  
sandstone drums for columns never assembled.  
Here speaks the international currency of straw,  
a coppered steel dialect, whose accent sounds  
Devonian here, Australian in Essex.

In Dongara, Morton Bay Figs form the arches,  
tracery and trunks of a half-completed nave,  
scaffolding removed from all promise and purpose.  
North of Badgingarra, hills as dark as sodden moors  
beg chapels, a hardy leather pelt stretched tight  
over the country's bare, sharp bones; the puncture  
of one post and it will rip and spill white sand,  
scarecrow in a storm, bleeding straw.

#### **II: Mount Magnet Road East**

Further north, the land is prised open, they say,  
valleys regurgitated. Mountains bleed into sea,  
flesh hung from trees charred by their own shadows  
black hands held up against the sun. It may all be true,  
for hear now, in the distance, this prophecy: the night's  
chandelier, crashing over a black marble table.  
So savour these last wheatlands, where slopes carpeted  
with golden grain's choral glow still flap and crack  
like hot sheets, outcrops burnt back to the blood-red bone,  
fired limbs of blackened stone. Here the war has been

refined to contour lines, visitation stories of dearth  
and deliverance Jeremiah might have believed;  
here is hope, discrete, unspoken, but lightly inscribed  
on slopes by slender post and wire, faith in invisible rivers  
stripped down to watermarks etched on tablets  
between dusty trees.

### **III: Mullewa**

In the deli's dark and sullen sanctuary, tourists  
congregate, lured by the promise of everlasting flowers,  
buying sour communion wine, while in shuttered shops  
and shrouded rooms in every fibro cube the dry town  
keeps watch on the rock at its skirt, where Hawes  
once dreamt black and white might kneel to rub rough stone  
against their cheek, and weep. This lost moment  
still stalls the day and haunts the night, this lost chance  
to take things further still runs under this skeleton  
of a town, a stubborn silver trickle, waiting to be found.

*Graham Kershaw*

### **Horseback**

I like the names, the recitations,  
the desert moon, the gait of camels,  
the wild men with their beards and honey,  
the women with their well-used names,  
the olive groves, the stony mountains,  
the mystic, intermittent rivers.  
I'm scared though of its discontents,  
the sound of thunder minus rain,  
its liturgies and long divison.  
I hear the wisdom in its singing —  
despite the tumult of the priests,



their formulae and incantations.  
The latter half has calmer paths,  
is easier on horseback —  
milder hills and more oases.  
The dialects of both I find  
still buzzing in my ears,  
a kind of tinnitus perhaps.  
The older on, it's said, is filled  
with what the wind subtracts from stone.  
Each village, town or city bears  
its metaphoric ring.  
From palaces to hovels,  
everywhere without exception,  
the literal is not enough.  
There is a background susurraton,  
mainly heard at dawn.  
It moves there as a sort of whisper  
not unlike the wind,  
a sense of something not yet named.  
They offer me their foods:  
one half with its prohibitions,  
the other with its loaves and fishes.  
Their litanies and chronicles  
sustain a single note.  
The meaning's in the sound alone,  
resisting all translation.  
Every time I ride there now  
the maps seems less familiar.  
The risk of vanishing entirely  
along with sweat and saddlebags

cannot be ignored  
though still at dawn I find myself  
riding back across the border,  
the sigh of my uncertainties  
widening with the light.

*Geoff Page*

**Celan**

**everything that is was spoken**

no other way to light but these hands  
I hear the call        ice river running  
smell the border        smell of it passing  
all the names are mine

**you're talking to the sky again**

clouds round on things, on thought  
dug to get to        somewhere the dark is true  
in some head there's still        anything glints        we see into  
an edge is always shining, cleaves  
here's a cast fishing        flag dredged  
the sky is well gated        hardly a chink  
cast off the dice and the venom  
this thimble's depth sea  
goes up        with one spark

**the coffin grows into a tree**

stars alight at my stop  
here's the dream        in which sets sail  
love and the springtide        strangers singing  
see ourselves in the river, the mirror we quaff  
nothing our own hands raised  
it's the future — far as the blue of frayed edges, paws

the other trying to get in

**time returns to the clock's shell**

to the sea which bore it  
time takes the heart in entrails down      the moon in burlap  
    we swallow all there is of time  
from where you have fallen still a way to go  
and heaven      that vanishing coin, speck  
blue as it was all those ages back

**the dead whom we've loved**

in the bones of the soul      go with us  
they do not require      the silence of prayer  
they do not know      which way we carry  
what is it eyes shine with?

**some channel where the static's true**

in bitter woods      Pray, Lord. We are near.  
a glut of track led      day blind dice to try  
pray to us God      you might still get through  
there has to be some free will left      might allow creation

**flower and stone**

as one towards another grown  
in nakedness      water between  
so the eye must seek out meaning      its prey  
cliffs beetle brow  
so far down in the dream      day will never get there

*Christopher Lee*

**Redemption**

**1. Contemplation**

It's the alcohol that makes me white  
the magic of intoxication  
suits my dreaming fine  
I want to be civilised.  
The harder I drink the whiter I get  
O how I want to imbibe  
like a gentleman  
get home to the wife every night.  
Working hard for the man  
kids don't want to go to school  
up at dawn every morning  
might stay home on welfare  
do a course — certificate IV  
teaching something white and airy.  
I want God to make me white  
and rich and fat  
next week we get royalties  
as well as welfare cheques.  
No more blackeyed payback wives  
no more paedophiles  
alcohol does not make love  
we out here all alone  
come in and lose your chains.  
Sing and dance wildeyed  
in blackout dreams  
demand sovereignty.  
I want to drink like I want to die.  
They put me in their gaols  
the back of their divie vans  
they beat me good and turn me black

from lack of alcohol.

I see the sound of moonlight  
striking water in the night.

## **2. Metamorphosis**

As the white inches from my blood

I become aboriginal

black

as a matter of evolution I am  
culturally changed.

The leaves fall

one day at a time

soberly

serenely they lay me naked

in a fourth dimension.

Unentombed and resurrected

God appears within the landscape

becomes country

without any bright colours.

The brightest colour of them all  
is blood.

Everything is round

the storylines in circles and cycles

the owners and the owned

are the same thing.

Nobody speaks in straight lines

it is considered rude.

What owns me is round.

If you go from here to there

you should walkabout a bit.

The best hunters know the cycles

of the hunted.  
The art  
the land itself  
which owns me  
which caused me  
breathes in an out  
like a horse's flank.  
From day to night  
the climate walks around the tides  
from where my gods come to speak  
into which my dead die.  
They are always near  
circling  
flowing through my veins  
as bright as the brightest colour  
over which the sea folds  
like a shroud.

*Mick Ringiari a.k.a. Patrick McCauley*

## Church sexual abuse in the media

EDITORIAL

*Michael Mullins*



If there is anything amusing about the Iraq War, it is the reality-defying propaganda broadcasts of President Saddam Hussein's information minister Muhammad Saeed al-Sahhaf, otherwise known as 'Comical Ali'. As the Americans were closing in on Baghdad in 2003, he extolled the invincibility of the Iraqi Army and the permanence of Saddam's rule.

Those paying close attention to media coverage of clergy sexual abuse might find Cardinal George Pell's defence of the Church hard to swallow. He [suggested](#) to *The Weekend Australian* on Saturday that the Church has been unfairly vilified, and is no worse than other organisations. 'Anti-Catholic prejudice is one of the few remaining prejudices ... among some circles'.

Then in his *Sunday Telegraph* column yesterday, he [wrote](#) : 'It is hard to name any other Australian organisation that has done more to produce a safe environment for young people [than the Church]'.

When you are being attacked by the media, it is natural to defend your turf, especially if you're a Church leader and you firmly believe that the good the Church does far outweighs the evil.

But in the context of a massive outpouring of public anger and emotion — not to mention an overwhelming body of evidence — it is surely better to approach sexual abuse in an empathetic manner before attempting to put facts on the table. Some kind of catharsis is needed as a precondition for reconciliation.

This is where Bishop Bill Wright of Maitland-Newcastle is leading the way. Fairfax reported yesterday that he plans to [attend](#) next month's launch of *Holy Hell*, a book dealing with the abuse of an altar boy by a priest who later died in jail.

The author is the boy's mother Patricia Feenan. She has already lauded the bishop for his decision to attend. 'He's a brave man. Almost as brave as my son who will come up from Tasmania for it,' she said.

Listening to victims without prejudgement could and should become the order of the day for the Church, perhaps in a systematic fashion, as long as it does not interfere with state inquiries. In the process, it may become clear which claims justify the most attention.

Empathy is something media investigations do well in that the victims can feel the benefit of powerful public support and understanding. But it is important that the reports not jump to conclusions and take the place of the court system.



The lesson from yesterday's [news](#) of the resignation of BBC Director-General George Entwistle is that investigative journalism is fallible. One of the most highly regarded media investigation teams in the English-speaking world got it wrong, with its mistaken identification of a former government official as a pedophile by the BBC's *Newsnight* team.

The announcement that all investigative reporting on the BBC *Newsnight* program is suspended indefinitely is a signal that we should regard the judgments of all investigative reporting with a degree of skepticism, though there is still important value in the catharsis that its interviews often produce. We should also remember that the much derided Comical Ali was eventually vindicated for one of his improbable claims, which was his assertion that Iraq did not possess weapons of mass destruction.

## Debunking the global financial con job

### ECONOMICS

*David James*

For at least a quarter of a century, the financial sector has pulled off a confidence trick that in 2008 almost destroyed the monetary system of the world and continues to imperil the world's money system. It is called financial deregulation.

Pro-market politicians, especially US president Ronald Reagan and the British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, business-funded think tanks and conformist university economics departments, established a chorus that mesmerised the world: financial markets are overly controlled by governments; there is a need to remove that control in order for money to roam free and create more efficiency.

Even after the most dangerous financial crises ever seen, the finance industry's lobbyists are still arguing that the sector should not be too heavily regulated on the grounds that it would be counterproductive.

This is nonsense. Money *is* rules. It is impossible to deregulate rules, as it is impossible to take the wetness out of water.

The rules of money are principally about value and obligation. When a bank lends money for a mortgage, the borrower is obliged to repay the value of the loan within a certain period. When investors buy shares, they purchase ownership of a certain value, which the company is obliged to give to them.

Money is not a commodity with a value in its own right; in the English speaking world, not since Henry VIII diluted the value of coinage in the 16th century. The wooden stocks (sticks) of medieval times that were used to record debts were just sticks, of little value in themselves.

These days, money mostly exists as blips on a computer screen. The amount of physical cash is very small. Such electronic transactions are based on agreement about how the rules operate.

Since finance cannot be 'deregulated', what actually occurred was a shift from government setting the rules, to traders setting the rules. Far from reducing the number of rules, the amount of rules has soared. According to Andrew Haldane, a senior official for the Bank of England, speaking at the economists' talkfest in Jackson Hole:

Since 1978, the Federal Reserve has required quarterly reporting by bank holding companies. In 1986, this covered 547 columns in Excel, by 1999, 1208 columns, by 2011 ... 2271 columns. Fortunately, over this period the column capacity of Excel had expanded sufficiently to capture the increase.

This is only the reporting side. The creation of massive amounts of derivatives

(transactions derived from conventional monetary exchanges such as bank debt, shares and currency swapping) is an instance where traders make up rules — money made from money made from money. The total number of derivatives is over \$700 trillion — more than twice all the bank debt, shares, land and bonds in the world.

Deregulation has descended into a rule-creation debauch, a financial Tower of Babel. And the Tower is a threat to itself. According to Paul Kanjorski, former chairman of the subcommittee on Capital Markets, on a Thursday in September 2008 \$550 billion was drawn out of money market accounts in one morning in the US:

The Treasury ... pumped \$105 billion into the system and quickly realised they could not stem the tide. We were having an electronic run on the banks. They decided to close the operation, close down the money accounts, and announce a guarantee of \$250,000 per account so there wouldn't be further panic ...

If they had not done that their estimation was that by 2pm, \$5.5 trillion would have been drawn out of the money market system of the United States, [collapsing the national economy] and within 24 hours the world economy would have collapsed. It would have been the end of our political and economic systems ...

What Kanjorski describes is the ultimate price of allowing traders to make up their own rules, and of governments failing to notice the logical cul-de-sacs in the arguments proffered for deregulation. The global monetary system was almost destroyed.

Nothing has been learned. There is still a failure to realise that *money is rules*. The discussion in the wake of the financial crisis centres on how much to regulate banks and financial traders. Derivatives remain the main cause of instability in the global financial system as they amplify crises, such as the Euro crisis in the latest iteration.

The emergence of high frequency trading is another dangerous rule-creation absurdity. This is the application of computer algorithms to financial markets that involves trading at high speed — trades are done in nanoseconds.

High frequency trading can apply to any market and takes no account of the value of the underlying asset or security. Its proliferation — it is growing fast in the Australian stock market and is about 70 per cent of the turnover in the American stock market — results in increasing incidences of volatility and collapses.

The algorithms can only be constructed because there is an underlying set of rules about the markets, whatever they are. So the explosion of rules continues unabated.

So what is needed? First, to recognise that money is rules, and that the

question is not how many rules you have but who should set the rules and what kind of rules should they should be.

Second, governments need to govern, not hand things over to mythical market forces. Governments can change the rules to stop the debauch, by returning to only allowing derivatives to apply to physical commodities, or putting a small (Tobin) tax on cross border monetary flows to put the speculators out of business.

But governments have become so supine, and so desperate to save the existing system from the traders' greed and mathematics, that they seem incapable of standing back and asking some basic questions about how the system should be constructed.

Haldane noted that if a 'once-in-a-lifetime crisis cannot deliver change it is not clear what will'. One of the consequences of governments' abrogation of its responsibility is that the job is passed to regulators. But regulators work from within the system; they cannot stand back and change it.

As Haldane observes: 'To ask today's regulators to save us from tomorrow's crisis using yesterday's toolbox is to ask a border collie to catch a frisbee using Newton's Law of Gravity.'

## Why we'll never agree about abortion

### POLITICS

*Lyn Bender*

Abortion seems to me to be an inherently insoluble moral and human rights conundrum. The best course however may be to face this complexity rather than seek to reduce it to a final solution. As the arguments currently stand I feel driven to advocate for a position that is pro-choice and pro-life.



In the late 1960s abortion was illegal in Australia. One consequence of this was the common practice of horrendous, self-administered or so-called backyard abortions, that put women at risk. This was the lot of the poor and unsupported, as medical terminations of pregnancy could be obtained for a high fee.

The TV drama series *Dangerous Remedies* documents this period of corruption, advocacy and eventual legalising of abortion. In a recent interview Jo Wainer, widow of pro-abortion campaigner Dr Bertram Wainer and a central protagonist depicted in the drama, confirms [it is largely faithful](#) to her experiences at the time.

Jo and Bertram received death threats, ironically from pro-lifers.

This still occurs in the US. Abortion was a hot election issue during the recent campaign, alongside the economy. Largely the argument is generated by the [Roe Vs Wade](#) 1973 United States Supreme court decision on abortion. According to the Wikipedia entry on this landmark decision:

The Court ruled that a right to privacy under the due process clause of the 14th Amendment extended to a woman's decision to have an abortion, but that right must be balanced against the state's two legitimate interests in regulating abortions: protecting prenatal life and protecting women's health.

Arguments became centred on definitions of the 'personhood' of the foetus. Some argue that human personhood [begins at conception](#), while others, such as the ethicist Peter Singer, argue that [it occurs later](#).

I am deeply unsympathetic to the argument that strips the foetus of any protection under human rights by defining personhood in Singer's terms, summarised by *Scientific American* blogger John Horgan as claiming 'even a viable foetus is not a rational, self-aware person with desires and plans, which would be cut short by death; hence it should not have the same right as humans who have such qualities'.

Singer's definition of a person as rational and able to make plans and envisage a future could exclude trauma victims, or those suffering from severe depression or even mild cognitive impairment. This could include my 93-year-old mother and

sometimes myself.

The abortion debate is not for most of us a coldly rational one. It generates enormous emotional involvement. Every one of us has been that helpless infant relying upon the protection of parents, the law and the community.

In 2009 George Tiller, medical director of a Wichita women's clinic that administered late-term abortions, was shot and killed in church by Scott Roeder, a professed Christian who declared his intent to be the protection of unborn children. While this is an act of murder for which Roeder was rightly convicted, it provokes the question: Is the defence of the rights of the unborn child sorely lacking in our ethical and legal debate?

For me the answer is an emphatic yes.

The true ethical space exists in grappling with many incompatible positions. We cannot dismiss the tragedy of killing a human being just because it is too small and helpless to ask for protection. On the other hand criminalisation of abortion results in maternal suffering and death, particularly among the poor and disadvantaged.

Too frequently abortion is the only answer offered to struggling women who fear being unsupported. These include the single young victims of family violence, deserted, shamed, poor and abandoned women.

Many are pressured by assertions that it is a more loving act to have an abortion, and that it would be selfish to keep their baby, particularly in the case of detected disability.

We can't ask the babies. Or can we? [In the words of Louisa](#) , now an adult but born with cystic fibrosis, 'I am a child with special needs, I do believe in pro-choice but there are things that I learnt and that I value about having [being a person with] CF.'

If we valued the unborn and were more willing to offer acceptance and support to vulnerable parents and their children, we might considerably reduce the need for abortion and live in a more civilised and diverse society that was willing to take care of the vulnerable at all life stages.

## **Supermarket witches and the Australian pumpkin boom**

BY THE WAY

*Brian Matthews*

It was with some equanimity that I entered the familiar automatically opening door of my local supermarket on 31 October, only to be shocked out of my complacency by coming face to face with three witches. They were wearing pointy black hats, black cloaks and black boots and their faces were marked with black cabbalistic signs.

Recovering quickly I said, 'So foul and fair a day I have not seen.'

The one who seemed to be the leader looked at me with withering disdain and was obviously on the verge of casting a spell to transform me into a frog. The other two giggled.

I considered offering them some eye of newt but thought better of it and left them to continue their traversing of the aisles, probably looking for broomsticks.

These occult manifestations were of course occasioned by the school girls' observance of Halloween or, as they probably would not call it, All Hallows Eve — the day before All Saints Day. It has a complex provenance in which Christian, pagan, Celtic and darker influences are mixed.

Religious and irreligious observances at Halloween were balanced by practical matters. In earlier days in the northern hemisphere 1 November was the beginning of winter, the 'dark' half of the year.

The general sense of one phase ending and a new one starting was often marked by bonfires and rituals. In England, bonfire night, loosely observed for centuries, became official after the Gunpowder Plot and the annual commemoration on 5 November of the foiling of Guy Fawkes and his cohorts.

In Australia the infrequently observed idea of a 'bonfire night' was given a rationale it couldn't otherwise have had in the southern hemisphere with the increasing popularity of the adopted Guy Fawkes night. This in turn has disappeared because of the risk of bushfires — and that brings us back to my supermarket on 31 October.

What significance can Halloween, the apparent replacement for Guy Fawkes, have for Australians about to embark on their hot summer?

It has become almost totally disjoined from its religious connections and the lineaments of the observance. Trick or treat, jack-o'-lanterns, sorcery, ghosts, vampires and other wanderers in the nether world are entirely imported from America, which imported them from Europe as recently as the 19th century.

In the *BBC News Magazine* this week, Tom de Castella worries whether Halloween is replacing the traditional and indigenous bonfire night. Halloween, he



reports, 'is now viewed by many chains as the third biggest retail event of the year in the UK ... Tesco sold 28 different types of Halloween cakes this year and two million pumpkins'.

And there, of course, is the rub: there's money in it. Already in urban Australia, the production of pumpkins specifically for jack-o'-Lanterns is booming. They're inedible. You just carve them.

And while we haven't reached the stage that Castella notices — 'crowds of 20 and 30-somethings staggering through British city centres as zombies, vampires or in less ghoulish fancy dress' — my supermarket witches had their equivalents in cities and suburbs all over Australia observing a ritual that is entirely imposed, bears the magic and irresistible imprimatur of the US, and grows out of nothing in our own history, traditions or folk lore.

Does this matter, we might ask in our dour Orwellian way. Well, probably not much. Why shouldn't the young and some of their elders have some fun dressing up and scaring each other and anyone else in the vicinity right out of their togas, witches hats and other arcane drapery?

And yet, looked at another way, it does matter that we espouse rituals and observances that actually mean nothing more than another diversion, that pretend to a provenance which they don't actually have in our country, and which exist and flourish as phony ritual because someone's profiting from them.

The trouble is, when you ask 'what price tradition?' and question the commercially driven imposition of 'traditions' that are meaningless to us, you are labelled as a curmudgeon or dinosaur. A curmudgeon is 'a bad-tempered, difficult, cantankerous person', and we all know what happened to the small-brained dinosaurs.

Well, dang my britches, guess I'll go down this here aisle and git me a pumpkin and a broomstick.

## **Beyond the Obama euphoria**

### POLITICS

*Jim McDermott*

Four years ago, after Barack Obama was elected President of the United States, Times Square was a mob scene like you only see on New Year's Eve.

Taxis driven by mostly men from other countries circled the square, honking and waving their hands, while people everywhere chanted 'Yes we can'. There was a palpable sense of relief, of something awful finally being over, and something truly historic beginning. Obama was, in his campaign's words, 'the change we can believe in'.

Today, the euphoria has passed. As inspirational and visionary as Obama has appeared internationally, he's struggled in the States against not only a manically negative Republican opposition with no interest in working together, but his own willingness to sit back far too long on important issues. His poor performance in the first debate came as a surprise to many, but it was consistent with the odd passivity from which he sometimes suffers.

When it came down to deciding between giving Obama four more years and electing former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney, however, the American people have clearly supported the President, and in a much more emphatic way than most had predicted.

Almost from the moment results started coming in, Obama was ahead in the key states. He won Pennsylvania and Wisconsin (home of Republican vice presidential candidate Paul Ryan) far earlier than expected. So, too, Ohio and Florida began trending his way early. He swept the Midwest. And he was reelected by 11:12EST, just 12 minutes later than in 2008 and a far cry from the tie some were suggesting might occur as recently as a week ago.

Some of Obama's success is a result of Hurricane Sandy. In the face of the destruction that Sandy caused, there was just no more oxygen for the soul-deadening, empty politics of the past year. And Obama, who to his great credit did not try to take political advantage of the disaster, surged in the polls from that moment on.

Romney was also trying to thread an almost impossible needle between moderates and extremists in his own party. The US as a whole skews conservative (and would so even more if we had mandatory voting), but always with a certain commonsense moderation. In driving out the moderates from the Republican party, Tea Party idealists with little interest in politics or compromise pushed away the independent voters they need to win.

They will quickly distance themselves from Romney now, but he was their best

shot at gaining power, the safe cover story they needed.

For American Catholics, one of the most important questions coming out of the election surrounds the actions of the bishops. Over the last 20 years they have become [increasingly vociferous about their politics](#) ; in recent weeks bishops the country over insisted letters be read at Mass pushing congregations to vote Republican. In the diocese of Green Bay, Bishop David Ricken went so far as to say those who vote Democrat 'put their souls at risk'.

That approach has been repudiated twice now. At some point the bishops would be wise to reconsider their approach. A voice in the wilderness has its place, but so does reasoned, respectful discourse.

Tom Brokaw, esteemed American journalist and former news anchor for NBC, noted that when talking to voters around the country who said they wanted 'major change', what they generally meant was they wanted the parties to work together. If Americans have been united about anything in the last four years, it's in the frustration and disgust with the same tone-deaf partisan politics with which Australia currently struggles. Few want it to continue.

Yet it's hard to believe it won't. While the focus of everyone's attention has been on the presidential race, the real key to change in our political gridlock lies in the behavior of Congress. As long as the Republicans running the House of Representatives maintain their strategy of opposition at all costs, we all remain their hostages.

In his acceptance speech, Obama noted that 'America has never been about what can be done for us but what can be done by us.' That distinction may very well be the key for the United States over the next four years.

On issues like gun control, immigration, drone strikes, banking reform and voting procedures (which are riddled with problems), politicians on neither side are willing to lead. And like Australians, Americans are often at their best when they have something (or someone) to fight for and get down to the business of doing it.

At the end of the day, with all due respect for Obama's many gifts, we may be the only change we can believe in.

## Amish psychopaths and Gandhian action heroes

### FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Seven Psychopaths* (MA). Director: Martin McDonagh. Starring: Colin Farrell, Sam Rockwell, Christopher Walken, Woody Harrelson, Harry Dean Stanton, Tom Waits, Amanda Warren, Long Nguyen . 106 minutes**

Pacifist screenwriter Marty (Farrell) aspires to write a script for a mainstream action movie that is centrally about love. While struggling with this unlikely task he embraces the role of the tortured artist — boozing, and driving away his loved ones. His loyal but idle mate Billy (Rockwell) wants to help out both personally and professionally, while not occupied by the dog-napping racket that he has going with the aging, dapper thief Hans (Walken).

Marty's great work-in-progress is entitled *Seven Psychopaths*, and he is collecting material worthy of that title. Some comes from his own imagination, but he also taps the odd real-life source. For one, there is the masked figure who has been going around assassinating mobsters. Then there is Charlie (Harrelson), the latest victim of Billy and Hans' racket, who is likely to cause bloodshed should his beloved Shi Tzu not be returned to him.

The fact that the *actual* film shares a title with the *fictional* character's script reveals this as familiar postmodern territory. Ten years ago Charlie Kaufman wrote a film called *Adaptation*, whose central character is a writer named Charlie Kaufman who is struggling with his latest script. It requires viewers to grapple with an awareness that the script that is so paining the writer on-screen is supposedly the script of the very film they are watching.

*Seven Psychopaths* doesn't chase its tail in and out of the metafictional rabbit hole with quite the same joyous abandon as *Adaptation*, but it is similarly self-reflexive, and shares with it a certain droll cynicism about the creative process. It also shares a black and hilarious critique both of subjectivity and self-indulgence in art and autobiography, and of the puerile interests of mainstream Hollywood and its imagined audiences.

This last point is explored most explicitly. As Marty, Billy and Hans flee to the desert to hide from the rampaging Charlie, Marty envisages an ending to his script in which the heroes simply head out to the desert and talk. Billy is incensed, insisting there must be a climactic shootout. Later he describes such a scenario, and through Billy's imaginings McDonagh parodies the kind of ludicrous excesses played for titillation in more earnest action films.

Later Charlie points out to Marty that he has lost more 'friends' during the course of their interactions than have Marty and co. On balance, and by this logic, it would seem that he is more victim than villain. It is an astute observation, which plays nicely to Marty's resistance to violence in general (to his credit he proves

steadfast on this front), as well as to McDonagh's riff on the arbitrariness of labels such as 'good' and 'bad' in action films.

Woven into McDonagh's film are several mini-movies that portray some of the stories that Marty has collected in the course of compiling his screenplay: 'the Amish psychopath', in which a grief-stricken father (Stanton) slowly, psychologically tortures the man who murdered his daughter; and the story of Zachariah (Waits) and his wife Maggie (Warren), who share a love born in violent circumstances and a vengeful career that corrupts them both.

Marty is drawn to such poignant tales of vengeance driven by grief. But the idea of absolving violence through violence jars with his pacifistic leanings. He is particularly vexed by the story of a Vietnamese veteran (Nguyen) who is unhinged by the slaughter committed by American soldiers in his village. Marty sees nothing but greater bloodshed and destruction in the character's future, but feels such a resolution unworthy of the Vietnamese man.

This again resonates with Marty's pacifism and McDonagh's questioning of Hollywood action tropes. It also gives McDonagh a strong final note. For while *Seven Psychopaths* is a shambolic assemblage of gags and ideas that is at times brilliant (Farrell, Rockwell and Walken are a hilarious triple-act) and at others pedestrian, the resolution to Marty's 'Vietnamese psychopath' dilemma provides a potent thematic resolution to the film as a whole.

## Religious persecution is not a contest

### RELIGION

*Andrew Hamilton*



In recent years much attention has been given to the persecution of Christians, initially behind the Iron Curtain and more recently in the Middle East, Asia and Africa. This research is invaluable because it brings to notice abuses that could otherwise be hidden, and helps their alleviation.

But in popular discussion the persecution of Christians is often compared with that undergone by other groups, like Muslims. The discussion takes on a competitive and proprietorial edge. This has unfortunate consequences.

In the first place it encourages an exclusive focus on the religious reasons for persecution. In fact religious belief is only one of many complex factors in persecution. Hazaras in Afghanistan, for example, have often suffered persecution on the grounds that they are Shiite, but this is only one reason among many which masks the tribal difference that underlies their persecution.

Similarly, the recently appointed Cardinal John Onaiyen has often cautioned against seeing the violence directed against Christians in the Obujan region as primarily religious. It reflects a wider tribal and economic conflict.

The real, if periodic, persecution of Christians in China also needs to be seen against a broader context. Chinese rulers fear small, committed groups that they cannot control. The memory of the catastrophically destructive Taiping rebellion, whose origins lay in a sick man's chance reading of texts from Isaiah, lingers. The persecution of Christians today needs to be set alongside the even more implacable hostility to the Falun Gong.

In the Middle East the position of Christians is particularly parlous. They have often suffered violence and discrimination in the name of intolerant forms of Islam. But the recent violence and dispersal of these churches have been provoked in no small measure by the reckless Western invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. After many Muslims identified the armies of the West with Christianity, local Christians were easy targets.

These complexities are likely to be lost when the persecution of Christians is made part of a comparison between religions.

Those with a competitive focus will also be more likely to associate serious persecution with the subtle forms of prejudice, discrimination and limitation of religious freedom experienced in Western societies. The broader context lends these experiences a gravity and significance that they would not have when studied in isolation.

When seen as part of international persecution, discriminatory attitudes and action become part of a large and grandiloquent story in which Christians see themselves as the victims of real or imagined enemies, whether they be large forces such as secularism or ecofeminism, or their representatives, such as politicians, the media or educated elites.

That in turn leads away from engagement in the task of building a fairer society for all citizens to an attempt to redress the wrongs suffered by the victimised group.

These are the risks of focusing on the persecution of Christians in a competitive way.

But it is right to focus on the reality and wrongness of persecution wherever it is found. The persecution of Muslim groups are as abhorrent as violations of the human dignity of Christians. All persecution is an offence against our shared humanity, and so to be deplored and its victims embraced. That is the insight that led an earlier and more generous generation of Australians to endorse the UNHCR Convention on the Status of Refugees.

It is also right for Christians to have a special care for their fellow members who are persecuted elsewhere. This will naturally express itself in sympathy for their plight, advocacy for them, and in practical help.

It would be also decent for them to recognise that the military actions undertaken by their own governments have contributed to the persecution of Christians, and to deplore them.

The temptation to weave public prejudices, laws and regulations in Western societies into a wider pattern of persecution against Christianity should be resisted. Each regulation, attitude and action should be looked at on its own terms, the issues at stake considered coolly, and unjustified discrimination opposed.

This piecemeal approach may suggest that the causes of discrimination are wider than hostility to Christians. In particular, the tendency of all Western governments to try to act outside the rule of law, as has been egregiously evident in the Australian treatment of asylum seekers, will infringe on religious freedom as on other freedoms.

This has nothing to do with secularism but with the abuse of power. If Christians were drawn into a crusade, this might be an appropriate cause.

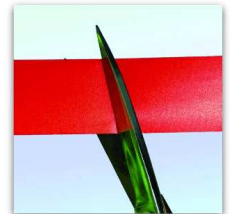


## Sting in the tail of Gillard charities red tape reduction

### POLITICS

*Paul O'Callaghan*

Almost every Australian has been involved with, or affected by, a charitable agency at some stage of their lives. Possibly as a recipient of services, or as a donor, volunteer or staff member. Not many Australians know that one in eleven Australians is employed in the charitable and non-for-profit sector and that this sector contributes more than \$40 billion to GDP every year.



Given the impact of the sector's work in the Australian community, last week was an historic one. After 17 year of various inquiries and reviews about an improved regulatory framework for Australian charities, a single national regulatory body for charities was [legislated](#) last week. It is the Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission (ACNC).

This is a positive development for the charitable sector, and for public awareness of its role into the future. At the same time, much hinges on whether the burden of unnecessary administrative compliance required by federal and State governments actually reduces over the next two to three years, and whether the government's commitment to respect the independence of charities becomes the norm.

In a 2010 pre-election [statement](#), Prime Minister Gillard committed her government to significantly streamline tendering and contracting processes in order ...æto allow organisations in the sector to spend more time and money focusing on what they do best... . In supporting the creation of the ACNC, charities hope that this commitment will come to fruition.

For the 67 member agencies of Catholic Social Services Australia, seeing red tape reduction occur is vital because virtually all of their funding contracts currently require separate reporting formats, conditions and timetables.

The combined administrative cost of servicing all these separate contracts is prohibitive and duplicative compliance arrangements divert scarce staff resources away from the direct support of clients in need.

Given our current starting point, there is a long way to go before the Prime Minister's commitment to significant red tape reduction for charities could be realised. However, some steps have been made. One of these is the government's late agreement to alter the Commonwealth Grant Guidelines so that some areas of duplication in reporting by charities are likely to be reduced.

The absence of federal/state coordination on this matter is a major weakness in any reform process for such a large sector. Even though there is a COAG Working Group seeking to harmonise federal/state arrangements, especially on fundraising

and regulation, the outlook for substantial harmonisation is not rosy in the medium term, notwithstanding South Australia's commitment last week to harmonise on fundraising, some other jurisdictions are a fair way off the new model.

Until and unless all jurisdictions adopt harmonised policies on charity regulation and reporting, it is hard to see how we can make the kind of progress envisaged in the [2010 Productivity Commission report](#) on the contribution of the sector or in most of the submissions made to that Inquiry.

An unexpected feature over recent months was the lively political debate about the merits of an ACNC. This included the Coalition's announcement that it would repeal the ACNC Act if elected next year. However the two recent parliamentary inquiries and the significant amendments obtained by Greens Senator Rachel Siewert have led most in the sector to support this legislation.

That view was encouraged by the government's recent 'gag clause' commitment. This means that no federal agency will be able to link their funding decisions to advocacy or statements by grant recipients, as was the case with the previous government and has become the case under the new Queensland government.

In parallel to this legislative process, and as part of its sectoral reform agenda, the government is pursuing a new charity tax under the guise of 'better targeting of tax concessions'. Cracking down on cases where the tax concession system is mis-used is the right thing to do. However, the proposed new tax appears to go well beyond this. It would be unfortunate if the pursuit of those mis-using such concessions caused collateral damage to other agencies so that they cut or downsize programs provided to support disadvantaged Australians.

## Blindsided by a saint at the Catholic Worker

### REFLECTION

*Brian Doyle*



My sister (now a Buddhist nun) having worked at [The Catholic Worker's](#) St Joseph House in New York City (pictured) for a while, and my New York family being the sort of devout Catholic family that put more emphasis on doing than talking, I too showed up on First Street one day, when I was about twenty, thinking that I would perhaps magnanimously volunteer for the day, or get into a long cool intense conversation with Dorothy Day, or be instantly hired as genius-writer-in-residence, or something like that.

I hadn't the faintest idea of what actually went on at St Joseph House, you see, and I was twenty, when anything might happen except pretty much exactly that which you thought might happen; which is how and why we grow up, I suppose.

In my case I found an elderly woman standing against the brick wall, looking stern and holy, and of course I immediately assumed she was Dorothy Day, as she looked grim and spiritual.

This is Saint Joseph House? I asked.

Yup.

And you are Dorothy Day?

Who are you?

Brian Doyle.

Welcome to Saint Joseph. Hungry?

Not so much. I am here to help.

Excellent. We need a dishwasher today. Can you wash dishes?

Yes ma'am. I am in college and I spend a lot of time washing dishes.

Excellent. Go in and tell them you are the dishwasher today.

\*

This I did, thinking how cool it was to be commanded in life by Dorothy Day; I mean, Dorothy Day was clearly going to be recognized as a saint eventually, and I had gotten to talk to her, so clearly some saint dust had drifted onto me, which was a good thing, because I was then twenty years old, and had done some things that a little saint dust would really help out with.

For a minute, there by the door, I thought maybe this was going to be an excellent day, saint-dust-wise, because what if I bumped into Peter Maurin, that

would be a major load of saint dust, despite him being French, but then I remembered that this was 1977, and Peter had been deceased for nearly thirty years, so I went in to the kitchen.

I lasted about an hour as a dishwasher. You wouldn't believe how many dishes come through the old lunch line at St Joseph. You think of the words lunch line, and you have the vague impression of a few cheerful and colourful raggedy souls who are actually sweet and brilliant and chaff you wittily when you say something so that you always remember how cool they were even though they were wearing boxer shorts on their heads or were talking to invisible wolverines or something, but that's not what it was like at all, the lunch line, which appeared to have eight million people on it that day, and they were not overly colorful and cheerful either, as they were ravenously hungry, and probably deeply concerned with where they were going to sleep, and find medical care, and survive another week, and avoid being beaten and robbed or worse.

I made a couple of cheerful witty remarks and then I shut my mouth and did dishes as fast and thoroughly as I could and when lunch slowed down I have to confess, with a little shame, even 35 years after that day that I quit.

\*

Back out front the same elderly woman was standing there looking like a cross between a cleaning lady and the queen of New York City, and she said what, you're done already?

Yes, ma'am. Worn out.

More dishes tomorrow if you want to help.

Back to college tomorrow, ma'am [a roaring lie].

Good luck with that.

Thank you.

Which college?

University of Notre Dame, ma'am.

Lots of dishes there?

Sweet Jesus yes, ma'am.

Do them well. That's a good prayer.

Yes, ma'am. An honor to meet you, ma'am.

Brian, was it?

Yes, ma'am.

My name's Eileen, she said, smiling. Pleasure to meet you too. Remember:

doing the dishes well, that's a real good prayer.

And the thing is, despite my initial disappointment that Eileen was not Dorothy Day, I never forgot her advice, which was as fine a spiritual piece of advice as I ever got, and over the years I came to realise that I had had the great fortune to meet a lady named Eileen, who was, of course, a saint. It turns out that everyone either is a saint or can still be one; a lesson I started to learn on East First Street, many years ago.

## The other race

CARTOON

*Fiona Katauskas*



## Painful lost years for unmarried mothers

NON-FICTION

Gillian Bouras



When I was a sweet innocent of 19 I went, with countless others, to see a revival of the film *Blossoms in the Dust*.

This 1941 work, which starred the famous Greer Garson and Walter Pigeon, was a real weepie. Handkerchiefs became even more sodden when audiences realised that the film was based on solid fact, for Garson and Pigeon played the parts of a Texan couple whose son had been killed when he was just a child.

The bereaved mother, Edna Gladney, spent the rest of her active life in a sustained effort to find good homes for orphaned and foundling children at a time when unwed mothers and their innocent babies were almost equally condemned by polite and conservative members of society.

But Gladney maintained that there were no illegitimate babies, only illegitimate parents, and she fought the Texas legislature until it removed the stigma of illegitimacy from the State records.

In the film, Garson/Gladney maintains that it is the good girls who bear their babies. In my youth, the pre-pill and illegal abortion era, girls lived in dread of enforced marriage, the so-called *shotgun wedding*. We all knew couples who *had* to get married because a baby was on the way; often the prospective parents were little more than babies themselves.

But far worse was the plight of the pregnant girl whose lover abandoned her. My mother used to wax indignant on the subject of 'those poor girls' and the matter of *the double standard*. 'Nobody ever mentions unmarried fathers,' she would say. And how right she was.

Forty years ago I was close to one of those abandoned girls. Let's call her Jane. Jane's parents supported her to a degree, and certainly did not banish her from the family, but there was absolutely no encouragement for her to keep her baby, and certainly no offer to raise him/her as their grandchild.

Jane had to give up a promising career as well as her baby. She was unlucky in that she became pregnant before Gough Whitlam's Single Parent's Benefit became law.

I visited Jane occasionally. For the duration of her pregnancy she lived in a gloomy Victorian mansion run by the Presbyterian Church. I used to feel very uncomfortable during these visits, God help me.

I was married but childless, and know now that part of the discomfort was a failure of my imagination. Another factor was my collusion in the secrecy. I knew



that I had to ask for Jane by her second name; surnames were not to be used. The first time I rang the bell, the door was opened by a uniformed matron who was polite but distant. I was ushered into a sitting-room and there Jane and I sat and talked about all sorts of things. No other girl was ever seen.

Jane had her baby, a boy. And she was permitted to look after him and feed him for five days, after which she gave him up for adoption: the matron assured her he was going to a good and loving home. It was only later, when I gave birth to my first child that I came close to understanding the raw pain of this particular loss: the thought of having to give my son up was one of sheer impossibility. Even now I think of Jane and the agony of having her baby for five days, and those days spent without conventional celebration: no presents, very few visitors, no showing off the baby to the outside world. Followed by *goodbye*.

The phrase *enforced adoption* conjures up visions of babies being wrenched from a wailing mother's arms, or babies being spirited away in the dead of night. Of course it wasn't like that: girls such as Jane signed the requisite consent forms.

But the idea of *force* is there, because the notion of choice rarely was, and girls were routinely persuaded that adoption was the best course of action to take for the sake of both mother and child. Victorian Premier Ted Baillieu's recent [apology](#) to all these deprived mothers, numbering in tens of thousands in Victoria alone, can never bring back lost years or compensate for raw and primal pain, but it is an acknowledgement of that pain. And that's important. Very.



## Meeting mortality

POETRY

*Anne Elvey*

### **Cuneiform tablet**

What can no longer be  
touched—the aged skin, the rare,  
rests in a muted light, in a spotlight—  
short print runs, handmade things  
in a cave of black partitions, glass echoes  
of the old museum and the walkthroughs  
housing phosphorescent rocks  
in that labyrinthine place gone to angled  
steel and here  
the Beat poets, botanica  
in nineteenth-century inks, a Torah scroll  
and an ancient notepad of clay. The wedges  
signify stock whose descendants  
were skinned for the scroll under glass  
or for a codex named  
for a mountain. On the third floor  
under the State Library's dome,  
by a roped-off spiral stair  
the indentations in the clay recall  
the press of a sharpened reed.  
Tablets of this size were also used  
for travel inventories and sacrificial  
lists. They hardened in fire  
or sun. This palm pilot was stacked  
for burning. Framed against the dark  
in a precise atmosphere it is preserved

under glass. I cannot deposit my oil  
in its grooves, nor weigh its matter  
in a glove. Three clasps hold it  
like a jewel.

**Mary of Magdala**

if the hunger remains  
that held her  
and the oldest stories do not concur  
she is painted, a candle in a mirror, one hand  
on a skull  
if the book she holds—let's not assume  
we know which book  
it is—opens  
on a language  
as quick as the nematodes that cling to roots  
beneath the first blanket of soil  
when the whole busy world of decomposing  
dark and dense  
is—under the rain—a welcome  
chain of being  
if she rests against a stone  
where ants climb, intent as angels  
on a ladder  
that inclines between earth and sky  
and if all that cannot be touched falls in clumps  
like spitfires on an oil-stained drive  
it is the beginning  
of a loss  
that makes things possible—four trees  
grow around her words—

we see in icons  
she holds a flask of ointment and an egg

**Mortal life**

*for Robert Adamson*

This is the wild  
thing that turns  
to loam, the seal pup  
dead on the shore,  
a fish caught  
in a crevice of rock  
when the tide ebbs.

The wind shakes  
the cabin. The sea  
is gathered in, pulled up  
in white snatches  
that break over  
tidal pools.

There are rabbits  
in the scrub, a cormorant  
on the rocks. This is  
the woman with unkempt  
hair, in a room  
that is forgotten.

It is not a basement.

It is not an attic.

She will not be consumed  
in a fire set  
by madness. It is  
the priest's hole  
no longer used,

the bushranger's cave,  
the feel of a place  
that might be men's  
business—if the warning  
signs were known—  
the disorienting polis,  
the agora of the soul  
where mortal things  
meet, the dam where a heron  
dips her bill.

## Cup Day losses to soar with betting apps

EDITORIAL

*Michael Mullins*

Australians are expected to spend \$60.6 million in betting on tomorrow's Melbourne Cup, an increase of 7.5 per cent since last year [according](#) to market researchers IBISWorld. The majority of bets will still be placed in person at the TAB, but it is especially significant that mobile betting is increasing rapidly, with more Australians using smartphone [betting apps](#) .



It is no coincidence that more betting and higher losses coincide with the convenience of betting apps and other online means of placing bets. The traditional walk to the local TAB and the requirement of having to wait in the queue acted as a restraint on betting that amounted to pre-commitment.

In the past, punters using the TAB needed to decide how much their day's wager would be before they reached the end of the queue, for it is unlikely that they would be motivated to return to queue again to top up their betting. But online betting enables continual betting until the running of the race. It is similar to the way poker machines are used. Some gamblers will stop only after their bank account has been emptied.

Pre-commitment, along with \$1 maximum bets, is the central platform of the compromise [National Gambling Reform Bill](#), which was introduced into the House of Representatives last week. It forces gambling venues to offer voluntary — rather than mandatory — pre-commitment by the end of 2016. Anti-gambling [campaigners](#) are taking the view that voluntary pre-commitment is better than nothing.

Pre-commitment is the principle that allows us to control our impulsive behaviours. 500 years ago, it was used by the Jesuits' founder St Ignatius Loyola when he formulated his [Rules for Eating](#). His idea was that you plan what you're going to eat for the next meal directly after the previous meal, or at another time when you're not hungry. In this way, rationality rather than impulse controls your eating habits.

Excessive consumption of anything — especially gambling 'products' — destroys human well-being. We all need a variety of supports to enable us to behave rationally and avoid the excess that *ad hoc* behaviour leads to. These days, that means not just encouragement from those around us, but the development of technology that is geared to enable us to act rationally and not designed to exploit our weaknesses.

Poker machines in particular promote gambling based on impulse rather than rational choice. That is why there must be laws to ensure that gamblers are able to make rational choices when they bet. Laws [controlling](#) online gambling are still

in their infancy, but it is important that the governments include online gaming — especially smartphone apps — when they draft legislation to help problem gamblers. The principle of pre-commitment needs to be built into the functionality of gambling apps.

## America's choice through Australian eyes

### POLITICS

Tony Kevin



If citizens of other nations could vote, it should be Obama by a mile! But Obama's many supporters abroad have wondered uneasily whether it just might go the other way. Recent polling was suggesting a cliffhanger in the swing states that will determine the outcome. I now sense that superstorm Sandy will save Obama, but it could still be close.

This is a vital election for Australia, as we [begin to digest](#) what the reshaping global power balance in the Asian Century means for us. The emergent decline of American global hegemony forces Australia to move beyond the easy simplicities of lockstep strategic alliance with the US combined with highly profitable favoured economic ties with a resurgent China.

As the US feels the psychological pangs of power contraction, Australia needs to help her weather her midlife crisis. It would be easier with Obama than Romney. Obama — and perhaps Hilary Clinton after 2016 — are in a better position to use the power of the presidency to help guide the US through this transition because they have a better grasp of the challenge for America of a rapidly changing world.

Those disappointed in Obama's performance in office since 2008 underestimate the huge constraints on him. These include an often hostile Congress, a deep-rooted public belief that the world exists to serve US interests and a false ideological consciousness of the proper roles of the state and private sectors.

Obama proved his strength and patriotism through the symbolically vital removal of Osama bin Laden. On this, [we now know](#) that, though a naked Osama bin Laden with his hands up in surrender would not have been shot, killing him was the presidentially approved plan in every other possible contingency. For most Americans, this was justice seen to be done.

Obama's evident empathy towards the plight of poorer people in an economy in trouble has been reaffirmed by this week's storm. Memories of the federally mishandled Hurricane Katrina of 2005 were not far beneath the surface, as shown by the Republican Governor of New Jersey's [unstinting praise](#) for Obama's role in this week's crisis. The Governor said all that needs to be said. Obama is too shrewd a politician to leave any room for suggestions that he might be politically exploiting the crisis. But the suspension of campaigning plays to his advantage.

Romney has been forced in recent months to turn turtle, presenting himself as the candidate of change and dynamism, against Obama as a tired, ineffective *status quo* candidate in office who has done little.

Romney has his own troubles. The Republicans remain deeply split between tea-party right-wing ideology and what is left of the moderate (read McCain) centre. Romney finally emerged as the least bad choice this year from a field of ideological extremists and the mercurial Newt Gingrich. He has to calculate every policy nuance against his uneasy coalition of less than enthusiastic backers and financiers. No wonder he sounds and looks so unsure of his ground on many issues.

The matter of Obama's race is still lurking there in white lower-income voting booths in the swing states — in the Midwest and Florida. There are those who will vote for the white man, regardless of their real interest.

The economy is not good for the underemployed or jobless poor. In the slow recovery from the GFC, jobs are expanding but rising GNP has mostly benefited the super-rich. Life is no easier for embattled middle-class Americans. But it seems likely that voters will reject Romney's strategy of getting the state out of the way and encouraging entrepreneurship. These are no answer to deep-rooted problems of structural transition.

America remains the centre of world technological progress and marketing innovation. As Chinese and Indian wages and living standards rise, global competitiveness is creeping back to the more traditional areas of US industry. If America does not lose its nerve over the next decade, it will, I believe, weather the transition to a more secure, self-sufficient country that can maintain public living standards despite increasingly challenging world markets for its products and services. America remains rich in natural and human resources.

Voter apathy is, as always, a vital issue in an election where voting is optional. The challenge for Democrats has always been to get out the vote — especially now when the Republican Right have lifted their game in mobilising votes.

Romney's [verbal aggression towards China](#) is risky. But here too, Obama seems to have carved out safe ground with American electors, with his much-publicised 'pivoting' of US strategic weight towards Asia. Through the Obama and Gillard [speeches in Canberra](#) on 17 November 2011 regarding upgraded US basing in Darwin, Obama established new markers of strategic firmness towards China that left no room for Republicans to accuse him of weakness.

These are the issues. They are clear, but the outcome is not, and I won't try to call it. We only need wait a few more days to see if Americans choose a weak and therefore dangerous new president over an incumbent who failed to meet unrealistic expectations.



