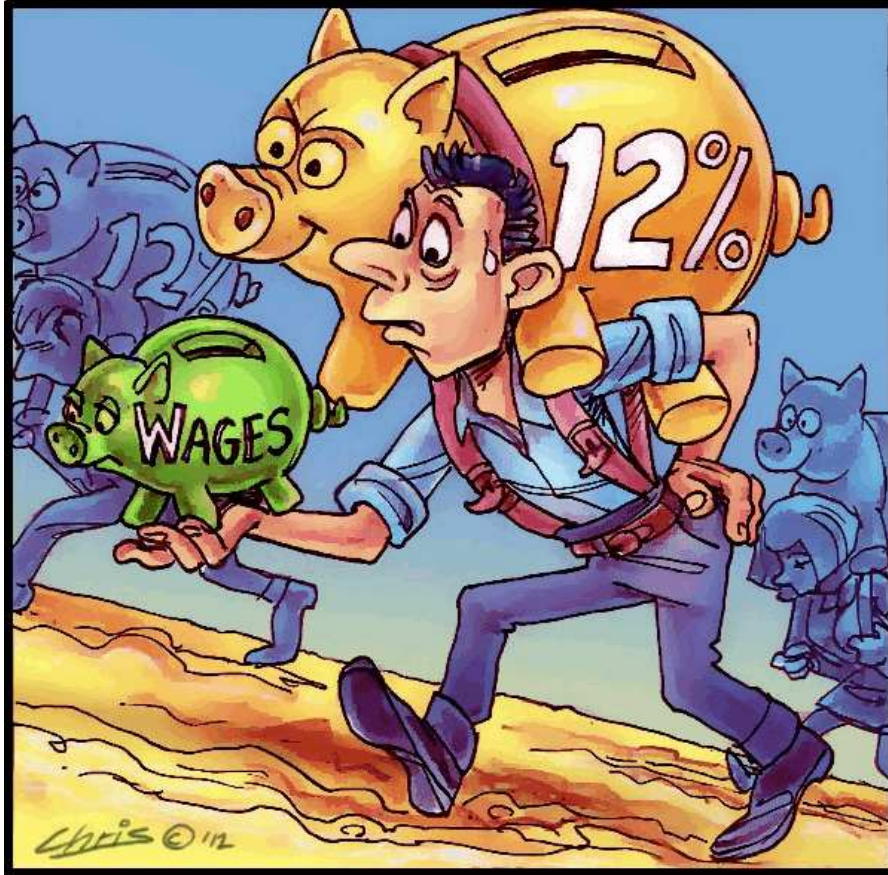


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PO Box 553
Richmond
VIC 3121
Australia

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

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Easter in detention

APPLICATION

Andrew Hamilton



Over many years I have celebrated Christmas and Easter in places where people are locked up — in refugee camps, prisons and detention centres. To be in these places at such times is hard. It is also a privilege.

Easter and Christmas are hard times precisely because in my own religious tradition and more diffusely in Western cultures, these are times of celebration. For Christians, Christmas is about a birth that makes all the difference to life. Easter is about a rising from the dead that makes all the difference to death. Both are celebrations of exuberant, sprawling, unexpected life, the stuff of families at high tide.

For people who are locked up by another group of people Christmas and Easter are not times of celebration. Dressed turkey simply reminds you that you are the turkey. They are times of grief for Christmases past, for Easters never enjoyed, for forced absence from the people who nurture life, for lives that seem wasted, for a more innocent time when it seemed that life itself was a blessing.

These are places where grief, anger and separation breed depression; where to be told stories of freedom and compassion only makes your present life the more intolerable. It is hard to be with people in times of such compounded misery.

But places of imprisonment are also privileged places to be in at Easter and Christmas. There I am put in touch with the reality that prisoners and detainees are not problems, monsters or examples of depression and oppression, but my fellow human beings who are doing it hard.

My presence, no matter how ineffective it is in changing people's circumstances, may not be totally ineffectual. It may encourage people to believe that they and their simple humanity matter.

I am also constantly surprised and encouraged by the resilience of people whose life journey has been full of tragedy and rejection, and by the awkward kindnesses of those who are responsible for keeping them locked up. When I meet Ahmed and Steve rather than the stereotypes of asylum seeker and officer, I come away with a deeper respect for human possibility.

For a Christian minister, too, these are privileged places because here the stories of Christmas and Easter come alive. The core of both stories is the experience of displacement, abandonment and the need to wrestle with the distance of God. The wonder of birth and victory over death is fully appreciated only when seen in this context.

In prisons and detention centres chaplains are subject to security procedures

just as are the prisoners, and the surroundings and the inner turmoil suffered by so many of those detained test the currency in which I speak of the hope of Christmas and Easter. I have the stringent comfort of recognising my own little faith.

I find Immigration Detention Centres harder to visit at Easter than prisons. For that reason they may be more privileged places. The Negro Spiritual that is much sung on Good Friday asks, 'Were you there when they crucified my Lord?' The question can be asked in two ways. Were you faithful during this hard time? And did you have a hand in nailing and raising the body on the cross?

Both these questions are poignant and challenging for any Australian citizen working in a detention centre. Constancy is an aspiration never fully achieved. And as an Australian living in a democracy, I know that I bear some responsibility for the policies of our government and their consequences.

When visiting detention centres I can never dissociate myself from the brutality, cowardice and expediency on display in the policies of detention and in their effects on people. As I tell the story of Jesus' trial and killing, I identify naturally with Caiphas' remark that it is expedient that one man should die for the people, and with Peter's dissociation of himself from Jesus as someone no longer like us.

But this discomfort is also a privilege. It means I cannot take Easter for granted. The inescapable necessities both of myself as chaplain and of the asylum seekers whom I visit are caught up in the promise of life, reconciliation and freedom expressed in Easter. Out of such a promise is bred constancy in insisting that there is a better way, and that people imprisoned should never be abandoned.

Easter manifesto

REFLECTION

John Falzon

... when he saw the multitudes he was moved to compassion for them, because they were distressed and scattered like sheep without a shepherd.

Being moved to compassion can sound almost like an act of largesse on the part of a powerful monarch. The Greek of Matthew's Gospel, however, expresses this phrase with an earthy and painful sense of compulsion, a kind of *tugging at the guts* or *churning of the stomach*.

Like how I felt the first time I met children and their parents living behind razor-wire at Villawood Detention Centre. Or how I feel listening to the stories of the Stolen Generations or Aboriginal deaths in custody, or read about yet another brutal bombing of the people of Gaza while the powers of the world seem to turn a blind eye.

We often miss the point of the scriptural metaphor of the shepherd and the sheep. It's not so much about *power over* as it is about *suffering with*. Shepherds were among the most marginalised members of society at the time of Jesus. Sadly, the centuries have mangled the metaphor.

For too long the charitable model of welfare has been built on the obscene notion that people should actually be treated like sheep who need a strong and wise shepherd to tell them what to do. This model, which moves easily between paternalism and punishment, comfortably accommodates such injustices as controlling the meagre incomes of people on statutory benefits and other forms of disempowerment 'for their own good'.

Oscar Romero (pictured), the late Archbishop of San Salvador, murdered by US-trained paramilitary in 1980, said of the [Beatitudes](#) that they turn everything upside down. They provide us with a radical way of unlearning our acceptance of guidance from above and learning with new hearts the promise of liberation from below.

Rather than looking to the skies for a sign, the story of Jesus presents us with a provocative challenge to listen closely to the signs of the times; the still, small sound of humanity in history.

The people Matthew refers to are 'distressed and scattered'. This sense of alienation is central to marginalisation. People feel they are devalued, left on the scrap-heap, and, worst of all, atomised, on their own, left to bear the blame, and therefore the burden, of their own exclusion.

Rather than viewing people experiencing exclusion as sheep in need of a firm hand and voice of command, we are invited to learn that it is the people who call us. If we want to be attentive to Christ's message we need look no further than

the faces of the people who are left or pushed out. Christ speaks to us through the marginalised. In a deeply Incarnational echo of his *Come, follow me*, they say: *Come with us, be our companions.*

I often like to quote the beautiful and wise words of the poet, Bertolt Brecht: 'the compassion of the oppressed for the oppressed is indispensable. It is the world's one hope.'

It is no surprise that a society built on the foundations of the market should place a high value on individualism. We are taught to make an idol of individual effort, responsibility, reward and consumption. We are taught to accept that an individual should pay for what they use and that those who do not have the means to pay should be denied the right to use.

We are taught that there is a kind of natural justice about the existing order, as if it were ordained that there should be some who are extremely rich and many who are very poor and that the poor are completely free to leave their poverty behind if only they get off their backsides and do something useful.

The Easter motif of suffering and resurrection comes alive in all movements of social justice and social change, when people who have been treated as if they are nothing proclaim by their collective dreaming that *we are everything*.

This sense of power from below, not as its own end but for the sake of creating a new society, was articulated poignantly by Romero: 'a people disorganised becomes a mass that can be toyed with, but a people that organises itself and fights for its values and for justice is a people that demands respect'.

The God of the scriptures is a God who is unequivocally on the side of the excluded. We have the right and the duty to organise ourselves as companions building a society in which people matter more than the walls that are built to divide them, lock them out, or lock them up and in which no one is treated as inferior.

For those of us who hunger for justice it is a sin to be disorganised. Especially when, as Pablo Neruda reminds us, so much misery is so well organised!

Rise up with me against the organisation of misery
... stand up with me
and let us go off together
to fight face to face
against the devil's webs,
against the system that distributes hunger,
against organised misery.

What Australia doesn't want East Timor to know

POLITICS

Pat Walsh

On 20 March, Attorney-General Nicola Roxon agreed to a Department of Foreign Affairs request to block public access to 34-year-old cables on the famine that ravaged East Timor early in the Indonesian occupation. Roxon reportedly believes that release of the material would prejudice Australia's international relations.

Given that Suharto and his regime have gone and that many other sensitive cables on the Timor question have been released over the last 12 years without damaging Australia's external relations, the decision is puzzling.

As someone who has spent many years working with both East Timorese and Indonesians to understand their shared history, I would argue that rather than cause for concern, the release of the cables would be generally welcomed in both countries as part of the free flow of ideas and information that both now enjoy.

Australia, as one of few witnesses to these events, should contribute what it knows so that these dark times are better understood and learned from in East Timor, Indonesia, Australia and elsewhere.

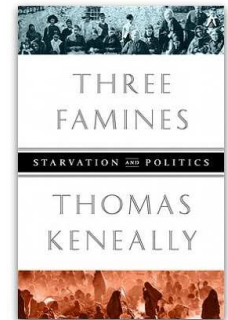
The famine of 1977–79 cut a swathe through East Timor's civilian population like the third horseman of the Apocalypse. Having failed to subdue the Timorese, the Indonesian military opted to starve them out. In addition to destroying food sources, forcing the population to flee and abandon gardens, the military also blocked international agencies from delivering aid until the army had achieved its military objectives.

When the US Catholic Relief Services was permitted to survey the situation in May 1979, its representative found conditions as critical as anything he had encountered during his 14 years experience in Asia. The famine, he reported, was not only claiming the very young and very old; many in their prime were also dying.

Most of the over 100,000 civilian deaths in East Timor during the 24 year war occurred at this time.

The significance of the famine to the Timorese was brought home in the course of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation's (CAVR) inquiry conducted after independence. Witnesses explained that Timor was no stranger to malnutrition, seasonal hunger or other tragedies, but this was the mother of all catastrophes. Whole families and communities were wiped out by starvation.

'In August 1977 in Idada we buried 80 bodies in one day,' Manuel Carceres da Costa told CAVR. 'They died of starvation. They died with swollen and aching



stomachs, unable to walk.'

Maria Jose da Costa's account was reminiscent of a 1950s rabbit drive in Australia: the military sprayed the long grass with gasoline and set fire to it to drive people out. Unable to run due to hunger, the elderly were left behind and died where they sat, defiant and dignified, dressed, she said, as if they were going to Sunday mass.

The famine dwarfs the Santa Cruz massacre and similar atrocities in scale and significance but is far less well known or analysed. This information gap is principally due to restrictions on access to East Timor applied by the Indonesian military until 1989. As a result most Indonesians are not only ignorant of what happened but continue to believe the Suharto regime's claims that the military was doing good work in East Timor.

Knowledge of what really happened is therefore an important corrective. It will help Indonesians understand why East Timor chose to separate from Indonesia in 1999 and why civilian control of the military is critical.

The period is also a blind spot internationally. Journalists continue to attribute the death-toll in East Timor to shooting and bombing rather than starvation, and researchers are unaware of the famine.

Cormac Ó Gráda, an Irish expert on famine, makes no mention of East Timor in his 2009 study *Famine, A Short History*, though he provides analysis and lessons from totalitarian famines of the 20th century in Stalin's USSR and Mao Tse-tung's China. Likewise Thomas Kenneally's book *Three Famines: Starvation and Politics* does not include the famine that occurred on Australia's doorstep though it illustrates his thesis.

East Timorese want to know more about the events that forced them to abandon families and have left them troubled because remains cannot be found for reburial according to custom. They also want to know why a crime of this magnitude has not been accounted for.

Australia can help them because it was a witness and what it saw is presumably contained in official cables from the time. Australia's ambassador to Indonesia was one of 11 diplomats to visit the territory in September 1978. Shocked at what he saw, he joined colleagues from Canada, Japan and the US to call for urgent relief. Assistance did not arrive until 12 months later, too late for many thousands of innocent people.

It will be hard to look an affected Timorese family in the eye today and explain why, over 30 years later, Australia does not want them to know what it knows about this catastrophe.

Titanic sets human tragedy apart from Hollywood gloss

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Titanic* (M). Director: James Cameron. Starring: Leonardo DiCaprio, Kate Winslett, Gloria Stuart, Billy Zane, Kathy Bates, Bill Paxton. 194 minutes**

Legend has it that upon its original theatrical release in the US 15 years ago, James Cameron's epic *Titanic* was listed as running for two hours and 74 minutes. The reason was a perceived aversion among American audiences towards films that ran for longer than three hours. It's probably an urban myth, propagated at the expense of 'dumb' Americans. But said Americans may have had a point. *Titanic* is too long.

I have nothing against long films per se. But to me *Titanic's* running time is needlessly bloated by an unnecessary framing narrative, in which an elderly *Titanic* survivor (Stuart) shares her story with a boatload of high tech treasure hunters; and by an overly drawn out 'lust story' in which beautiful youngsters Jack and Rose (DiCaprio and Winslett) grope each other across the class divide.

At a recent screening for media, held to promote the revamped 3D conversion of *Titanic* that arrives in cinemas today, in time for next week's 100th anniversary of the ship's historical demise, we were shown 45 minutes of selected scenes: the 'reader's digest version', quipped producer Jon Landau prior to the presentation. For me, 45 minutes is about enough, especially after several viewings of the entire film in years past.

It was sufficient to remind that, despite its failings, *Titanic* is an excellent film. Its great strength is its portrayal of small human stories against the gargantuan disaster of the doomed ship's final hours. Yes, the sight of the massive ship sloping, snapping, and finally sinking beneath the waves is spectacular. But the tragedy is the loss of life, not of vessel, and the film doesn't lose sight of this.

If images of a weeping elderly couple embracing on their bed, awaiting death together as their cabin fills with water, and of a mother reading to her children to offer them the small gift of love and comfort before the end, are shamelessly trite, they are also effectively emotive. I remember choking up as a 15-year-old cinemagoer at the melancholy dignity of musicians who continue to play even as the deck beneath them lists treacherously.

We feel the stab of injustice as third class passengers are barred below deck to face certain death; qualified outrage at a villain who rescues a child in order to secure his own place on a lifeboat; sorrow for a remorseful captain going down with his ship; shame and sympathy for huddled escapees who refuse to return to rescue others who have been left bobbing in the ocean, for fear that their lifeboat might be overturned.

During its long climactic sequence *Titanic* accumulates images of panicked individuals perishing upon the deck amid falling debris or gushes of icy water, or drowning or freezing in the ocean itself. Some of these are familiar characters; others are extras. But the film manages to evoke each loss of life as if it matters. *Titanic* is noble in its tribute to these individuals. Jack and Rose's story, by contrast, is pure Hollywood.

This re-release is an artistic as well as commercial endeavour. Cameron and co. are the most skillful practitioners of 3D technology working today, and their conversion of *Titanic* is immaculate. 3D is best when used not as a gimmick whereby gags fly off the screen at a flinching, giggling audience, but rather as an immersive technique. As Landau puts it, the enhanced depth of field makes of the cinema screen a window onto another world.

A Mormon in the White House

POLITICS

Alan Gill

So we may yet have a Mormon, Senator Mitt Romney, as the Republican contender for the White House.

Forty or so years ago this would have led to a perceived clash of loyalties: 'Who runs America?' — remember the fuss about John F. Kennedy's Catholicism? But now, due no doubt to the declining impact of religion generally, the senator's membership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints has been the least of his troubles.

Not quite all Americans regard the issue as of no concern. Conservative evangelicals — those on the far right of the religious right — see the LDS church as a hotchpotch of heresies, based largely on private revelation, and therefore offensive to biblical Christianity. More liberal elements see it as a phantasm of fairytales; essentially harmless, almost entertaining, with an appeal to history as the first (and only?) native born American religion.

On the 'plus' side is the Mormons' patriotism, defence of family values, and promotion of health and fitness. In Salt Lake City, when I was there as a guest of Mormon leaders, the officials who welcomed me were waxing lyrical about the Australian 'Norm, the couch potato' TV adverts, which they were hoping to import.

On a leg of the journey I found myself next to a businessman who was regarded as the city's Jewish community leader. 'I live in the only place where Jews are Gentiles and Gentiles are Jews,' he quipped.

My week as a guest of the LDS could not have been better timed. The movement's world leader, who is also 'Prophet, Seer and Revelator', had just decreed 'by revelation' that black Americans could henceforth be accepted as full members. It was an interesting end to a long simmering controversy.

I spoke to some of those affected, who shed tears of joy. One of them told me he would have remained content, if fate and the church had thus decided, to remain on the outside looking in. A few days later I had a personal audience with President Spencer Kimball. I remember thinking: 'This puts papal infallibility in the shade.'

During my first few days in this fair city I was struck by the cleanliness of the streets, polite behaviour of the inhabitants, the pretty girls with their 1950s style gingham dresses. Rather like a science fiction film. After a while I was so brainwashed that I noticed how scruffy were the outsiders as they stepped out of their tourist coaches.

The shops were old-fashioned but a joy. I called on the tailor who makes the suits worn by young Mormons when they go overseas on mission. Each suit has an

extra pair of pants. I was told they don't go threadbare, they rust.

A bookshop manager, himself a Mormon, directed me towards the city's Catholic cathedral, telling me to ask for Father Bill McDougall, the dean. He promised I would have a surprise in store, and he was right.

The man who came to the door was a powerfully built, thickset man, who, after leading me into the parlour, stretched full length on a couch, lit a cigar and asked me to tell him about myself. He seemed a most unclerical gentleman, and I was more interested in learning about him.

McDougall, initially a journalist on the Salt Lake City *Deseret News*, became a war correspondent with Reuters, covering the US Navy's role in liberating Java and the islands of the south-east. When his ship was sunk he spent nine days, clinging to a makeshift raft in a perilous sea, and vowed that, if his life were spared he would give his life to God and seek ordination as a Catholic priest. He did just that.

He said he did not feel alienated, living in a city where 75 per cent of the population belonged to a religious faith which many considered a little odd. 'I have nothing on Mormons,' he said smilingly. 'We have common values and have been victims of shared prejudice, particularly in the early years. Nowadays we just bait each other with a few jokes.' (Sample: 'Only a Mormon could lose the golden plates.')

Currently, there is a minor crisis within the LDS over accusations that the leadership has reneged on a promise to exclude Jewish gravesites and records from their custom of offering 'baptism of the dead' to those who, in their lifetime, lacked the opportunity to gain eternal life.

The practice is considered particularly insensitive to Holocaust survivors and others who do not understand the good intentions involved. Catholics are not known to have complained, other than at the annoyance caused by visitors sniffing around for access to information. It is thought Catholic saints are among the newly 'baptised'.

Probably the average American doesn't much care. The custom is a boon for genealogists, who find the information gleaned (available to outsiders) invaluable to compiling family trees.

Modest as I am, I feel compelled to mention my own small part in improving the Mormons' record keeping. Many of the genealogical records were, at the time of my visit, held in a huge room divided into sections corresponding with geographical areas. On visiting the room I noticed that the Australian section, unlike other national groups, had drawers and shelving clearly under lock and key.

The young attendant whom I asked about this said: 'We understand that some of your people have convict ancestors and you might not like it known.' I replied that the absolute opposite was the case. She then sent for her boss, who, having satisfied himself as to the veracity of my assertion, had all barriers and locks

removed.

Russia's liberal wind of change

POLITICS

Dorothy Horsfield

'I have a story for you,' says my young Moscow acquaintance, Konstantin. 'It goes like this: President George Bush phones Prime Minister Putin.

"Vladimir," he says, "please can you help me with my election campaign?"

'So Putin sends his 'magician', Russia's Central Election Commission Chairman Churov to Washington. But when Churov returns a few weeks later, he is downcast and apologetic: "Forgive me, Mr Putin, I could only achieve a 45 per cent vote for your party, United Russia.'"

Konstantin has a lot of such jokes, full of knowing scorn for Russia's leadership, especially 'Tsar' Putin, with his self-intoxication and fawning entourage, ignorant of political realities on the street and beyond the reach of advice. Did he really think his presidential victory confirmed the love of the Russian people for his leadership?

Among Westerners and locals alike, Moscow seems to be afloat on scurrilous innuendo, focused on Putin's bully-boy tactics, his fondness for young women and his greed bordering on the pathological.

Still, for a newcomer, the narratives are also shifting and opaque. Ever since the eruption of street protests after last December's parliamentary (Duma) elections, there has been so much focus on a liberal wind of change — or at least a steady breeze.

There seem to be cracks appearing in the Kremlin's legendary spin-doctoring. Its use of 'administrative resources' to ensure the electoral outcome, including the pre-election allegations of an assassination conspiracy against Putin by Chechen separatists, seemed especially to have lacked credibility.

The Opposition Movement is said to have unsettled the Kremlin's powerbrokers. The media has been more open to public debate; and Putin responded to the campaign against electoral fraudulence by installing CC TV cameras in almost all of the 93,000 polling stations across the country. The local media estimated that more than a million volunteers were mobilised to monitor the booths.

And yet Putin's undisputed victory was a confusing result. At a press conference the day after the election, independent monitoring organisation Golos deducted a whopping 15 per cent from the government's official victory tally of more than 63 per cent.

Alongside a very public recognition, at least in Moscow and St Petersburg, that Putin does indeed lead a government for whom stealing an election was no more than business-as-usual, it appeared that around half of Russian voters still supported him.

For some commentators the explanation lies with the failures of the Opposition voice.

These days, Moscow is an in-your-face consumerist, entrepreneurial city. Along the well-swept avenues around the Kremlin, Moscovites are bundled up against the snowy cold in expensive high-fashion puff jackets and ankle-length, hooded furs. They are the new middle-class, approximately 20 per cent of the population, whose opportunities and incomes have blossomed under Putin.

Many of them are also the stalwarts of the anti-Putin opposition, gathering in their thousands in Pushkin Square or Arbat Street, the iconic places of Moscow's 19th century intelligentsia.

But as the weeks go by since the election, it seems that banking on Russia's Opposition Movement to carry the torch of democratisation could prove no more than an entry ticket into the school of lost causes. The Movement is a very loosely aligned umbrella grouping across a spectrum that includes the extreme Nationalist Right and the increasingly irrelevant Communist Left.

Consider, for example, the protests in the evening the day after the March presidential vote. The hope was that they would be bigger than ever, a critical mass that had been cheated of their vote and could not be denied. As I stood amid the crush in Pushkin Square, listening to an old Beatles song ('Ob-Bla-Di, Ob-Bla-Da, Life Goes on, Bla!') on the public address system, there seemed little sense of optimism.

I thought the mood was resigned. No doubt, the fact that it was painfully cold — minus 15 degrees — had something to do with it. As well the place was grid-locked by hundreds of riot police, and there had been some talk of the spectre of a post-election Putin crackdown.

In any event, the mostly middle-aged protesters seemed resistant to the rhetorical theatricality of self-appointed leaders Alexei Navalny and liberal oligarch Mikhail Prokhorov. Nor were they particularly supportive of the small group who were arrested for attempting an Occupy Movement sit-in.

Maybe some momentum has been lost in this division between confrontation with the authorities and legally accepted protest, that there was no longer a credible sense of where to go next.

A week later the Arbat Street demonstration gathered far fewer people — scarcely sufficient protesters for the riot police to close the road to traffic.

Australia's mystic river

POETRY

Various

Big river

The Darling is just another beast
secreted in shade.

Hangabout leaf that
river is almost embarrassed at the space it occupies —
professionally shocked to be spotted
despite the camouflage dust it
wears to wander beneath notice.

One vein for all living
but not interested
in grand acclamations.

Such tinnitus is human,
unworthy of a ripple here
where even the trees
are transitory.

It scrawls
on the grey-soil plains.

This consecrated vellum
is read by cockatoos. A lethargic loam is too thin
for gods or garnish —
last will & testament there's fear
where there's nothing.

Men are busy — we pump & preen about
this unknowable saline belly.

Eagles understand the deaths
that feed any cycle.

Further south more weirs & bridges cage

a living this dissonance.
But it moves on despite all subornation,
blue in its pocket
& no sense of contention.
Meanders towards Antarctica
in a joyfully flocculent languor.

Les Wicks

none o'clock

its none o'clock,
the A-frame warm,
a day of page, of touch,
sky unzipped
the A-frame warm,
day of brie on rye
and the sky unzipped,
blue wrens flitting
day of brie on rye,
a river bank wander,
blue wrens flitting
a day of page and touch,
Schubert and doona,
none o'clock

Kevin Gillam

She-oaks

She-oaks are silent.
On the sand dunes they grow together,
but never make a forest.
They stir, in the sea wind,
grey heads nodding,
rooted in sand.

It never seemed odd to me
as a child
how they survived,
leather-skinned
old lizards,
their tough grey hides
focused inwards
on the pale flame
drawn up, drawn
up their thin frames
from silence,
the wordless thought,
that says
'alive, alive'.

R. Nugent

Targeting aid workers

POLITICS

Duncan Maclaren

When Australian aid worker David Savage was recently severely injured by a suicide bomber in Afghanistan, his family, understandably, was dumbfounded by anyone wanting to kill a civilian who had come to help the Afghan people. He worked, after all, as an advisor to AusAID, not the armed forces.

Unfortunately, over the last decade and a half aid workers have become 'legitimate targets', not just collateral damage. In this case, the Taliban said they had wanted to kill him in revenge for the shooting of 17 unarmed Afghan civilians by a deranged American soldier. It took me back.

I was caught up in a similar situation in the Islamic City of Marawi on the Filipino island of Mindanao in 1986. The Americans had just bombed Libya in retaliation for terrorist attacks on Americans.

At the time, I was investigating projects for the aid agency I worked for among the poor Muslim population. The locals drew their drinking water from the same lake where cows lazily defecated because the local warLords were charging too much to use the municipal taps that dotted the town.

The police told my hosts that the life of the American had been threatened. My explanation that I was Scottish drew blank stares and they offered me a gun. I said my style was more gin and tonic.

In the end, I was driven by two burly members of the Moro Liberation Front (who otherwise might have kidnapped me on the way down the mountain) to a safe house, run by my hosts, a Muslim aid organisation. I was lucky — David Savage was not.

In more innocent times, aid workers were regarded as angels by all sides because they took their cue from the Geneva Conventions and were present as humanitarians, not political stooges. There was a sharp distinction between them and any troops who had, in addition to any combative role, a mission of winning hearts and minds while retaining the capacity to kill people.

Western governments and armies then tried to co-opt NGOs, offering to lay out tents for them, for example, thus giving mixed messages to the population in need.

In Central America at the height of the proxy wars, NGOs were a major source of information for the CIA and unwittingly aided in its killing spree of left-wing rebels. Now western aid workers are regarded as part of the westernising mission in many parts but especially Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia where most violence against aid workers occurs.

The 2011 Aid Worker Security Report actually mentions a slight downturn in violence against aid workers in the last two years of reporting though this is caused by less activity of those agencies in the most violent settings as humanitarian space shrinks and the difference between an aid effort and a war effort becomes blurred.

Nowadays, aid workers are targeted by politicised rebels as well as bandits and, as one who works in rural Afghanistan recently told me with a smile, 'we never know when we go out the door whether we'll return'.

The Health Minister of Sri Lanka's recent comments [accusing](#) Caritas Sri Lanka of a 'major conspiracy' to sow anarchy by reporting the government's abuses to the Human Rights Council reminds us that most aid is carried out not by westerners but by locals who in most cases die in larger numbers as they have less protection.

I happen to know Caritas Sri Lanka extremely well and they are too savvy to go to the Human Rights Council knowing their government would destroy all their other programs. Its excellent peace-building program and attempts to reconcile ordinary Tamils and Sinhalese do not have the government seal of approval and that is probably the reason for the minister's outburst.

His words put the Caritas workers in jeopardy, something Western politicians might remember when they try to control or twist humanitarian work too much, regarding it as an arm of foreign or defence policy rather than as a free gift to others as part of our common humanity.

The age pension was fairer than super

POLITICS

Brian Toohey



Labor has the politics of superannuation badly wrong. Its core constituency would be much better off without it. So would the economy.

But Labor has long promoted super as 'gift' to ordinary workers that it compels employers to provide. Recently, however, the superannuation minister Bill Shorten acknowledged that compulsory contributions to super come from money that could otherwise be paid as normal wages.

Rather than being forced to hand the money over to fund managers to punt volatile financial markets, many employees could prefer to spend the money on their own priorities, such as raising a family, paying off a mortgage and improving their education.

Shorten is pushing ahead with Labor's decision to increase compulsory super contributions to 12 per cent of salaries. Yet Treasury modelling has shown that even the existing 9 per cent, plus the age pension, will produce an incongruous outcome in which low income earners have a higher disposable income in retirement than while working. Shorten is now fighting union resistance to trading off the increase to 12 per cent against wage rises.

If employers were allowed to convert the 9 per cent to a normal part of salaries, this would boost take home pay by \$85 for those on average weekly earnings of \$1333 and by around \$45 for someone on the minimum wage of \$589. Finding better things to do with this money than putting it into super should not be hard. Australian Prudential Regulatory Authority data show the average rate of return on super over the ten years to June 2011 was a meagre 3.8 per cent.

Governments could also find better things to do with the money they spend on superannuation tax concessions that are heavily biased towards high income earners. The research director for financial information company Rainmaker, Alex Dunnin, says about half the value of the concessions goes to the 8 per cent of superannuation members who are in a self-managed super fund (SMSF). Tax office figures show 75,000 of these funds have assets between \$2 million and \$10 million. Two have more than \$100 million. Yet 90 per cent of SMSFs have only one or two members. Dunnin estimates the average balance in not-for-profit industry funds is \$44,000.

The Henry tax report notes the cost of lifting contributions to 12 per cent will outweigh any savings on the age pension. Well before the 12 per cent rate is fully in place, official projections show the tax concessions will cost the budget over \$42 billion in 2014–15.

Even after subtracting offsets, scrapping the concessions should increase revenue by well over \$30 billion a year. The concessions consume vast sums that could improve productivity and wellbeing through increased outlays on education, childcare, health, transport and well designed tax cuts. Until it tackles the concessions, Labor can forget about making serious headway on a new disabilities scheme, dental care and disadvantaged schools.

A recent Productivity Commission report rejected calls to give saving for age care the same tax concessions as super. It said, 'Such subsidies perform poorly on equity grounds as they offer the greatest benefit to those with the greatest capacity to save.'

The report also highlights how compulsion produces inferior economic outcomes: 'Compulsory saving imposes a deadweight loss as it distorts decisions about which savings vehicles to use, as well as between consumption and savings. In particular, younger people may be less able to invest in their preferred mode of savings (for example, owning their own home).'

Compulsory super also prevents the efficient allocation of resources by artificially boosting fees paid to fund managers and administrators by several billion a year. Not even the local car industry could dream of winning an assistance package in which governments compelled all Australians to buy its products, regardless of whether they had better things to do with their money.

The vast bulk of the money in super is used to buy and sell existing financial assets. Only a tiny proportion goes directly into creating new productive capacity. Often one super fund merely swaps the ownership of a parcel of shares with another.

Paul Keating says he changed superannuation while Treasurer from an elite system to one in which 'the bloke running behind the garbage truck could have super'. But a new elite has left the garbo in the dust. Unlike someone still working for the minimum wage, members of this elite pay no tax on retirement income from super, even if it is millions of dollars a year.

Tax-free super income is also exempt from the means test for prescription drugs. This allows rich retirees to buy drugs for \$5.80 a prescription compared to \$35.40 for a minimum wage earner. But Labor refuses to abolish this rort, let alone tax those over 60 at normal rates.

Given their limited resources, governments should not fund massive budget subsidies for super as well as the age pension. Once governments fund the pension as a decent safety net, they have fulfilled their basic welfare obligation to retirees. Anyone who wants to save more can do so.

Apart from being impervious to financial market gyrations, the age pension is immune to a new problem peddled by the finance industry called 'longevity risk' — that your money could run out before you die. The age pension has the great

advantage that it never runs out.

Bob Carr's 'overlap of cultures' and the Victorian bishops on gay marriage

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

In his maiden speech last month, Australia's new foreign minister Bob Carr [articulated](#) his vision for people of different cultures living together. Rather than multiculturalism, he spoke of the 'overlap of cultures', a phrase first used by King Abdullah of Jordan at a Davos conference in 2004.



'That notion of an overlap of cultures, I think, is inspiring, especially compared to the alternative notion of monochrome monoliths destroying one another's statuary, smashing one another's grave sites and burning one another's books.'

He went on to invite the Senate to 'dwell' on some of the 'marvellous cultures of tolerance' in the world's history. His primary example was medieval Andalusia in southern Spain, where Muslims, Christians and Jews lived together and the Muslim ruler appointed a Jewish scholar as his foreign minister.

Last week Bishop Pat Power referred to Carr's historical examples of tolerance in an [opinion article](#) in the *Canberra Times*. The article was based on a [paper](#) Bishop Power gave at an International Conference on Jerusalem, convened by the United Arab League and held in Doha at the end of February.

His context was the perceived need for federal parliamentarians to understand the injustices being suffered by the Palestinian people at the hands of Israel. He writes: 'I tire of seeing our parliamentarians of all political persuasions unquestioningly supporting Israel's usurping of fundamental Palestinian rights.'

The overlap of cultures Carr refers to shows itself in a lack of tolerance for particular practices linked to religious belief such as the wearing of the burqa. Another current and pressing example is the push to change the legal definition of marriage to a form that is incompatible with the teaching of certain religious authorities.

Victoria's six Catholic bishops have just issued a [pastoral letter](#) insisting that parliamentarians respect the Catholic doctrine that 'the natural institution of marriage [is] a union between a man and a woman'.

The bishops should be entitled to expect that the Australian Government will not legislate to 'smash' the sacrament and religious institution of marriage. In the past, civil authorities have generally respected other elements of Catholic faith such as the seal of the confessional, even though it encroaches upon transparency and other values normally regarded as non-negotiable in a secular democratic society.

Of course it goes without saying that Christians in a secular society cannot expect non-believers to live according to the teachings of *their* Christian religious faith. This is despite the fact that many of our laws are based historically on values that derive from Judaeo-Christian religious teaching, and radical changes to particular laws that jettison universal principles based on nature could diminish and even derail the value system as a whole.

But tolerance of other cultures and faiths must be reciprocal, and the bishops know this. The tone of the Victorian Bishops' pastoral letter suggests they will studiously avoid hostile interaction with gay marriage advocates and politicians with whom they disagree. They will have learned a lesson from the UK experience, where the Scottish Cardinal Keith O'Brien was roundly criticised for his intolerant [labelling](#) of same-sex marriage as 'madness'. By contrast his London counterpart Archbishop Vincent Nichols was temperate and respectful in his [warning](#) that it would be a 'profoundly radical step'.

We should take heart that Bob Carr's overarching vision of 'marvellous cultures of tolerance' is close to reality in Australia, even if it is threatened by the passion associated with debate over issues such as gay marriage. Implicitly he's encouraging us to celebrate the overlap of cultures in our society and not let our differences defeat us.

Harmoniously working through such issues will provide us with a template to help all Australians, particularly our parliamentarians, toward a constructive rather than ham-fisted role in promoting peace in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Close-ish encounters with two queens

BY THE WAY

Brian Matthews

In March 1954 my parents took me to see the visiting Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip as they whizzed past in the back of their limousine. I remember seeing a white gloved hand at the window and that was about it. The experience, to which I had gone under duress — having even at that young age vestigial, half understood republican tendencies — turned out to be the one time in my life so far when I saw the Queen 'in the flesh'.

I knew that the two royals were heading to the MCG and perhaps they were running late and this explained the speed of their passing which, while not of Formula One quality, defied even cursory observation.

The MCG, in those days before it became a genuine world class stadium, was much given to performances by schoolchildren on ceremonial occasions. Sure enough, when the Queen and Philip arrived, they saw the word WELCOME spelt out on the sacred turf by hundreds of carefully arranged, colourfully dressed and remorselessly drilled schoolgirls and boys.

I know all about this, not because I have studied the matter, but because, unbeknownst to me, as they say in the romances, my wife-to-be was helping to form the bottom leg of the L, just where the right angle begins.

A few weeks ago, accompanied by that same vital component of the L, I went with some enthusiasm to see another Queen pass by. During the previous week a notice on a blackboard in the Queenscliff information centre had announced that the *Queen Mary* would be passing through the Port Phillip Bay Heads — [the Rip](#), as it is known — at about five in the morning and would be departing again at about nine that evening.

Though living almost in sight of the Rip, we passed on the early morning tryst but, along with most of the population of the Bellarine Peninsula, nearby Geelong and even visitors from Melbourne, we lined up on the Point Lonsdale foreshore with a couple of hours to spare rugged up and ready for the show.

At about seven, a bloke in the crowd said, 'Here she comes.' He had a huge pair of binoculars that he must have inherited from a long gone relative who might have found them useful on the Somme. He sounded authoritative.

Sure enough, far across the bay and approaching through the channel was a ship with a couple of lights showing on the mast. 'She's low in the water,' says the bloke. 'You can see the Plimsoll line on the black hull.' Now he was showing off. Any minute I expected him to shout, 'Right standard rudder!' and other nautical instructions.

But he had the crowd's attention and his pronouncements spread quickly. A

tremor of expectation ran through the crowd in the way it does when Black Caviar hits the front again. Children were sent running to dig their fathers out of the pizza and fish and chip queues. The elderly were jostled and manhandled into better positions.

For my own part, though not at all nautically gifted or well informed, I couldn't help wondering why 'she' should be so low in the water and why the vessel, now becoming more distinct, had a black hull whereas the Queen Mary was white. And how come a state-of-the-art cruise ship, a miracle of precision and planning, was running two hours ahead of schedule? Did half the passengers get stranded in Port Melbourne?

I kept quiet, except to murmur to my wife, 'That can't be it.' Others too were doubting, but the man with the binoculars was having his moment and was not to be denied. 'Any minute now she'll turn', he said, 'and we'll see the lights in the portholes.'

Well, soon enough, the truth became brutally clear, as it so often does. The ship everyone was craning to see came up the channel and turned towards the Rip. No portholes, just a jet black hull with 'ITALIA' in large white capitals. Her load of about 200 red, blue and green containers explained why she was 'low in the water'.

Perhaps the captain realised he had inadvertently fooled thousands of spectators crammed on both sides of the Heads because he sounded his klaxon as he sailed through.

If it's possible for a ship's horn to be ironic, this one was.

Temporarily disappointed but undaunted and with a couple of hours to wait, people straggled back to the queues where some unsuccessfully tried to reclaim their original places and were given some pointed, very Australian but amiable advice.

Dead on time, the real *Queen Mary*, like a city of lights, lit up the horizon and slid majestically towards the Rip under a full moon. As she passed between Point Nepean and Point Lonsdale, the captain sounded the horn, a deep bass note with no irony in it at all.

Much better and more moving than a waving gloved hand.

Canned pairs reveal Opposition's fruity strategy

POLITICS

John Warhurst



The practice of granting a pair allows an MP to be away from the chamber when there is sufficient reason. It serves the same purpose as a proxy vote, except it works in reverse. While a proxy would allow the absent member to vote in absentia, a pair means a member on the other side doesn't vote so as not to take unfair advantage of the member's absence.

The federal Opposition has played unrelentingly hard on pairs. Naturally Government members, whose vote is needed in the chamber, have not taken unauthorised leave. To do so would risk the Government's majority whenever a vote was called.

The purpose of the Opposition's actions is both practical and symbolic. It wants to make life difficult for Government MPs despite the impact on its own members. Furthermore it wants to emphasise the closeness of the numbers in parliament, whenever a Government member seeks leave. When the Government MP is a so-called 'baddie', like former health services unionist Craig Thomson (pictured), then even better.

The same is true when the Opposition wants to focus attention on particular issues, like the Carbon Tax. But the logic appears to have spread to any vote at any time.

Both Arts Minister Simon Crean and Liberal Shadow Communications Minister Malcolm Turnbull were refused leave to attend the funeral of artist Margaret Olley, despite the bipartisanship.

This attitude to pairs has led to some crazy situations, most recently when Thomson applied for medical leave. The Opposition queried Thomson's medical certificate. Not only did it request further information, but Warren Entsch, the Chief Opposition Whip, made personally intrusive speculations about his health.

All this might seem trivial. But there are broader consequences that a full analysis of the refusal of pairs would reveal. Who is really suffering from MPs being tied to their desks in the chamber unnecessarily?

Recently I was involved in an extremely silly example.

The 17th National Schools Constitutional Convention was held in Old Parliament House on 21–23 March. This event for 125 year 12 students from across the country is sponsored by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Politicians from all sides of Parliament have addressed the students at past

conventions. But this year all efforts to involve parliamentarians proved fruitless despite the fact that one from each side of the House of Representatives was invited. The usual reply was: 'I'll never get a pair.' Ultimately, the member for Fraser, Andrew Leigh, was formally refused a pair on the day before the convention began.

The matter of pairs raises the wider question of the whole approach to voting in the Chamber.

Recently a senior minister, Chris Bowen, was unable to return to the chamber quickly enough from an interview in the ABC studio to vote in a division on an aspect of the carbon tax. The Speaker, Peter Slipper, was forced to cast a casting vote to pass the government's legislation.

Labor is no better in its own internal affairs. During the Rudd-Gillard leadership challenge Michelle Rowland, the member for Greenway, was denied a vote because she couldn't be physically present, having just had a baby. Earlier Liberal leadership challenges also had missing MPs.

The rationale is similar. You must be present to cast a vote even if you have a very good reason for being absent. The same thinking underlines the granting of pairs. Proxies address this problem as, incidentally, does absentee voting on polling day.

The physical presence of a person to vote should not be elevated to a sacred principle. Such thinking is archaic. In other walks of life this is recognised by a proxy vote, but not in parliament. It is time parliamentary voting was brought up to date. MPs should be allowed proxy or absentee votes. This would eliminate the unnecessary argument about justified absenteeism and pairs. Parliament would not suffer and the community would benefit.

US bishops' contraception conundrum

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

To Australians it may seem strange that one of the most passionately fought issues in current United States politics has to do with contraception. It has divided Republicans from Democrats and set the Catholic Church against the Government. The issues raised in the debate are central to the relations between church and state, and also to the ways in which Christians deal with a less than perfect world.



The health department believes contraception is a health issue, and that its costs should be met through insurance. The majority of American women agree. But in a nation where medical insurance is private, the United States bishops were concerned that the Catholic Church and its agencies should not be forced to provide or pay for services that it believes to be unethical. It saw this as a breach of religious freedom.

In January the health department issued a draft mandate that to its mind resolved the tension between its responsibility for health and the demands of religious freedom. It ruled that all insurance policies should include access to contraception. It exempted church agencies that served the religious needs of their co-religionists from this obligation. But church agencies that provided public services, such as education or medical care, would be obliged to include contraception in their employees' insurance cover.

To Catholics with any sense of history the guiding principles behind this directive were unacceptable. It imposed a definition of church in which the outreach of charity was quarantined from the so-called core aspects of faith as prayer and worship. Furthermore, it made the state the judge of what is religious. Finally, it asked church agencies to pay for services that the Catholic Church regarded as morally unacceptable.

The Catholic bishops won considerable support in opposing the mandate.

In February the health department proposed a compromise which did not touch on principle, but meant Catholic agencies would not pay directly for contraceptive services. It proposed that insurance companies should provide contraceptive cover gratis to those who wanted it. How this was to be done was not specified. Nor was it clear how the many Catholic agencies that had established their own insurance funds could avoid direct involvement.

Although some Catholic organisations welcomed this compromise, the bishops remained implacable, unhappy both about the principles that remained unchanged and the lack of detail as to how the scheme might work.

This issue exposed the tensions involved in living in an imperfect world. In Catholic tradition these tensions are covered under the heading of cooperation with wrongdoing. Given the Catholic judgment that contraception is wrong (a judgment with which many Catholics disagree) people must then decide what forms of cooperation with it are permissible and which excluded. Possible forms of cooperation range from manufacturing contraceptives or holding shares in companies to selling, advertising, insuring, and paying taxes out of which they are subsidised.

In discussing these questions moralists usually distinguish between formal and material cooperation. We cooperate formally if we approve what is done. If the action with which we cooperate is wrong, this kind of cooperation is never right. Cases of material cooperation, where we have a part in something of which we do not approve, are more perplexing.

The moral judgment of material cooperation depends on how immediate or remote our cooperation is, and on what good end it might serve. To appear on stage to spruik contraceptives would be pretty immediate. To pay taxes to a government that subsidised their distribution would be a very remote form of cooperation. The more remote the cooperation is, the more it can be justified by countervailing values.

The effect of the February compromise was to make the cooperation required of church organisations more remote. They would no longer have to provide insurance themselves, but only work with insurance companies that covered it among their other provisions. So in continuing to oppose this compromise the bishops risked demanding a level of moral purity that they would not expect in other areas of life, notably in the making of war.

In March the Health Department offered another compromise. It involved extending to all Catholic organisations the exemption offered previously to those serving the internal needs of the Catholic community. It also established a period of consultation to look at all aspects of the issue before coming to a final resolution. The bishops' response was sceptical but muted, reiterating their concern for religious freedom.

I have looked at the issue from the perspective of the United States bishops. There are other perspectives. This is an election year, and the production of the mandate and the variations rapidly rung on it surely have much to do with the President's conflicting political pressures. Much of his core support comes from groups for whom easy access to contraception and abortion are a central issue.

Equally, he does not wish to incur the hostility of the Catholic Church. The bishops therefore have a stronger negotiating position than at other times, and that is perhaps why they carried their opposition to the early amendments further than they might have at other times.

But ultimately political influence depends on moral influence. When you are

defending a position as counter-cultural as is opposition to contraception, moral influence depends on radical integrity.

The bishops are certainly counter-cultural in the United States in calling for a public national health insurance scheme. But their fastidiousness about indirect cooperation with government in contraception would also need to be matched by an equal fastidiousness in cooperating indirectly with government in the abuses associated with military, penal and immigration policy. That is a hard ask.

Geriatric sex and dignity

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Best Exotic Marigold Hotel (M)*. Director: John Madden. Starring: Maggie Smith, Judi Dench, Tom Wilkinson, Bill Nighy, Penelope Wilton, Celia Imrie, Ronald Pickup, Dev Patel. 123 minutes**

'It's about a group of British seniors who retire to a nursing home in India.' My colleague's face turned slack with boredom before I'd even finished this thumbnail synopsis. His stupefied expression was so comical that I burst out laughing. 'No, it's much better than it sounds on paper!' I insisted.

It is too, due in overwhelming part to an ensemble cast that consists of, frankly, some of the finest film actors in any age group, let alone the 60s to late 70s bracket they currently inhabit. Any film that features the likes of Smith *and* Dench *and* Wilkinson *and* Nighy would surely be worthwhile, regardless of any other shortcomings.

A prologue introduces the characters and establishes their motives for moving from England to India. Bereaved Evelyn (Dench) is faced with selling her home to pay off her late husband's debts. Supreme court judge Graham (Wilkinson) has unfinished business in India that dates back to his youth. For the unashamedly racist Muriel (Smith) the trip represents an opportunity to expedite hip surgery.

The relatively youthful but tightly wound Jean (Wilton) is appalled at the prospect of moving into a retirement village; she and her affable husband Douglas (Nighy) see India as a chance to extend their horizons and prolong their independence. Madge (Imrie), on the other hand, is on the hunt for what will be only her most recent rich husband, while ageing tomcat Norman (Pickup) simply wants to get laid.

These characters (strangers when the film begins) travel and arrive together at the Best Exotic Marigold Hotel for the Elderly and Beautiful, a once splendid but now rundown establishment whose reality does not yet match the vision of its optimistic young proprietor, Sonny (Patel). The new residents, many of whom have not strayed this far beyond England's shores, settle into abodes that are far less luxurious than they had anticipated.

O! Parker's screenplay (based on Deborah Moggach's novel *These Foolish Things*) makes less than you might expect of the (predictable) clash-of-cultures, elderly-fish-out-of-water aspects of this scenario. There is the obligatory montage of the residents rushing to the toilet to relieve bowels that are unaccustomed to rich curries. But the film largely eschews 'poverty porn' and the India clichés of sardine-tin crowds and swatches of colour.

In place of the garishness of brightly coloured fabrics and spice markets director

Madden for the most part opts for a soberer colour scheme, and the action is bathed in clean yellow light. The characters' move to India, it seems, is not merely about stepping outside of comfort zones, but also stepping beyond the familiar in order to examine life and self in, literally, a new light.

The fact that Jean — the most repressed and negative of the characters — refuses to leave the grounds of the hotel therefore seems to speak less of a fear of cultural difference than of an apprehension for self-examination. At the other end of the spectrum, Graham sojourns easily beyond the walls, questing to resolve a long held regret. His is the most affecting story, assisted greatly by Wilkinson's incomparable gravitas.

Each of the characters has their own story within the broader narrative: Evelyn seeks to attain independence; Muriel, a former service employee for a rich family, develops a fondness for a maid at the hotel that transcends her racial prejudices (and turns her into the film's unlikely hero); Madge and Norman's respective searches for romantic partners are played mostly for comic effect.

Accross the board, there is a sense that the calibre of actors have lifted what could have been a middling film to something that is above average. They bring life and warmth to something that in lesser hands could have been dull and sentimental, and lend credence to its frank considerations of geriatric dignity, sexuality and mortality.

'Everything will be all right in the end. So if it is not all right, then it is not yet the end,' chimes Sonny, expounding a personal motto that is also a kind of de facto thematic banner for the film. This philosophy is rather appealing, despite being somewhat cheesy. Much like the film itself.

Revelations shed new light on Bill Morris dismissal

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan

Some Catholics think last year's dismissal of William Morris as Bishop of Toowoomba is just a storm in a teacup about a recalcitrant country bishop, and that it is time we all moved on. This is a serious misreading of the signs of the times. Church structures need to be reformed to be more aligned with contemporary notions of justice and due process.

Ten months on, people are left confused as to whether Morris was sacked chiefly for what he wrote in his 2006 Advent letter about women's ordination, for what was reported by the Apostolic Visitor, Archbishop Charles Chaput, or for what was reported to Rome by those sometimes described as 'the temple police'. Now more details have come to light showing how threadbare and confused the processes were.

In his 'Statement of Position' to the three Cardinals gathered in Rome in January 2008, Morris said, 'At the end of the Apostolic Visitation, when Archbishop Chaput was being driven back to Brisbane, he remarked to Fr Brian Sparksman, our diocesan Chancellor, that he would be astounded if our diocese were to lose its bishop.'

'He also asked John Bathersby (Archbishop of Brisbane) why he thought he was asked to investigate me because as far as he could see from the material provided to him things that I had reportedly said and done were happening in other places as well.'

Fr Sparksman told me last week: 'I cannot say with certainty that Chaput used the word 'astounded' but it was a word like that. I definitely took heart and was relieved by what he said because as you can imagine it was a tense time for us all and that was a difficult drive to Brisbane. I was very anxious at first but then very relieved by what Archbishop Chaput had to say.'

Archbishop Denis Hart wrote to *The Sydney Morning Herald* and Melbourne's *The Age* on 4 February 2012 telling us Chaput 'said he discussed the contents of his report with Bishop Morris in Toowoomba'. Hart's claim contradicted Morris' letter to the Holy Father dated 24 December 2008 in which he said: 'I have not seen the report prepared by the Apostolic Visitor; the Apostolic Visitor did not discuss his findings with me; I have not been shown any of the 'evidence' that was gathered or even the list of the 'accusers'.'

Hart's claim was strenuously denied by Morris when he then wrote in response to the same newspapers on 8 February 2012 stating: 'I categorically deny that Archbishop Chaput ever discussed with me what he was going to put in the report.'

At World Youth Day in Madrid last year, Chaput, realising that Gerard Holohan, Bishop of Bunbury, was from Australia, drew him aside in the cathedral before mass to indicate vigorously that he had indeed discussed the contents of his report with Bishop Morris — except for the names of who he met — at the end of his Apostolic visit to Toowoomba’.

If the processes were working correctly, there would have been no need for an Apostolic Visitor to draw aside a bishop he had never met to assure him of due process in relation to another bishop when the stranger bishop had not even made an inquiry.

If Morris was sacked for what he wrote in his Advent letter about the possible ordination of women, married priests, and recognition of other orders, ‘Rome willing’, there would have been no need for Chaput to make his visit and his report. But then again if he was sacked for matters detailed in Chaput’s report, we are left wondering why Chaput being apprised of the Advent letter and having completed his visit would have told the Diocesan Chancellor how extraordinarily surprising it would be if Morris were to be sacked.

The matter is a complete mess reflecting very poorly on a Church which prides itself on a code of canon law which provides for the protection of the rights of all Christ’s faithful, including priests and bishops.

When Morris met with the curial cardinals in January 2008, they spoke specifically to only six of the issues listed in the unsigned, unsourced and inaccurate memorandum which had been presented to Morris by the nuncio in September 2007. The first issue listed was the vague assertion that ‘Toowoomba is moving in a different direction than that of the Catholic Church’. The second issue was the Advent pastoral letter.

The third issue listed was the false statement: ‘At least in the past eight years there have been no priestly ordinations in Toowoomba’ and that priests in good health were retiring early and being replaced ‘by deacons or laity’. There had been four priests ordained in the last eight years, and Toowoomba had no deacons.

The fourth issue was the third rite of reconciliation. The Cardinals said, ‘With regard to ‘general absolution’, we are glad to hear of Bishop Morris’s statement that ‘general absolution is no longer common.’ Morris was able to assure them that he had given permission for general absolution only twice in the last three years, and for the most appropriate canonical reasons.

The fifth issue was his general failure to correct liturgical abuses. Morris assured them: ‘Reports of aberrations have been addressed immediately, when referred to me.’ The sixth issue was ‘the general theological climate of the diocese, and especially of its priests, need(ing) to move towards a more authentic Catholic identity, as found in the Catechism’.

For the Pope to be totally free in the appointment, transfer and removal of

bishops, he and his flock have to be assured that his curial officials exercise their power to recommend appointment, transfer or removal in a just and transparent manner. This did not occur in the case of Bishop Morris.

Greek peasant's faithful fatalism

NON-FICTION

Gillian Bouras



Nobody believes Greece has a winter, but in fact Greek winters can be very bleak. It snows in Athens and, in the palely sunny Peloponnese where I live a biting wind can blow, apparently straight from Siberia, for days straight. Greek villagers have a particular verb for such a wind: it *harvests*.

There are various kinds of harvests, and this past winter Maria, my friend and neighbour of 32 years, was gathered in, as my grandmothers would have said. As the villagers buried her, she would have been amused, I think, to see the priest wearing a scarf under his stole. Maria was 89, and had never lived anywhere else but here; she had made an occasional visit to Kalamata, 25km away, but had never been to Athens.

Maria was born at a bad time and into poverty, and did not have much luck in escaping it. It haunted her until the end: the traditional vigil was kept, unusually, in church, her tiny, bare house being quite inadequate for the reception of mourners. Automatically destined to be a village wife and mother, she received little education. But neither did she receive a dowry, and so she never married.

Instead, she devoted herself to her nephews, who are my children's third cousins, and was a constant and loving presence in my sons' lives as well. They came and went between her garden and their own, chattering away to Maria, and playing with her kittens, chickens and kids. When her nanny-goat butted four-year-old Alexander (he bears the scar in his eyebrow to this day) she was mortified, wringing her hands with guilt.

I bore my own burden of guilt with regard to Maria, and castigated myself regularly for my own discontents. My life, with its privileges, opportunities and comforts was, in a very real sense, a world away from Maria's.

Yet I never heard her complain, despite having so little: her pension, when she eventually got it, was minimal, and she used to earn a little bit of extra cash by selling her pieces of crochet to women who were too busy to make the d'oyleys and runners that their Domestic Goddess souls yearned for. She would sit outside with her cronies in the summer evenings, chatting and plying busily.

Women are the same the world over: we need conversations with other women, so Maria and I would often have what my mother used to call 'a good mag' over her garden gate. She had met my parents during their holidays here, and never forgot to ask after them: I think she regarded the ongoing saga of my father's second marriage as her own exotic soap opera.

She consoled me when another neighbour's chooks wrecked my vegetable

garden, and told me how to make a pretty and delicious dish out of courgette flowers when the courgettes themselves had failed.

Unlike me, Maria was an unchallenged believer. She would call on the Panagia, All-Holy Mother of God, in time of trouble, and was always certain of receiving an answer. She was also, predictably enough, imbued with both fortitude and peasant fatalism, and would say, very regularly, *Oti thelei o Theos: Whatever God wants*.

This, while I, product of a very different tradition, would huff and puff inwardly and mutter that God helps those who help themselves. But part of me envied Maria her certainties. A big part.

Somehow we have to cope with loss; we have to change our shape, as it were, in order to accommodate it. But I will miss Maria greatly: now all I can do is flip through the snapshots of memory, and be thankful that she was in my life for so long, with her patience, humour, and the lessons she taught me, all unwittingly: incidental learning.

Now fruit trees are bursting with blossom, and wild jonquils and grape hyacinths are clumped along the banks and hedgerows. Maria loved flowers. The red hips are still on the rose that straggles along her garden wall, but already little shoots of new growth are appearing.

Later in the spring and for the summer the whole will be covered with a mass of pink blooms. I wish Maria could see them. But then ... perhaps she will. Perhaps.

Man versus wind

POETRY

Various

Dial tone

Up and down the hallway
phones are ringing
he went to school
the kitchen is full.

She would've said it
who could stop him?

here is the doctor

I have to sign.

A million squeezes
now certification

I the informant
after all this time.

Snaps of wafers
viewing arrangements
handles like that?
who would make them.

One then another
proofs and papers
'no flowers please'
ward donations.
what a creation.

Wind

Trees are moving houses.
scavenger squads
are sling-shot,
flung at squall speed

gather like tea leaves
the day has no front teeth
it raves in the street,
it is grey as a tap.
a murky x-ray
of a multiple trauma
the front door keeps whistling
old songs about going away,
even the radio echoes
'just say the word', Sinatra sings.
these hinges hate me,
not one screw will stay put
they are moving out,
the evidence is
to anchor a cabaret
well you wanted to see a temper
remove a frequency.

Family tree

A cage, a bloodbath,
an acorn of vanities
adorn display cabinets,
decorate the perch.
Some trace to esteem,
stretch sobering feats
some wipe dust
from cobwebbed boxes
Run slave with beast
seek recent arrivals,
indentured drudge
at clearance prices.

Usher silence
uncover gloom
find pummelled men
in boiler rooms.
Shocked on walls
or dragged
from drawers,
ghosts in pleats and hats.
Befuddled grooms
in full costume,
heirlooms
framed by naphtha-flash.
All dearly beloved
waiting in heaven
yours to the last,
remember that.

Floating mountain

in memorial stands,
cool climate tweed
Mountain Ash,
lopped amputees
a daguerreotype
of breath in beams
cottage prints,
tea-towel fernery
filtered fathoms,
gilded shadows
latches, snibs
and boiled sweets
evening gowns,

tentacle jewellery
fountain lights,
drizzle below

Stynes a man of flesh and steel

EULOGY

Joe Caddy

It was a warm December afternoon in 1984 and I was at my parents' home on holidays from the seminary where I had just completed my first year of training to become a priest. I could hear this incessant bouncing of a football up and down our back path — surely this was cricket season and far too hot for football.

But the big raw-boned 18-year-old from Ireland who stayed for his first year in Australia with my parents had no interest in cricket. He was utterly determined to learn this new game with the awkwardly shaped oval ball. That determination and toughness characterised the 'man of steel', [Jim Stynes](#), who against the odds not only learned how to play AFL but eventually took its ultimate individual honour, the 1991 Brownlow Medal, in 1991.

He was so determined that he joined me in swimming the 1985 Pier to Pub at Lorne, even though he did not know how to swim — he completed the 1200m open water swim doing a kind of dog paddle. It took him 20 minutes longer than anyone else, and no doubt he alarmed more than a few of the lifesavers, but he completed it!

Over the years the evidence mounted that Stynes was a man of steel — a record number of consecutive games in the AFL, defying all injury and pain; taking on the chairmanship of a broken AFL club and restoring its spirit and its finances; and finally the heroic way that he took on the cancer that was to rapidly overtake him. This battle made him a hero and source of inspiration for thousands, maybe millions.

But Stynes was not only a man of steel, he was also a man of flesh and blood. So moved was he by the plight of young people drifting, lost and without direction that he started the [Reach Foundation](#) to support young people and help them to realise their dreams and potential.

He loved his family deeply and in spite of a very busy life was always fully present to them and their needs. And for their part they were always there for him, showering him with the love and blessings he needed to sustain himself in the good times and in the times of struggle.

Finally he suffered through his disease and was on record saying that this suffering actually helped him to empathise with others who were suffering in their own various ways.

Steel, yes, but a man of flesh and blood. Determined and grim, yes, but with an enormous heart. Tough on himself but so understanding of others.

Our paths crossed from time to time over the past 27 years years at various family functions, 21sts, Christmases and so on. In 2001 I officiated at his wedding

where he married his beautiful wife Sam. Last Saturday I was called by his mother to his bedside where I led some prayers with his family as he received the sacrament of the sick.

Today I will be one of the clergy officiating at his funeral. I don't know if I will play any particular role in the ceremony, but I will feel honoured to be involved in the send-off for a great man.

Elitism in online dictionaries

MEDIA

Philip Harvey

'Words, words between the lines of age,' sings Neil Young. His bittersweet song about relationships makes us dwell on how words that are meant to say everything are still just words. Sometimes they are all we have, and we try to say it the best way we can. We do not always succeed, and that is not just because of the words. But we will go on trying, we are all caught up in the daily traffic of words.



The lyric also reminds us that words themselves are born, alter, age, transmute, and even die. Their meaning shifts through time and may have a completely different — need I say awesomely different — meaning between age groups, regions, times and educations.

This has never been truer than in the case of 21st century English, the *lingua franca* of the planet. The sheer variety and vitality of usage across every continent by those for whom English is first, second, third, even 23rd language brings us rather too quickly to the whole matter of meaning.

Meaning is a service of online dictionaries, but not always their forte. Meaning is what online dictionaries purport to supply, but how thoroughly and deeply depends on the purposes of their makers. Meaning is the aim of dictionaries, but whose meaning? And when were the definitions created?

Thoughts like this fizzed in my mind each time I visited [Merriam-Webster](#), which was for a time the main internet dictionary through a process of availability, popularity, and algorithms. Samuel Johnson famously defined oats as 'a grain, which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people'. Merriam-Webster was not so susceptible to prejudice and gave short, straightforward definitions that were simple fare indeed.

Merriam-Webster now seems to have gone the way of all business, so we turn to [The Free Dictionary](#) (American Heritage and Collins) which gives four definitions for oats, no history, and unhelpful links to muesli websites.

Better in this regard is [dictionary.com](#) (Random House) with six definitions and history of origins, including 'sowing of wild oats', the kind reported frequently in James Boswell's journals and studiously overlooked by his friend Johnson. But in none of these are we given an idea of which usages are the most common, nor is a date placed on archaic uses of 'oats'.

This site has a voice box to click for pronunciation, which is good if you wish to say 'oats' like someone from Massachusetts.

The poet W.H. Auden kept the 13-volume Oxford English Dictionary in his

writing room: he once called the room 'the cave of making'. At an older age his set had become so over-used it was falling apart and he considered purchasing a new one. Today the OED is online, so Auden would have had to subscribe, then renew that subscription each year. He would have foregone the pleasure of paging through entries at leisure for the rigour of pointing at entries with a cursor.

This might be okay if he wanted both the latest and the least meanings of a word, or wished to identify earliest uses of that word in any of its usages, but it would have cramped a serendipitous reading style that presented Auden with variations of a word, and have prohibited him from mining the forgotten words he set into his lapidary late poems.

In many ways this has always been the choice, between the concision of the popular prescriptive dictionary and the expansiveness of the great descriptive dictionaries like the OED. When we want a quick definition, we want a dictionary that matches our word in short order. This can be a problem when assessing new words. When we are translating, we want all uses of the word, proceeding by common usage.

The quality of internet definitions can be woeful, or wonderful, which is due in part to its democratic range of choice. The free online internet still needs to be treated with caution as a final reference authority and it is sometimes a worry to know that globally people turn to this source for definitive meanings every day.

Despite appearances, the forgoing grump is not aimed at the internet, but at the lack of thoroughness in free online dictionaries. You say tomato and I say tomatoy. The free ones are too often bland and incomplete in their definitions, while those that are complex and exhaustive require a credit card. Quality, it seems, comes at a price. This divide between what is free and what has a price tag on the internet is an increasing educational issue. Rich institutions and individuals can pay for the words we all use, while others cannot, or just do not.

But then maybe it's the internet itself that has become one big dictionary and our task is learning how to read it as we would any other new reference work at home or in our libraries and offices.

I first heard the word 'bogan' over 20 years ago. It seemed to describe very imprecisely certain kinds of young men who loitered on railway stations and plazas. They wore running shoes, black clothes, loose cardigans and never combed their hair. In my mind's eye they resembled Kurt Cobain, but Cobain probably wasn't a bogan. The free online dictionaries today maintain that a bogan is simply a tranquil stretch of water found in Canada.

But interestingly, [Wikipedia](#) itself has the best overall perspective on this term. Its entry includes links to dedicated bogan websites, leaving one to understand that while 'bogan' is a term of derision for some, for others it is a badge of honour.

The OED does not provide this kind of sweep, and if you can pay for the

inestimably worthy Macquarie, one of our seriously undervalued literary creations, you will be told that bogan is a colloquial noun (mildly derogatory) for 'a person, generally from an outer suburb of a city or town and from a lower socio-economic background, viewed as uncultured. Compare *barry, bennie, boonie, Charlene, Charmaine, cogger, feral*; especially Qld *bevan*; Chiefly Qld *bev-chick*; WA *bog*; ACT *booner*; ACT *charnie bum*; Tasmania *chigger*; Riverina *gullie*; Melbourne Region *mocca*; Victoria *scozzer*; Chiefly NSW *westie*.'

These last are baffling even to many of the locals, let alone the global villagers who read this terminology beyond the land girt by sea.

Neil Young's lyric plays with the expression 'reading between the lines', that process not just reserved for poetry and government documents where the actual meaning of the words is less important than the implied meaning.

Another positive of treating the internet as a dictionary is the stupendous number of uses we can find for any one word. Those with the time can be extracting examples of the word in every setting, whether in its plain use, its minor uses, or its subtle 'between the lines' uses.

By comparison, Samuel Johnson only had his memory to draw on, a circle of friends, and a substantial library. Prizes go to the best Johnsonian pronouncement upon being shown the internet.

The slow torture of kids in detention

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

Julian Burnside [taunted](#) his audience at La Trobe University in 2010 with the suggestion that we take a couple of children out of detention and publicly execute them.

'And if killing seems a bit tough, well then what say we just take half a dozen kids from detention and torture them for a while. Publicly, so that everyone will get the message.'

The idea of his 'thought experiment' was to illustrate that we are not bothered by the torture of children in immigration detention because it is out of sight. Burnside's logic was that if the torture was conducted publicly, and not behind razor wire, most Australians would be bothered. The politicians would act immediately to stop child detention.

The torture is also out of sight because it is mental and there are no physical wounds. The evidence will only come to light in the form of mental illness, which the children will suffer in years to come. 'The torture is slow and unseen and the damage much harder to fix.'

Sister Anne Higgins has been involved with families in immigration detention for over ten years. She [says](#) it's well documented that people detained for even three months suffer mental illness. She stresses that children are especially vulnerable.

'I recall in particular a 12-year-old girl who arrived at a detention facility with her parents and younger sister. She was a bright-eyed child relieved to be safe from the danger experienced in her country of origin.'

Higgins was alarmed to learn that after several months, the young girl was suicidal. As in many detention cases, the refugee determination and review processes were drawn out.

'Her parents were powerless; they could not change the situation. The local guards also did not know what to do. As the child's life was now in danger from her situation, the doctor attending the centre placed her in hospital. This bright-eyed, engaging young girl had now become a sad, listless child. After many more months the family were eventually accepted but severe damage had already been done to this young person and to her family.'

According to the International Detention Coalition (IDC), Australia currently holds 528 children in secure and remote facilities. Last week it released its [Captured Childhoods](#) report at the 19th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. The authors spent two years listening first-hand to the stories of children and parents from all over the world who have experienced or been impacted by immigration detention.

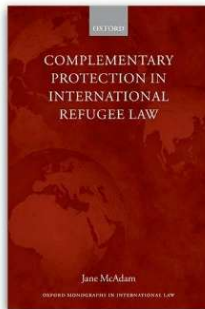
Immigration Minister Chris Bowen responded with a [statement](#) that that the 'Federal Government is continuing to move children and vulnerable families out of detention facilities'. Effectively it underlined how slowly this is taking place, as if there is no urgency.

The Prime Minister and leader of the Opposition said nothing. It was left to the Greens' Sarah Hanson-Young to [urge](#) legislation to outlaw child detention and to declare that it is 'shameful that Australia is on the list of countries that locks children up simply for seeking refuge and safety'.

Australia playing catch-up with latest refugee reforms

POLITICS

Kerry Murphy



On Saturday two major reforms commenced regarding refugee processing. The first is the long awaited Complementary Protection provisions. The second is the abandonment of offshore processing and having all protection visa applications assessed in the same process, regardless of how the person arrived in Australia.

Complementary Protection was introduced back in October 2011, but the start date was delayed. It means that a person who makes a protection claim can now rely on one of three separate claims to be successful; a claim based on the refugee criteria; a claim under the Complementary Protection provisions; or a claim as a member of the immediate family (spouse, dependent children) of a person claiming under one or two above.

Complementary Protection is intended to simplify a process whereby previously people had to wait until their review case was decided before seeking the personal intervention of the Minister. This three stage process was cumbersome and the ministerial process was not transparent and had no review options.

Now, a person who has a real risk that they will suffer certain types of harm contrary to the Convention Against Torture (CAT) or the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) will have their case assessed at the first stage of processing rather than waiting until the end.

People will need to prove they are at risk of torture, of being subjected to the death penalty, or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. There are exclusions for those who are a danger to the community or have committed serious crimes.

These changes bring Australian processing of asylum cases into line with similar provisions in the EU, Canada and New Zealand. For the first time, there is a domestic remedy for someone with such a case. Sadly, there are still gaps such as for stateless persons, but hopefully this will be reformed in the future.

The second major reform is the standardisation of processing for all refugee applicants onshore, regardless of how they arrived. This is also a long overdue reform. Now, all unsuccessful asylum seekers will have their case assessed by the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT), rather than by an independent contractor under the IMR (independent merits review) system.

The IMR system was successfully challenged in the High Court in 2010 in the M61 case. Since then, a significant number of IMR decisions have been overturned in the courts for errors of law such as a failure to provide procedural fairness or to comply with Australian immigration and refugee law.

There will be delays in the review process as the RRT needs to recruit and train more staff to deal with the increased caseload and the implementation of Complementary Protection. The Government was forced into the single processing system because it could not get the flawed Malaysian system amendments passed.

Sadly the Coalition opposes both reforms, and has even recently managed to cause concerns with the Indonesian Government by relying on their simplistic 'stop the boats' chanting rather than seriously trying to address what is a global human rights phenomenon.

Like any major reform, it will be interesting to see how the laws develop over time. In the meantime the changes are welcome for refugees and asylum seekers.