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Learner lobbyists let loose on Canberra

APPLICATION

Neil Ormerod



Sometimes divine providence works with a sense of irony and of synchronicity. So it determined that the latest Catholic Bishops' social justice statement, '[And you will be my witnesses: young people and justice](#)' should be launched as just over 260 Christians, mainly young people, had spent four days in Canberra.

They were being trained then let loose to lobby our politicians, to ask that Australia keep its Millennium Development Goal commitments and not allow them to fall away into that vague space known as 'aspirations'.

These young Christians, mainly from evangelical churches, were part of the fourth 'Voices for Justice' event organised by [Micah Challenge](#). This organisation is endorsed by a number of Australian Christian overseas aid bodies such as World Vision, Tear Australia, Baptist World Aid and Caritas Australia.

Micah Challenge has been mobilising Christian churches to take up the challenge of the Old Testament book of Micah (chapter 6 verse 8), 'to act with justice, to love mercy and walk humbly with your God'. It focuses on the alleviation of world poverty and the promotion of the Millennium Development Goals.

Launched in 2004, Micah Challenge is said to have made conservative evangelical churches more attuned to justice issues. This shift has affected the ballot boxes and political life of Australia.

In a video viewed during the training sessions Labor senator Bob McMullen described his own disappointment when the Hawke-Keating Labor Government cut back funding for overseas aid. At the time he said to himself, 'The churches will speak out'. But to his bitter disappointment the churches said nothing.

Directly crediting Micah Challenge, he said that now the churches are speaking out. Through the advocacy of the churches and their agencies the Rudd Government is raising the level of Australian overseas aid from 0.3 per cent of Gross National Income (GNI) under the Howard government to 0.5 per cent.

Though laudable in itself this increase falls short of the 0.7 per cent of GNI to which the developed world has committed itself for over 40 years. Australia's commitment to the 0.7 per cent goal fell away under the Hawke and Howard Governments and has now been identified as an 'aspirational' goal by the Rudd Government.

In a parody of the 'Kevin 07' campaign of the last election a number of those attending the 'Voices for Justice' event wore T-shirts emblazoned with 'Kevin 0.7'. One of the key 'asks' of those lobbying their politicians focused on the level of aid

and its proper targeting.

The other key 'ask' concerned the impact of climate change on the poor. This is the first time that Micah Challenge has raised the issue of climate change in its lobbying. In doing so it has been criticised for 'jumping on the climate change bandwagon'.

Yet the evidence from its endorsing agencies is that climate change is already affecting the poor nations of the world. Sea level rises are affecting Pacific nations. Seasons are shifting in Bangladesh with longer dry seasons and more fierce monsoonal rains. Malaria is emerging in new areas of Africa as temperatures rise.

Aid agencies are deeply concerned that climate change will undo all that has been achieved in alleviating poverty over the past decade. They are supported by that most radical of organisations, the World Bank. It has called on wealthy nations to pay their fair share of the cost that climate change is having on the poor, arguing that they have caused the problem in the first place.

Are there points of contact between the work of Micah Challenge and the Bishops' Social Justice Statement? Certainly the text of Micah 6:8 was read at the mass that accompanied the launch, and Cardinal Pell referred to it in his homily. The Cardinal also identified the importance of advocacy for the poor and encouraged the school students present to consider life in public office.

The document itself concludes with a brief reference to the Millennium Development Goals under the heading 'Looking beyond our shores' and speaks of 'reducing our carbon footprint'. Sprinkled with references to World Youth Day and quotes from Benedict XVI it is clearly seeking to engage the momentum generated by WYD08. It challenges youth to take up that energy and utilise it in the cause of justice.

Of its nature it is a diffuse document, dealing with a range of issues, and so lacks the focus and hard edge of the 'Voices for Justice' event. But the coincidental timing of these two events stands as a challenge to Catholic youth to display the same level of commitment as the 'Voices for Justice' youth to take up Micah's challenge.

Freemasons show the Church how to handle Dan Brown

VIDEO

Peter Kirkwood

Last week, American author [Dan Brown](#) published *The Lost Symbol*, the third in a series of thrillers featuring Harvard professor of religious symbology, Robert Langdon. The other two are *Angels and Demons* and *The Da Vinci Code*. Riding on the back of the huge success of *The Da Vinci Code*, which sold 81 million copies worldwide, including 1.7 million in Australia, no doubt *The Lost Symbol* will also be a bestseller.

To promote the book, the reclusive Brown has done one extended television interview, conducted by Matt Lauer for the *Today Show* on the US NBC network. (Continues below)

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The nine and a half minute interview is neither probing nor critical. Rather it's a comfortable chat set in a rather strange room in Brown's home which he calls his 'fortress of gratitude'. It's a trophy room dedicated to his books, which contains all their foreign editions (they've been translated into over 50 languages) and props from the movie versions, including the cryptex from *The Da Vinci Code* and the tube of anti-matter from *Angels and Demons*.

It's interesting, and useful, to see in the interview something of the man, his appearance and demeanour, the way he talks and expresses himself. Along with J. K. Rowling and Stephenie Meyer, in the realm of books and movies, he is a major influence on popular culture and the contemporary imagination. What's notable is his ordinariness; he seems a nice enough chap, articulate, intelligent, perhaps a bit drab, even a touch nerdy.

The Lost Symbol is set in Washington DC, and in it Brown turns his attention to Freemasonry. In a review in *The Los Angeles Times*, Nick Owchar says the narrative 'solves puzzles, analyses paintings and reveals forgotten histories — all so that Brown's tireless hero, Robert Langdon, can find a legendary Masonic treasure despite special ops squads that are dogging him and a bizarre killer who has kidnapped his dear friend and mentor'.

So, more of the same, but this time the intrigue is woven around the Masons rather than the Catholic Church.

The popular triumvirate of Brown, Rowling and Meyer all feature strong religious and spiritual themes in their books. As Neer Korn, a commentator on popular culture, said last week in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 'They might be writing about angels, demons, vampires and wizards, but in Australia now, especially among the young, there is a huge interest in the mystical and the spiritual, though

not in its customary forms.'

Brown's presentation of 'customary' religion in the first two Robert Langdon books ruffled ecclesiastical feathers. The plots of both hinge on connivance and corruption in the upper echelons of the Catholic Church. *The Da Vinci Code* challenges the traditional Christian story. It was widely condemned as being anti-Catholic, even prompting Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Secretary of State in the Vatican, to denounce it as 'a sack full of lies'.

But the Masons seem to be taking a different tack in responding to their starring role in this latest book. In the US and Australia they are using it as an opportunity to promote their organisation and activities. For instance, last week the media were taken for a tour of the United Grand Lodge of NSW, and Grandmaster Gregory H. Levenston spoke openly with journalists about their arcane and, till recently, secret practices.

This seems a more effective response than heavy-handed criticism and defensive condemnation. After all, Brown is only writing thrillers. He shouldn't be taken too seriously. But he is tapping into a spiritual hunger in readers, and perhaps less hostile engagement by his Catholic critics, coupled with open exposition of their point of view, might direct this hunger towards more traditional religious expression.

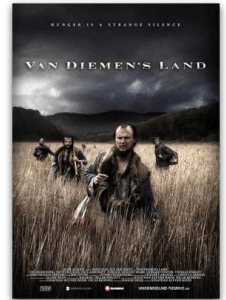
Cannibal convict's tour of hell

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

According to film legend, there came a point during the shooting of *Apocalypse Now* at which director Francis Ford Coppola discarded the script in favour of a copy of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The parallels between book and film are of course deliberate and profound.

One gets the impression that something similar occurred during the creative gestation of *Van Diemen's Land*. This period drama about colonial Tasmanian folk antihero Alexander Pearce shares a similarly symbiotic relationship with Dante's *Inferno*.



'We access the story through Pearce's confessions,' says director Jonathan auf der Heide. 'It's as if he is drawing us into his own personal hell and giving us a guided tour. You follow him down through the spirals of hell until you meet Satan himself.'

The film's 'cheeky' allusions to the *Inferno* have a historical basis. The mouth of Macquarie Harbour was nicknamed 'Hell's Gates' by the Sarah Island convicts, a wry acknowledgement of the harshness of life on this penal colony.

But if life in the colony was hard, it was nothing compared to the unforgiving wilderness beyond. History records the cannibalistic measures Pearce and his fellow escapees adopted in order to survive after fleeing the colony. In auf der Heide's film, desperation takes the form of spiritual and moral corruption as a result of the cruel landscape.

'The further these guys go on the journey, the more they are taken over by the harshness of this place', he says. 'The landscape in the film represents the darkness of man, the brutality, and how they need to become like it if they are to be the last man standing.'

The old adage applies here, that the location is an important character (in this case, the title character) in the film. Like others before him (notably Peter Weir in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*) auf der Heide milks Australia's natural wilderness landscapes for all their ominous potency.

'First is the image of going down the Gordon River with these towering walls of trees, and how insignificant a man is compared to that. We used lots of wide shots to make the characters seem insignificant compared with the landscape. If you're going to take part in the battle between man and nature, you're going to lose.

'I'd done a tour down the Gordon River, and I saw what these guys were up against,' he adds. 'They came from a cultivated homeland of England, Ireland and Scotland, to this untamed, untouched land that time forgot, this ancient rainforest.'

It's an important aspect of colonial Australia, this relationship to the land.'

Oscar Redding, the film's co-scriptwriter and also the actor who plays Pearce in the film, says Pearce's simple humanity, and hence his vulnerability to the harshness of his circumstances, was the most important aspect of the character. 'The thing that seemed to make the story most interesting was for Pearce to be a pretty ordinary sort of guy who adapts and changes due to the circumstances that he's thrown into', says Redding.

'I don't think there are vast gaps between who these guys may have been and what their desires were, compared to mine. You get a sense that Pearce is not a psychopath. If he was, he'd probably be quite happy to continue. But there's an awareness in Pearce of his own humanity which has fallen almost completely out of his system.'

Such sympathy for the characters' unsympathetic actions was key. Auf der Heide does not see humankind as being innocent until corrupted by external forces; rather, the ease with which the characters are corrupted is due to what he sees as a human predisposition to violence, both for self-preservation and for its own sake.

'Is it human instinct to kill in order to survive?' he writes in his director's statement. 'I believe it's the very reason we're here today and consequently, underneath our veil of 'civilisation' is a repressed need for violence.'

'When I wrote that, I'd recently been attacked', says auf der Heide, revealing the personal basis of this decidedly bleak outlook. 'I was walking home with my friends, and eight teenagers took fence posts and, for the fun of it, smashed my face in. I had 12 fractures to my face, I was unconscious, I was hospitalised. It was terrifying.

'I couldn't get over it', he recalls. 'I thought, what is it in us as a species that does this? Is it because we used to have to kill to survive, but nowadays there's no need for that, and so there is this repressed violence within young males that they let go in brawls in pubs, or ... ?

'I wanted to open that to discussion. What happened to these men in 1822 is horrific, but are we any different today? If put under these extreme circumstances, wouldn't we kill in order to survive?'

These are existential but not entirely hopeless musings from the young director. 'I read an article recently in which [filmmaker] Steven Soderbergh said he felt art doesn't change anything any more: If Shakespeare could write these great tragedies that said "look at the way he acted and look what happened", why haven't we learned from that? But I do feel it's important to look at these stories, examine them, see what they meant.'

Which brings us back to the symbiosis between *Van Diemen's Land* and the *Inferno*. 'The *Inferno* was a sermon to mankind, saying we've strayed off the path

to God,' says auf der Heide. 'I wanted to reiterate that. Back then, today, it doesn't matter. We're all just logs to the fire. We keep making the same mistakes.'

Still, 'I haven't got a pessimistic view of humanity', auf der Heide insists. 'There's always got to be hope. You've got to believe there is.'

Reasons for violence

APPLICATION

Andrew Hamilton



Violence is much in the news. Stabbings, bashings and glassings are recorded and deplored. And now the violent video game *Left 4 Dead 2* has been [banned](#). Premiers, columnists and correspondents all deplore violence and propose remedies. In such a heated atmosphere, it may be worthwhile to reflect more broadly on violence and on the strategies which societies, including our own, develop in order to deal with it.

Violence goes with [being human](#). It may be avoidable, but it is not likely to be avoided. So in the Bible murder is one of the first human actions described.

The raw materials of violence are simple, although the way in which they come together are complex. Frustrated desire, usually detonated by anger, expresses itself in violence. A child wants food, and on being refused by parent or thwarted by her brother who competes for it, lashes out in anger. States want another nation's territory, and when frustrated go coldly to war.

Here the desires are simple and the frustration direct. But children may be raised in brutal families, their desire for love and respect continually frustrated. Their accumulated anger may lead them to displaced violence against strangers.

Because unrestricted anger and violence will destroy a society, all cultures develop and communicate ways of addressing desires and of responding to anger and frustration. They usually commend to their young a response to life in which the natural inclination to violence is understood and inhibited.

Most cultures propose a view of human life in which desires for immediate things like pleasure and possessions are weighed against higher desires, whether for conversation, beauty, harmony, love, knowledge or for God. A bored child who demands to go home from an extended family dinner will learn that relationships with family outweigh his desire. So we learn what really matters, and are able to bear frustration of our less deep desires.

Many cultures encourage us to place a high value on other human beings. They are not simply obstacles to our desires, but people like ourselves. They deserve respect. We learn this as children by the way in which we are required to address other people, to greet them, negotiate our conflicting desires and handle our angers. Other people are not primarily competitors but people who make a claim on us. Our relationships shape who we are.

Cultures also develop ways of reflecting on anger and violence. Violence is ritualised in play, in religious symbols and in art. Children can explore violence in

games of make believe and in stories. Competitive games, too, provide safe structures for competing and expressing anger and frustration.

Finally, societies develop regulations that penalise violence and prevent people from dismantling the inhibitions against violent self-expression. So in times of interracial tension, the gathering of mobs will be controlled. Extremely violent videos and films are restricted.

These reflections suggest that in order to deal with violence we should first ask how it is encouraged and discouraged in our culture. The broad answer is encouraging. There is general agreement that the individual's body is inviolable.

But some aspects of our culture, and particularly the priority given to commercial gain, weaken the inhibitions against violence. It puts a high priority on individual choice and privileges the desire for consumer goods.

The emphasis on what can be bought leaves little space for higher goods. It also marginalises those deprived of stable upbringing and education. They can rarely attain these goods. The emphasis on competition further alienates those without the resources to compete.

The result is a high level of frustration and a thinning of the hedges that protect us against violence.

The commercialisation of play and popular art also hinders their use as a catalyst for exploring violence and anger. Indeed they often celebrate violence. Elite sport emphasises competition, massive financial rewards and the view that losing is shameful. In junior sport frustration will naturally express itself in violence.

In many television shows and films the appropriate response to violence is seen as further violence. Tabloids and shock jocks focus on violence, demanding the punishment and humiliation of wrongdoers. All this is commercially profitable. But it diminishes the sense that perpetrators and victims of violence share a common humanity and make it more likely that the violence they condemn will be perpetuated.

The approach to alcohol in society expresses the same priority given to individual choice and commercial values. Alcohol clearly reduces inhibitions to violence, and so makes it more likely. But the right of the individual to drink as they please and the economic profit to be made from selling alcohol make effective regulation impossible.

So we return to the remedy of more intensive policing. It makes as little sense as it would to distribute matches to children on a north wind day and then call for more firefighters to extinguish the blazes.

Violence does raise large questions about what we value in society and whether those values promote a non-violent society. In Australia there is a large

conversation to be had.

Guatemala the grave

POLITICS

Colm McNaughton

When a famine is looming, the health care system is collapsing, the economy is on the edge of implosion, the justice system does not work, and the levels of corruption and social violence are astounding, it would be wrong to speak of a new crisis. This is a permanent state of crisis. So it is with the small Central American state of Guatemala, the original banana republic.



The history of Guatemala, and especially of its indigenous Mayan communities, from the time of the invasion by the Spanish conquistadores to the present day, is one of social exclusion, slavery, poverty and numerous attempts at genocide. Poor Ladinos do not fare much better. In Guatemala, the fusion and continuing reproduction of hierarchies of class and race are everywhere apparent.

The invasion and colonisation by the Spanish from the 16th to early 19th centuries laid the foundations for the ongoing crisis that is Guatemala. The Spanish saw Guatemala as a large quarry from which they extracted riches and shipped them back to Europe. When Independence came in 1821, the emerging ruling elites continued the colonial traditions of theft, racial hatred and military rule.

Although there have been moves in Guatemalan history — especially in the mid-20th century — to break from these traditions, they were soundly squashed by the emerging regional power in the area, the United States. The United Fruit Company, which in the 1950s and '60s owned around 70 per cent of arable land in Guatemala, still wields immense influence under a new name. If US corporations do not like what is happening in Guatemala, it will be stopped. They are willing to arm, support and train for genocide in order to defend their interests.

I write this article in a hotel in Nebaj, Quiche province, in the western highlands of Guatemala. It is part of the Ixil triangle, which is made up of the towns of Nebaj, Chojul and Cotzal. In the early 1980s there were some 200 massacres in this small mountainous area; 16,000 Mayans died; the population dropped by 23 per cent.

The architects of the policy were Fernando Romeo Lucas Garcia and Efraim Rios Montt. They and their officers were all trained at the School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia, where they learned the counter-insurgency techniques they put into practice.

A military campaign called *Frijoles y Fusiles* (Beans and Guns), gave villagers food. In return it forced all males between the ages of 14 and 65 into Civil Defense Patrols. These patrols were under the direct control of the military and were used

to engage with the guerillas, who were strong and drew recruits from the area. The core of the strategy was to exterminate people who might support the guerillas. This they did.

Recently, I visited an exhumation of bodies at Finca Covabonga, which is part of the Ixil triangle. On 9 December 1982 the army turned up and the locals were told to assemble. In previous weeks there had been heavy fighting between the guerillas and the army, and many massacres had occurred in the surrounding area.

The assembled people were divided by gender; the men were sent to the church and the women to the school, which were then set alight. A few men were able to break out, some were shot dead and a few others were able to escape to the mountains. Seventy-five people were killed that day.

The people from the Centre for Forensic Analysis and Scientific Application (CAFTA) who carried out the exhumation were armed with spades, scrapers, trowels and cameras. They are archeologists of memory, piecing together the evidence of one of the most heinous crimes committed in last century.

In talking with them I asked if the evidence they gather ever leads to convictions. They replied that it did not. They added that not only is there impunity, Rios Montt, who was ousted in a coup in 1983, is still a senator, runs a major party and in 2003 tried to become president. Although he lost, he is still a major player in Guatemala.

The civil war that lasted for 36 years is over, but a new war began immediately. This is a narco war, with many of the same players as the previous war. It is creating immense wealth for a few, and sending out a tsunami of violence on the people of Guatemala. In Guatemala, things change so that they can stay exactly the same.

How not to make a toast

NON-FICTION

Brian Doyle



The most memorable toast I have heard was my about-to-be-mother-in-law's toast the night before I married her final daughter, a daughter who had been engaged once before with great fanfare to another guy whom she almost married but was saved from marrying by a roaring argument in France just before the wedding.

My about-to-be-mother-in-law stood up, on the night before her daughter married me, held her glass aloft and sighed, 'Let's just hope this one comes off', which sent my many brothers into hysterics and the about-to-be-bride wailing from the room.

That toast stays with me, as you can imagine. But I have heard stunning and stuttered toasts, muddled and moving toasts, hilarious and haunting toasts.

Another entertaining one was in a dark ancient wooden smoky book-dense club in Boston, many years ago, when I was there as a member of an obscure society devoted to the adventures of Sherlock Holmes, in which a snake plays a crucial part in a crucial story, and a famous Boston newspaperman stood to salute the snake: Here's to the snake, who didn't have a pit to hiss in.

This still makes me laugh, as does that scholarly society's firm tradition, to this day, of a whole series of toasts before dinner (to the snake! to the detective! to his best friend! to his worst enemy! to the woman he loved! to Queen Victoria!), which tends to leave the company gibbering before the giblets arrive.

Then there is the toast offered at my wedding (which did take place, I have witnesses), spoken by my friend Pete, who was shivering shy as he stood to deliver, but then boomed the room with Michaleen Flynn's wedding toast from the film *The Quiet Man*: 'May their days be long and full of happiness; may their children be many and full of health; and may they live in peace and freedom,, which elicited a roar I have not forgotten.

My mum burst into tears, but I think that was because she detests *The Quiet Man*, in which Maureen O'Hara is threatened with a stick.

This Irish vein reminds me of my grandfather, who was from County Clare and who grew up speaking only Gaelic, and whose toast at the table was always *go mbeire muid beo ar an am seo arÁ-s*, which translates roughly as let's hope for one more year, and of my other grandfather, who was from County Wicklow, and whose toast was always *pogue mahoÁ-n*, which means something cheerfully rude.

My sweet sister, when she was young, used to say 'here's to cigarettes!', but now that she is a nun in a monastery she says 'here's to hope!' when she lifts a

glass twice a year with her many brothers, who for a long time happily sent cartons of cigarettes to the monastery as a joke until the overwhelmed abbess there begged us to stop, so now we send socks, dozens a year, enough to outfit two religions.

(My sister told me that for a while she fed the cigarettes to the peacocks that had also been sent to the monastery as a gift, because she detested the peacocks, vulgar and arrogant birds, as she said, but I think she is teasing me, as she has done since we were children.)

Speaking of tiny beings, some of the best toasts I ever heard were from children, who tend to seize the nervous tension of the celebratory moment with both hands and shake it as you would a badger, so I have heard 'here's to making out!' and 'here's to dwarf stars!' and 'here's to all of mum's husbands past and present!', that last one from a girl of 11, which caused three people at my table to choke on their champagne, one woman shooting it through her nose, which you hardly ever see.

My own children have offered such memorable and gnomic remarks as 'here's to ladders and horses!', which was such a cool toast that all three children in my house and both parents still mull it over regularly like a zen koan.

But the coolest toast I ever heard, I think, came from a friend of mine who joins us for dinner every autumn, lamb stew and spinach salad and pinot noir, and some years ago he lifted his glass and invented a toast I never forgot and sometimes turn to as a compass point, a lodestar, when matters grow murky.

'To mercy and laughter,' he said, 'to the web and weave of us, to patience and kindness, to love and water!'

In 50 years I have not heard a more powerful or perfect toast than that one, and I leave it hanging in the air for all of us. 'To love and water!'

Death by tiger

POETRY

L. K. Holt

Grandmoth (a translation)

The moth has hung itself among the portraits,
A Magrittean body-as-face.

With the frontal eyes of a predator it waits;
a cat outside a birdcage.

When I opened the jewel-box it fled in fear —
though it was the fear of an outriding scout,
his nation's might but a day's march behind;
his paltry mouthful of felt — good as glory.

I take out her necklace, a museum piece
for looking never wearing. For authenticity,
false memories fade like real ones.
I put it back and close the box, worn out
by looking up through week-old eyes
at my grandmother looking down.

Progress report

We are weak by the minute, strong by the year;
there's no precise way to judge our worthiness
as subjects — objects — subjects! — in love; mere
bad weather can reduce us, as our impermanence
can rouse us to endure. We tried co-hibernation,
consuming only time; emerging topple-boned,
our big smash-mouth love was like a bear's swipe:
surprisingly precise. How did we refrain from
eating each other, when loosed from the black's die,
the one self-scent? . . . Next model: co-moderation.
We'll ration the bread we are to each other,

to outlast every war pent up in human nature. . . .

No matter how we persist,
love's a lever. We lower when we want to lift.

The tiger, ending with a quote from FoxNews

*Ye shall be slain all the sort of you; yea, as a tottering wall shall
ye be, and like a broken hedge. Psalm 62*

Yearly you shrunk, paced; after inexplicable wait
you leapt the 8 ft moat and 12 ft wall
on wings presumed by the will to flight,
landing self-cleaned and bristling light
into a strange world of shrubbery for fencing:
man's maladaptive fear of seeing.
At last you saw around the corner
to the kiosk, to the music that had terrorised:
nothing, now in view. The teenage boy,
drunk, taunting, now hanging from
your latch of jaw, was wilder than you,
if wildness be the undeliberated life.

*whether the escape was the result of a deliberate act —
police said they've not ruled anything out*

Portrait of a family man with a portrait of his father

With a coinly profile, burnished as close to self-love
as punctilio permits, the man sits. In one hand
a manichaeian cane at rest, in the other a picture
shown to his family: his mother and son seated,
his wife standing clasping the boy's head against her
crotch, steely aiming him at his grandfather's portrait.
His son stares down at his lap in small, eternal defiance;
his wife looks past the framed fiat of the in-law,
meeting her husband's eye with rancour's residuum,

always a day stale. (Leftovers of the carnal Know;
the all-wise illiteracy of smell.) Only his mother
observes her husband biddably; his pure
white chops and hair conspiring to the air of a rabbit,
soft and unwitting in the red right hand of son.

A version of *In praise of distance*

In the waters of your eyes
are the fishermen's nets full of mad-sea.
In the river-roots of your eyes
the sea's undertaking.
As a heart that moved among whole men,
I strip off my clothes, the patina of an oath:
blackier in black, I'm barer now. Apostate, only true.
Whenever I am, I am you!
In the cataracts of your eyes
I wade and dream of paw-stunned salmon.
The net catches net:
always our embraces pre-halved.
In the Quell of your eyes
a man strangles the rope as he hangs.

Indigenous people power challenges mining might

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Moira Rayner

A mining registrar in Western Australia has a hard decision to make. The Martu Idja Banjima Native Title claimants — the Martidja Manyjima people of the Pilbara — want him to hear their challenge to BHP Billiton's claim for more mining leases on 200 square kilometres of their traditional land. BHP Billiton doesn't.



The Martidja Manyjima people have decided the damage to their responsibilities to the land of water degradation and destruction of sacred sites by the owners of the nearby massive Hope Downs mine is just too great. They don't want money, they want to limit the endless expansion of mining on their country.

The power differential couldn't be greater. Potentially, the country may have ore worth \$25 billion in exports next year alone, which both State and Federal governments desire, as do the owners and shareholders of the four big mines already in the area, which have ambitious expansion plans.

The Martidja Manyjima people are just 200 extended families. They want to tell the registrar that the cumulative impact of mining on their country's water resources (already pumping billions of gallons from the aquifer to expose the ore), as well as irreversible damage to their culture, has been and will be catastrophic.

They have approached the registrar, who recommends to the minister whether more leases should be granted, to present the evidence of enormous human rights violations, in the public interest. The mining companies have opposed even this, claiming that the Martidja Manyjima people have enough protections under WA's Environmental and Aboriginal Heritage protection laws.

Here's where it gets interesting.

There is a precedent for their request: a WA Supreme Court ruling that a mining registrar could and should consider the publicly-funded Environmental Defender's Office arguments because environmental issues are a public interest issue when deciding on mining in Perth's lovely hill suburbs. Not a lot of Aboriginal householders live there.

The solicitors for the Martidja Manyjima people want their client to have similar rights. They say neither an environmental impact assessment nor a comprehensive heritage survey has been carried out, even though 35,000-year-old artefacts have been found on the site. They say the cumulative effect of mining on their human rights has not been and should be properly considered.

The solicitors invited the Australian Human Rights Commission to intervene. In

her letter of reply, AHRC President Hon Catherine Branson QC said it would not 'at this point', but clearly set out its view of the public interest in protecting the human rights of Indigenous people in mining determinations.

The AHRC takes the view that a group's human rights can be violated by public or private entities, and though particular activities might not in themselves violate Section 27, the cumulative effect of minerals exploration may. It is, in the AHRC's view, vital to ensure that the special relationship of these people is protected and there is ample international jurisprudence and authority to establish this as a principle of Australian decision-making.

Non-compliance with Australia's human rights obligations is, Branson states, as contrary to the public interest as is acting in breach of a Commonwealth law.

BHP Billiton has promised to 'uphold fundamental rights and respect cultures, customs and values' under the Enduring Value — the Australian Minerals Industry Framework for Sustainable Development to which it is a signatory. The Minerals Council of Australia's Framework for sustainable Development also commits the industry to 'respect the culture and traditions of Indigenous peoples and their relationship with lands and waters'.

The Australian Government has supported the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which details these obligations, noting that ours is one of the oldest continuing cultures in the world. Not for long, if the Pilbara destroys this country.

The Indigenous claimants say that granting more minerals leases will affect a significant portion of their land including cultural sites, and interfere with their ability to perform culturally significant activities. If true these consequences enliven internationally recognised rights under Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Articles 27 and 1) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which Australia has ratified.

According to the AHRC, Article 27 of the ICCPR requires that such rights be protected against not only acts of government but also the acts of other persons within the state party to these covenants.

The AHRC also observed that WA's Aboriginal Heritage Act does not protect rights adequately. It permits the destruction of registered Aboriginal sites with the minister's consent (Section 18) without limiting or setting a minimum level of protection to a particular group's enjoyment of their culture and interests.

The Commonwealth Native Title Act has been repeatedly criticised as discriminatory and providing inadequate protection of Indigenous land rights. The right to Indigenous self-determination is part not only of Australia's binding obligation to eliminate all forms of race discrimination, but also the new UN Declaration on the Rights of

Indigenous Peoples which explicitly covers indigenous people's rights to

maintain and strengthen their distinctive cultural ties and obligations to the land.

The Indigenous claimants say that the land is already 'dying' because of existing mining activities.

The Mining Registrar is being asked to find that it is relevant to his decision to take these public interest considerations into account. And if he considers that granting the leases is likely to result in breach of the human rights of the Indigenous claimants, he should recommend against it.

Whatever the Registrar's decision — and the pressures on him will make it a hard one — appeals will follow.

The Common Law is an evolutionary instrument adapting to changing social and economic circumstances. Law is created every time a tribunal makes a decision applying established rules to new facts. Courts' decisions set 'precedents' that must be followed in similar circumstances by subordinate tribunals. Human rights have become part of those circumstances because we are all affected by world events, governments ratify international human rights instruments, and formally accept that respect for them is a necessary element of communal life.

These rights may be inconvenient and can be statutorily created, modified or removed, as the Howard Government did in exempting the NT Intervention from the Racial Discrimination Act 1975, which implemented our obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Such inconvenience has encouraged Commonwealth and State attorneys general, with the notable exception of Victoria's Rob Hulls, to decline to introduce even the most anodyne human rights protections in domestic laws. But it is in the nation's interests to give voice to unpopular rights and powerless people.

Justice and the public interest would both seem to require that all relevant evidence be heard. Where else, but in our courts? Journalists don't hang out in Pilbara towns to write stories about finding 35,000-year-old artefacts or dried-up water-holes. Papers don't put them on the front page.

What this mining registrar does or doesn't do will affect every one of us. May they have their day in court. May we be sufficiently interested to read about it. May we care about the outcome. It's our country, too.

Layman's guide to the climate debate

ENVIRONMENT

Bronwyn Lay



At a party you find yourself squeezed between two old friends, both scientists. Uncharacteristically they start to bait each other. Facts explode and temperatures rise. One is a climate change denier, the other a believer and they argue over the biochemical cycle, MMTCO₂Eq, thermohaline circulation, mixing ratios, flux adjustments and halocarbons. Hot numbers and mathematical equations fly, but to you its gobbledegook on speed.

Both of them look down. 'So what do you believe?'

You may have read some science delivered by the celebrity climate change posse like Flannery and Monbiot, which left you thinking that the best thing you could do for the planet was swallow cyanide and slip off to die under a tree. You may have read the sceptics and felt relief that the status quo would continue and your children had a chance at the good life. You looked at the [Garnaut report](#), saw [Al Gore's movie](#), and have been unable to grow anything colourful in your garden for three years.

You might be suspicious of how the Carbon Emissions Scheme is appearing in convoluted layers over an already questionable economic system. You might wonder at how living simply now seems rather complicated. You may have felt the weather change: down at your place, up at your folks' by the Murray, and you have lived through a few heatwaves.

You have engaged as much as you can and, especially if you're sitting between scientists, honesty demands you admit that white noise appears every time graphs and calculations are shoved in your face. You also might believe that science is another human endeavour, as fallible as we are.

You note that your friends have not asked about facts. They have couched their question in terms of faith.

At the base of the climate change debate lies a rousing giant. A massive question demanding an examination of not only the particles that comprise daily life but also what we believe, how we relate and find meaning in the place we find ourselves, and to explore this issue doesn't require a science degree. The scientific debate has encouraged many to question and rediscover their relationship with the dirt upon which, despite our best efforts to run away to places like the moon, we all stand.

Perhaps we are getting closer to collectively exploring what Judith Wright called a 'poetics of place' where through story telling, for many of us a more accessible medium than scientific facts, our vision expands and we see that the environment

is not mere matter given to us to play with as we wish.

The French philosopher, Michel Serres, talks about the motor of human history being driven by wars. We have fought great muddy battles all over the earth's surface, and when one is vanquished, both sides retreat to lick their wounds, turning their back on the equally wounded battleground, muddied and embedded with deadly shrapnel. Serres calls for a Natural Contract, a new way for those under the jurisdiction of western legal systems, to establish something similar, though not as advanced, to an indigenous understanding of place.

He calls for us to recognise that the place on which we fight our wars has as much right to exist and be respected as we have towards one another. He advocates a new contract containing our rights and responsibilities to the earth and most importantly, the inalienable rights of the earth. The Natural Contract may become like the Social Contract: a strange idea we now take for granted.

When the rights of man expanded, slavery came to be viewed in a new light — as a moral abomination. Perhaps our progeny will view us as we regard those who remained silent about slavery. Perhaps they will be abhorred at the immorality of slaying rainforests, lining the planet with carbon and bleaching coral.

When we see slave owners in history books we shake our heads at their moral naivety, but how would we feel if we knew our descendants might do the very same thing?

From a Natural Contract there is slim hope that the motor of human history will cease to war over the earth as if it didn't exist and enshrine the truth that we all stand on the same dirt and, like us, the dirt is not necessarily indestructible, permanent and omniscient — neither noble savage nor plaything for our pleasure.

I confessed to my friends that I have hedged my bets to the wagon of those who believe in global warming, not only because their scientific explanations have convinced me, but also because if there is any possibility that earth suffers due to my behaviour, I have a responsibility to pull my head in and look at how I live with it.

There is no opting out of the scientific debate. It has to be followed and understood by the layman because power seems to be setting up shop at its heart, but there are many other reasons to live respectfully with our environment, and to remain fixated with one discipline will lead us up a narrow path. The possibility of 'all being rooned' cannot be the sole motivation to live ethically on the earth. Who wants their descendants to hang their heads in shame? Not me.

Telstra's price gouging is a sin

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

If you know somebody who has moved from the UK to Australia in recent years, ask them what they are paying for their phone, internet and pay TV. They will probably tell you that they are now paying 50 per cent more than they were back in the UK. The reason is not simply the UK's larger market and geographical concentration. It's the forced separation of the retail and wholesale activities of the former British Telecom, which took place some time ago.



Following Australian Communications Minister Stephen Conroy's announcement of government moves to engineer the structural separation of Telstra, the Australian consumer has reasonable grounds for hope that telecommunications pricing will be fairer.

On the face of it, this is obviously good news for the consumer and bad news for Telstra and its shareholders. Opposition communications spokesperson Nick Minchin immediately [leapt](#) to the defence of Telstra's so-called 'mum and dad shareholders', insisting that they will have a case for seeking compensation for the '\$2 billion wiped off the value of mum and dad shares in Telstra'.

This is understandable, as wealth is being transferred from one sector of the population to another as the result of a government change of policy. However questions need to be asked whether the widely-recognised price-gouging practices of Telstra make this wealth ill-gotten, and if the practices might be legally but not morally defensible.

There are many aspects of these questions we could take up. One is the use of the emotive term 'mum and dad shareholders'. Former Telstra chief Sol Trujillo would use it to justify predatory-pricing practices that sought to drive his Singapore-owned Optus rival out of business. He [said](#) :

We have 1.6 million mums and dads that own shares in Telstra and they do care about their investment and they want to be treated fairly and they don't want to see a government official, or regulator or whoever saying 'Let's take Telstra's value that they create and send it to Singapore'.

Aside from the fact that the significant transfer of Telstra's 'value' will be from 'mum and dad shareholders' to mum and dad 'customers' (rather than 'Singapore'), price-gouging has to be seen to be immoral. Trujillo and Minchin are using the the mums and dads moniker to sanitise the practice.

This must be seen as a sin akin to usury, which is now understood to refer to

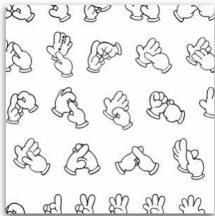
excessive interest. The online Catholic Encyclopaedia [says](#) 'lending money at interest gives us the opportunity to exploit the passions or necessities of other men by compelling them to submit to ruinous conditions'.

There is nothing wrong with mums and dads buying shares as an exercise in responsible stewardship of family assets. But they need to be ready to face consequences if profiting from their investments involves exploiting other Australians.

The rise of Deaf Pride

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Frank O'Shea



Recently, the ABC aired an interview with the CEO of a successful company promoting the cochlear implant, the pride of Australian technical and business achievement which, implanted in a deaf person, can enable that person to hear perfectly.

Perhaps he did not use the word 'perfect', but that was certainly the sense of the interview. The company's website is more circumspect, promising merely that the device is 'designed to provide useful hearing sensations'.

That interview grated on me. There was in it an implied hubris, veiled as sincerity, that technology could make deaf people 'normal'. It wasn't the sappy interviewer or the cheerful, can-do attitude of the man being interviewed — he has shareholders to keep happy, after all — so much as the unwarranted interference in the personal lives of people who may not want his expensive gadgetry.

Those of us who have normal hearing feel good if we think technology can provide a way of helping deaf people to hear, to be the same as us. In contrast, according to Deaf Australia, the national peak organisation for the Deaf* in this country, 'Deaf people generally have little interest in 'cures' for deafness. They value their identity as Deaf people and see no value in becoming a different person.'

Deaf Australia's policy on implants, while acknowledging that the leading product in the area is an Australian invention, gives the impression that as a group, they are not easy about its use, particularly with children.

One sentence in their [document](#) is particularly striking. They urge implant specialists to 'ensure that parents considering an implant understand that their child will always be a deaf child even with an implant'.

The group is also uneasy about the cost of implant programs and implies that the expense of inserting and tuning the device and training the recipient to interpret the sounds being heard — a process that may go on for years — takes money from mainstream services for the Deaf.

There is in this country and in others a thriving Deaf pride movement. It may lack the flamboyance of gay pride or the testiness of ethnic pride, but Deaf people do not see themselves or want to be seen as having a disability. Some have learned to lip read and speak, but all of them have an alternative language, Auslan in Australia, with which they communicate.

It is useful to distinguish between language and speech. For the Deaf, speech is replaced by sign, but those signs form their language; the words they read on a

page of written English constitute their second language. Characteristic to the Deaf community is the identification of Auslan as their primary language, though they will also read and write English in their daily lives.

Not many people realise that Auslan is a language, not just a set of mimes or esoteric hand gestures. It has its own grammar and syntax, its own vocabulary, its way of forming sentences, of expressing emotion, its own humour. It is not the same as fingerspelling which is used within Auslan for unusual words that do not have a sign or for proper nouns like names of countries or people.

Research has shown that children of signing parents, whether those children are hearing or deaf, go through the same stages of language acquisition as children who learn spoken language from speaking parents. They make 'nonsense signs' at about the same time that speaking children are 'babbling'; first words and then combinations of words are formed at about the same age. There is even a signing stage corresponding with the lisps or syllabic mixups that we find endearing in children — fwend, hopsital, aksed.

Sign language is not universal but evolves naturally in the same way that spoken languages do. An interesting point here is the connection between Auslan and British and Irish sign languages, particularly evident in religious and specifically Catholic signs, a residue of the role of nuns in earlier work with the Deaf in this country.

The Deaf will tell you that just because billions of Chinese do not know what you are saying when you speak, we do not regard them as having a disability. The Chinese have their own language, you have yours, we have Auslan, they will tell you.

I wonder how the Chinese might react if someone invented an implant that would automatically translate English into Mandarin.

**When used as a word of identity for the cultural and linguistic minority group who have hearing impairment, the convention is to capitalise Deaf. Since not all people with hearing difficulty see themselves as part of the Deaf community, the capitalisation is not used for all deaf people.*

Gloves off for climate crunch

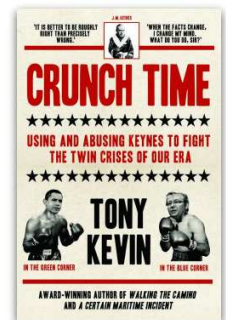
BOOKS

John Wicks

Tony Kevin: *Crunch Time: Using and Abusing Keynes to Fight the Twin Crises of our Era*. Scribe, 2009. ISBN: 9781921372933. [Online](#)

The economic recession and growing concerns at the disastrous consequences of climate change are global. *Crunch Time* examines the issues in an Australian context with a Keynesian economic backdrop.

This informative text focuses in some detail on climate change, science and analysis from the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#), numerous individual scientific reports, international conferences and, particularly, the [Garnaut Review](#).



It emphasises that the Rudd Government, contrary to its earlier indications, has failed to support this important Review. This, it suggests, is the result of powerful industry lobbying and the Government's subservience to political considerations rather than Australia's long-term interest.

The author, former public servant of 30 years Tony Kevin, provides an outline of Keynes' economic values and thinking, especially the emergence of macro-economics and government intervention, in contrast to the individualism and 'free market resolves all' of neo-classicists.

Of course, today's economic conditions are radically different to those that confronted Keynes in 1936. Think of the massive growth in bank and non-bank finance and credit, profligate consumption and split-second trillion-dollar investments, many of them questionable, taken daily around the world.

However Kevin does highlight Keynes' recognition of 'productive' and 'unproductive' investment and his likely being appalled at today's excessive and prolific consumption.

The book contains an excellent outline of the general operation, effectiveness, fallacies and desirable long-term objectives of the energy sector in Australia. It debunks the 'clean coal' concept as now spruiked by the Government and its proposed huge expenditures to achieve it.

In fact the clean coal concept was not originally developed with CO2 in mind. It was developed to sell Australians sulphur reduction, washed, low particulate coal using 'bag' and related technology. The issue of CO2 emissions was simply added to the clean coal concept and took it over for industry and political convenience when CO2 emissions started to become an issue, without any serious scientific or economic analysis and justification.

Moreover, in the 20 or so years that clean coal has become focused on CO₂ removal, there has not been a single commercially viable application in the world. Also as the book points out that the exorbitant costs of sequestering CO₂, even if possible, simply increases the viability of other options.

The book rightly emphasises the potential for a range of renewables. Coal use and exports cannot be abandoned immediately, but a credible effort should start now to replace it.

Some will be concerned by the black and white treatment of climate change in the book. There are in fact many who believe that climate change is occurring — it has happened before in the earth's distant past — but do not see CO₂ as a major cause. There could be common ground now to begin to generate significant policy changes with a focus on wellbeing, even while the CO₂ debate continues to rage.

For example, already sea levels are rising and a billion people are in danger of catastrophic consequences; should we not start *now* to develop policy responses and options? Climate change, whether due to CO₂ or not, is already and will continue to change the location and types of agriculture practiced across the world; should we not invest in transitional steps *now*? Also, the scope for new and renewable energy expansion is substantial and economically beneficial and should be radically expanded *now*.

The conclusion to *Crunch Time* is a frightening vision of Australia facing the full, catastrophic furore of CO₂ induced climate change in 2060. Similarly dire prophecies from the likes of Malthus (who in 1798 saw population increases driving the world to disaster) and George Orwell (in 1984) proved partly valid, but in both cases there have been ameliorating factors. No one knows if this might also be the case with climate change.

Crunch Time is good, provocative reading for the thinking person. There are ample facts, figures and references to worthwhile analysis, combined with controversial assertion. It will provoke strong support from some, violent opposition from others. That is just what we need to generate and heighten debate on these important issues.

Back to the future for international students

MULTICULTURALISM

Hanifa Deen



There was a time in our history when Australia kept immigrants and visitors with dark skin at arm's length. Indian students and others from the Subcontinent and South East Asia were also a rare species. This was the era of the White Australia Policy, which remained on the statute books until 1972 when it was repealed by an act of parliament.

But in 1950 a new educational scheme, called the Colombo Plan, became a centrepiece of Australian Foreign Policy. It marked the beginning of the end of the White Australia Policy and played a significant role in the thawing of old entrenched attitudes.

The Colombo Plan affected my teenage years on a very personal level. As a Muslim teenager of Pakistani ancestry growing up in Perth in the late '50s, I was miserable and given to rehearsing rebellious speeches in front of the mirror, speeches that went no further than my bedroom. I envied the freedom enjoyed by my Anglo-Australian friends and spent a lot of time daydreaming about taboo pastimes, like dancing the twist and 'going out'.

There were no other Muslim families in Perth. My grandfathers had ventured to Australia in the 1890s, years before 1901 and the slamming of doors in the faces of people who looked like 'us'. On weekends I entered a twilight zone. I knew there had to be more to life than taking my baby brother to the cinema. This was decades before mobiles and the internet linked you up with like-minded strangers.

But one sunny day a normal teenage life became my lot, and my father's hair did not turn grey overnight. Suddenly I had friends who looked like me and we could go out together as a group. I owed it all to an Australian initiative for students from the Asia-Pacific region, an educational scheme light years ahead of the times.

Under the plan the first students to enrol in our tertiary institutions came from Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, India and Pakistan. In the early phase of the plan many students happened to be Muslims. Nursing, engineering, business studies and economics were popular choices.

Certainly the students were carefully selected: intelligent, proficient in English, friendly, charming and good looking young people. Friendships were forged and many Anglo-Celtic homes 'adopted' the newcomers. So did service clubs and sporting and church organisations. Universities treated them as special guests.

The students were happy to show off their respective cultures and went to barbecues and dances, although Muslim students avoided drinking alcohol. Many

were keen soccer players who formed their own teams and joined a local soccer league. Badminton and table tennis were other sports boys excelled at and they cha-cha-cha-ed and jived much better than most of the locals.

Students also attended local mosques, fasted during Ramadan and celebrated Eid days. The female students I knew trained as nurses and wore the modest Malay dress of sarong and kebaya with a thin scarf over one shoulder. They influenced me so much that I even enrolled as a trainee-nurse for three months until I came to understand that a nurse's life was not for me, even though it offered the added incentive of living away from home!

Most Colombo Plan students returned to their homelands after completing their studies. They continued to visit Australia and even sent their children to Australia for schooling. Some male students married Australian women and settled here. Those who returned home formed a new generation of leadership: senior public servants, politicians, leading economic planners, businessmen and educators who helped significantly to develop trade and diplomatic links.

Their fondness for Australia and the families who'd 'adopted' them served our national interests well. It tempered the view, widely held by newly independent nations in the region, that Australia was a racist country.

I'm sure I'm not the only baby-boomer who remembers the years when we showed concern over the wellbeing of international students, when we treated them as people rather than statistics in an export industry worth about \$15.5 billion.

If the singling out of [Indian students](#) had ever reared its ugly head back then, we'd have hung our heads in shame and not buried them in the sand. We'd have reacted immediately if news had leaked out about rogue educational providers and the exploitation of casual workers.

The attention that we are currently receiving from the Indian media is not undeserved. Visits to India by our senior politicians offering glib reassurances will not halt the turndown in Indian student enrolments at our tertiary institutions. We need to revisit the days when we understood what duty of care meant.

State governments, colleges and universities should start listening to international students and their representative bodies and stop fobbing them off with platitudes. Students' concerns about their physical wellbeing, accommodation needs and quality of education need to be addressed. This is what was proposed for the International Students Round Table discussions, which were held earlier this week.

If Australian students were being exploited or 'singled out' in New York or Mumbai or London, we'd demand answers. Mums and dads in India are no different to us.

MasterChef winner roasts the media

TELEVISION

Tim Kroenert

Julie Goodwin, inaugural winner of the cooking/reality TV program [MasterChef Australia](#), couldn't believe the reaction she received upon leaving the MasterChef house. In fact, until she stepped out of the house and tripped face-first into a buzz of post-show hype and media obligations, she didn't know the program had been popular at all.



Speaking last week to a roomful of religious media professionals at the 2009 Australasian Catholic Press Association (ACPA) Awards, Goodwin, a transcendent 'home cook', practising Catholic, wife and mother of three, said that from within the confines of the house, the contestants had no inkling of the runaway popularity of *MasterChef Australia*.

'On the surface of it, it shouldn't have worked,' she said. 'Not too many of us were your usual glamorous TV types. All the drama that is built around people sniping at each other was absent. The scathing remarks that reality TV judges usually deliver, didn't happen.'

'It was a show not about the glamorous world of showbiz or fashion, but about the seemingly mundane, decidedly unglamorous and messy task of cooking. On paper, it shouldn't have worked at all. And yet, it did.'

Goodwin was humbled to later hear 'stories of children eating foods they have never tried before, teenagers exploring new career options, retired chefs returning to the game, and one three-year-old who carefully plated up the dog's food in its bowl'. But she also quickly discovered that there is a dark side of exposure to the public eye.

She 'made the mistake once' of reading one of the online discussion forums associated with the show. She 'didn't go back for seconds'.

'It seemed to me that in the middle of the night, in the privacy of their homes and with the protection of anonymity, certain people would vent their spleen about everyone and everything to do with the show. On the internet, opinions were stated as facts and the viciousness and the personal nature of some of the posts was staggering.'

More affronting was that some of these comments seemed to filter through into mainstream media. 'Certain journalists, and I am using the term loosely, drew on the forums for their material. Completely one-sided, non-verifiable and anonymous web posts were hauled off the internet and printed as newspaper articles.'

'It disturbed me to think that this material could be presented to the newspaper

reading public without the source being identifiable. I have always believed that if you are willing to say something in a public arena, you should have the guts to put your name to it.'

Perhaps the ordinary domestic context from which Goodwin comes has provided a grounding influence. Certainly during the course of the *MasterChef* contest she presented as a model of 'sportswomanship', refusing to become embroiled in snide personality wars. Whatever the reason, it is to her great credit that she has been able to regard unfounded criticism objectively, and put it in its proper context.

'I have learned valuable lessons about the nature of celebrity and being in the public consciousness,' she said. 'I have learned to grow a tougher hide. I have learned when I read or see things that are hurtful or untrue, to develop the attitude, those who know me, know better — and those who don't, don't matter.'

One year on, Garnaut's glass half full

ENVIRONMENT

Tony Kevin



If any in the audience were expecting Ross Garnaut to be bitter about the Federal Government's inadequate response to his September 2008 [Review](#) recommendations, they were wrong.

Speaking on Monday night at ANU, it was clear Garnaut remains resolutely glass-half-full. He offered a high degree of patience and equanimity. He is optimistic about the cumulative positive public impact of his Review. Listening closely to his graceful words, there were also steely messages.

Garnaut noted that climate change policy involves taking rational decisions under conditions of uncertainty and the risk of bad extreme outcomes. He is pleased that his Review's target assumptions — aiming for a 450 ppm CO₂-e world 'in which Australia plays its full proportionate part', by targeting a 25 per cent emissions reduction on 1990 levels by 2020, and reductions of 60 per cent or upwards by 2050 — have become part of the Australian electorate's common understanding of what must be done.

He suggests that a 450 ppm global target is the best the world can aim for now, as it will certainly be overshoot for several years. He is glad that both Government and Opposition now accept the same 25 per cent 2020 target, though they differ on how to get there.

Garnaut regretted that he had during 2008 displeased some of Australia's top climate scientists by canvassing, in an earlier version of the Review, a reduced 2020 emissions target.

He had expected old-industry vested interests to attack the Review, but hoped that introducing it over several months would help build public momentum for reform. Unfortunately, the political impact of his work was not yet strong enough to prevail over 'the congenial environment in Australia for rent-seeking behaviour by established businesses'. He deplored the success of 'unprincipled' carbon protectionism in securing massive compensation under the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme — 'the ugliest money politics we have seen for a generation'.

Yet, he argued, it is important to pass the CPRS in its present diluted form, even if it is weakened further as the price of securing Opposition support: Australia must make a start on reform. He criticised environmentalists who oppose the CPRS on grounds that it locks in under-achievement. The Greens are allowing 'the best to be the enemy of the good, and the friend of the bad' (an allusion to the denialism now rampant in the National Party).

Garnaut suggested that support for strong carbon emission mitigation is

growing strongly around the world. Australia does not risk getting out ahead of other countries in passing the CPRS, indeed Australia is already being left behind. There is now G20 acceptance that major industrialising countries must act early, in concert with — though in different ways to — major industrial countries.

The coming December 2009 UN meeting in Copenhagen will reflect this approach. Copenhagen will not yet achieve a global emissions trading system, but it will make real progress towards the only just and workable goal, of equalising per capita emissions around the world.

The US and China are proceeding apace with building renewable energy infrastructure as part of their counter-recessionary policy — ‘and Australia has its pink batts’. Climate reform governments have been elected or re-elected in Japan, Indonesia and India. Developing industrial countries like Mexico and South Africa already have carbon emission reduction mechanisms in place.

In the end, global deals will be struck by heads of government sitting around a table with Obama: the negotiations are too big and complex for diplomats.

The debate within Australia this year focused too much on transitional arrangements, and not enough on how the final global mitigation system will work. Economists have become over-absorbed in detailed fine-tuning about merits of different carbon price mechanisms.

Garnaut stressed his commitment to the mainstream science view that man-made global warming is real and urgent. He described climate change denialism as ‘a grasping of straws from people on the outer fringes of science’. He said he had heard out the views of Australia’s leading exponent of such views, a person of scientific background, and concluded that he could not prudently accept such arguments, as the risks are too great.

Australia’s best economic statisticians have reviewed the global average temperature data since 1950. They are in no doubt that a 60-year global warming trend is evident, despite an appearance of slowdown since the peak El Nino year 1998. Garnaut firmly favours market-based solutions to emissions reduction, which he sees as universal in application and less open to special interests.

Garnaut noted that Australia is one of the countries most vulnerable to global warming because much of our agricultural land is already at the hot dry margin of sustainable production. Under business-as-usual policies, the Murray-Darling basin would in 50 years come to resemble the Eyre River basin. It is probably already too late to save the Great Barrier Reef.

In closing, ANU Emeritus Professor John Molony remarked that ordinary Australian people are ahead of politicians in understanding the dangers in climate change. He noted that ordinary citizens living in the border regions of the Roman Empire had a better appreciation of the risks of barbarian invasions than did the political elites, over-absorbed in their games of power back in Rome.

The meeting, appropriately opened by a climate scientist and closed by a historian, left its predominantly young audience with a tangible feeling of hope and excitement that real change is possible.

Larrikin poet's Sentimental 'slanguage'

BY THE WAY

Brian Matthews

C. J. Dennis, who would have been 133 about a week ago, once wrote that, as a small boy, he had 'a devout and urgent desire to become a larrikin'. This might have been because his four maiden aunts dressed him in starched suits, Eton collars, a cap, patent leather shoes and brown gloves in which he carried a cane.



And his name was Clarence — all in all, the perfect recipe for small boy torture in a remote country town. As soon as he could, Dennis dropped the 'Clarence' and became known universally as Den.

As he grew up, Dennis drifted unsuccessfully through a range of jobs including working in his father's Laura pub, the Beetaloo. Spilt beer and smashed glasses convinced everyone that he was not cut out by nature to be a barman.

In the new century, after some editorial ventures in Adelaide, he finished up in Toolangi, north east of Melbourne, depressed and broke.

It was during this time that he brought the Sentimental Bloke into existence and, in line with Dennis's own low spirits, the Bloke comes on the scene not triumphantly but in a state of puzzled gloom.

The world 'as got me snouted jist a treat;
Cruel forchin's dirty left 'as smote me soul;
'An all them joys o' life I 'eld so sweet
Is up the pole.

What he can't understand is why he feels so down. But gradually it dawns on him that it's spring time and he hasn't got a girl.

It seems to me I'm kind er lookin' for
A tart I knoo a hundred years ago,
Or maybe more.
Wot's this I've 'eard 'em call that thing? ... Geewhizz
Me ideel bit o' skirt! That's wot it is!
The street lore offers a way out of his confusion:
Aw, spare me days,
If this 'ere silly feelin' doesn't stop
I'll lose me block and stoush some flamin' cop!

But he does meet her — his ideal bit o' skirt. 'Er name's Doreen ...'

Head over heels in love the Bloke abandons his rough mates, the booze and the life of the streets only to find himself in — of all places — a theatre, sitting in velvet seats to see a play! Love conquers all.

The Sentimental Bloke is a wonderful example of just how good Dennis was at writing verse in 'slanguage' as he put it, chronicling the ordinary man's experience of those times in the language of everyday: the gang warfare on Melbourne's back streets, the life of the markets and barrowmen, the coming of war.

Dennis was well read in and a great lover of the works of Shakespeare. He made a study of how Shakespeare and his contemporaries used slang and was astounded to find that much of the language of the streets of Melbourne had its origins in the lanes and markets of Elizabethan London.

The Bloke's moods mirror many of those found in Shakespeare's sonnets. Shakespeare's forlorn and depressed 29th sonnet, 'When, in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes/I all alone bewep my outcast state', has its exact counterpart in Dennis's 'An' 'ere's me, 'ere,/Jist moochin' round like some pore, barmy coot/Of 'ope and joy an' forchin destichoot.'

One of Shakespeare's lyrics on the coming of Spring salutes 'lady-smocks all silver-white'. Dennis has his 'Spring Song' too — 'The young green leaves is shootin' in the trees/The air is like a long cool swig o' beer' — and, like Shakespeare's ladies, Dennis's 'smilin' tarts walk up and down all dressed/In clobber white'. There are many similar parallels.

So when the Sentimental Bloke is dragged off to the theatre by Doreen, it is to a Shakespearean play — about feuds, street fighting, love and honour. As the bloke puts it: 'Doreen and me, we bin to see a show/The swell two-dollar touch/The drarmer's writ be Shakespeare, years ago/About a barmy goat called Romeo.'

This is C. J. Dennis at his brilliant best, bringing together the character of the street-fighting Bloke and Dennis's own fascination with Shakespeare, slang and larrikinism. When Romeo fights Tybalt, the Bloke, sitting in the velvet theatre seats alongside Doreen, can't contain himself. It's the world he knows:

Quite natchril, Romeo gits wet as 'ell.

'It's me or you!' 'e 'owls, an' wiv a yell,

Plunks Tyball through the gizzard wiv 'is sword.

'Ow I ongcored!

'Put in the boot!' I sez. 'Put in the boot!'

'Ush!' sez Doreen. 'Shame!' sez some silly coot.

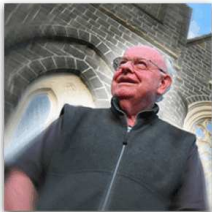
The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke was published by Angus and Robertson with

an introduction by Henry Lawson on 16 October 1915. By 31 March 1917 it had sold 66,148 copies. It's still going, deservedly so, because, like Lawson himself, Dennis opens a window on one part of our Australian culture and the forces, traditions, speech and images that have helped to forge it.

Sympathy for Father Bob

APPLICATION

Andrew Hamilton



The story of Fr Bob Maguire's retirement can be told in many ways. It has generally been represented as the struggle of a brave battler against a heartless large corporation. Whatever of that, it has a more universal and poignant relevance as the story of the predicament of ageing community workers. These include general practitioners, teachers and religious ministers.

For people whose lives are spent working in communities, the path to retirement is complex and difficult. Historically, the age of retirement has been dictated by failing physical strength or a declining ability to adjust to rapid change. The reluctance of people to retire has come from financial difficulties or from having identified their personal value with their work.

For community workers, the criteria for retirement and the sources of resistance to it are more complex. At the heart of their work is the pattern of relationships which have been built up over time. The effectiveness of their service depends on their competence, but it also relies on their knowledge of the community they serve and on the trust that this familiarity engenders. Because knowledge and trust grow only gradually, continuity is prized. Few people feel blessed, for example, by having to change their doctor every six months.

Nor are the traditional reasons for retirement cogent. Physical strength is not usually essential, and communities and their workers respond organically to change. As community workers age, too, they naturally grow in practical wisdom. General practitioners often say they reach the height of their diagnostic skills only at the age when they contemplate retirement. Nor does age automatically make it difficult for older people to communicate to the young. I doubt if there is an Australian priest who communicates more intuitively with young Australians than Bob Maguire.

The difficulties that community workers may feel in contemplating retirement can cut deep. Because relationships are so important in their professional work, they easily identify themselves with the people whom they serve and with the ways they serve them. If it is true that our identity is shaped by our relationships, then to let go of significant relationships must threaten to diminish us as human beings.

The importance of relationships suggest that it would be best to leave it to the community and its worker to decide when the time for retirement has come. But this proposal also has its difficulties. Communities will not always feel free to tap a much-loved leader on the shoulder against her wishes. Nor will they always be in a position to judge the competence, say, of their general practitioner.

The proposal is even more problematic in communities, like church congregations, which see themselves as enduring through time, as bound to other congregations, and as committed to nurture belief in the next generation. Changing ministers is a normal part of renewal. Communities always tend towards entropy, and it is easy for a congregation with a long-standing and ageing minister to age and die together.

These considerations argue that if a community is to endure, and if the community workers are to remain competent and effective in their service, their tenure must be subject to review. That is why general practitioners submit to appraisal by their peer group. Within the Catholic church, Bishops and parish priests are required to submit their retirement at the age of 75 to the Pope and local bishop respectively. The offer of retirement gives space for reflection and review.

These practices have much to commend them from the point of view of the wider community. They encourage community workers to reflect on their own future and their capacities. But such reflection is always delicate and often fraught with fear and suspicion. Both the workers and those who depend on them naturally fear it, feel powerless in it, and ask whether the process will be fair or simply an opportunity to get rid of people seen as troublemakers.

This argues that where possible people should be able to keep contributing to their communities in less responsible positions. Older teachers can have auxiliary roles in their school, doctors become junior partners in their practice, clergy assist a new parish priest.

But this ideal solution often proves impossible. Where there is conflict, as in this case, the generous will feel sympathy for all those involved: for Fr Bob Maguire, for Archbishop Hart and for the parish community.

African parables

POETRY

Grant Fraser

Somalia 2009

The camps in Eastern Kenya
House a quarter of a million
Refugees. Each day hundreds
More cross the border from
Somalia.
With our cinnamon-dusted children,
We once followed the cattle in their swaying seasons
To horizons promised with rain.
The air was fragrant with orange blossom,
Cardamom and cloves.
But now, they have salted
The orchards and the vines.
The lowing of the cattle is taken,
With our names, upon the wind.
In our land there is no civil countenance.
No longer may we love or mourn.
We exist on rumours of water, food and hearth.
We have no currency
But the litanies of our hands
And our public eyes
In which you might recognise
The price of our humanity.
We stand at the brink of your wire,
Watching in silence
As another parable begins.

The gate

*In many parts of Africa people must pay bribes
to be able to work, sometimes several bribes.
There is always a gate-keeper.*

Each day amongst the shanty lives
trading must begin anew
for earth-space, water, fire and work
[for now, at least, the brownish air is free]
At the building site
The keeper of the gate has begun to palm
The famished ounces of quiet bribes,
And to usher his chosen ones
Through the gate space,
Where they will, by further promises,
Be permitted to heft their shoulders
Into the gall and gruel of work,
So that a morsel,
Trimmed by exacted percentages,
Might fall their way.
Otherwise,
Men who stood before the gate,
their eyes brimmed with tall expectations,
Must trail the weight of empty hands, empty pockets
Back to the shanties,
Where children are launching imagined craft
Away from the stench of earth
Into pools
That are the colour of Keen's Mustard.

A poem for Catherine Hamlin

*Catherine Hamlin, an Australian doctor, established
A hospital in Ethiopia in 1974 with her late husband*

*to treat women who had been damaged by the complications
of childbirth. Because of their wretched injuries these women
were commonly cut off from
their families and communities,
often permanently. So far the hospital has successfully performed
fistula repair surgery
on more than 34,000 women.*

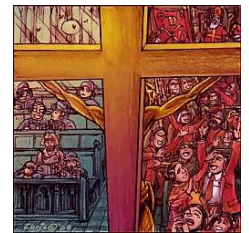
She might have traced the sweetness of her child,
Raised him up,
Felt the weight of his infancy comply to her breast,
But the thorns of Africa drive deep:
In the groaning travail of birth she was cruelled,
In the joy of yielding to life she was abandoned
And curled in an atrophy of shame,
Was soured,
Became untouchable.
And so we are haunted by our hesitations,
By our capacity to abstain from grace,
To forget the best-forgotten
By crafting a life of contained mercies
Counted out in the small currency
Of familiar denominations.
But in your fretting time you squired them home
To shelter and sheets of soft linen,
Knowing that for those who are untouchable
The moment of healing begins
With the sacrament of touch.

On reclaiming Christianity from the West

RELIGION

Irfan Yusuf

Sitting near my keyboard is an *iftar* invitation. The word *iftar* is an Arabic word used to describe a gathering where people break their Ramadan fast. My invitation was to join friends and colleagues of Mr Issam Darwich, a religious scholar of Lebanese heritage. He lives and works in the south western Sydney suburb of Greenacre, home to a large Arabic-speaking population.



But this was no ordinary *iftar* invitation. Issam Darwich is the local Bishop of the Melkite Catholic Community. Yet if Bishop Darwich telephoned a talkback radio station and announced he was holding an *iftar* for Ramadan, what would listeners assume to be his religious affiliation?

And so we live in a country where the name of a Catholic bishop isn't readily identified as Christian. Aren't we a nation built upon a Christian ethic? Don't we have an established Christian heritage? Aren't Western culture and civilisation distinctly, uniquely and inherently Christian?

It isn't for me, a non-Christian, to be telling Christian readers how they should understand their faith. I have some exposure to Christianity, having spent a decade studying at Sydney's only Anglican Cathedral school. Then again, many Anglicans wouldn't accept exposure to the Sydney Diocese as counting for much.

The way mainstream Australia understands Christianity affects me as an Australian non-Christian. It also affects many Christians who don't meet the Christian stereotype. I often blame my stigmatisation and marginalisation on people stereotyping me on the basis of my faith. Yet the worst and most damaging stereotype of all is that of Christianity. And ironically, Christianity is subjected to inaccurate stereotypes allegedly for its own protection.

So I often put up with having Christianity rubbed in my face by politicians known for their Christian devotion. I'm not just talking about the likes of [Peter Costello](#) who spend so much time pleasing Pastor Danny Nalliah at my expense. I'm also talking about Tony Abbott, one of the few Howard Government ministers who openly supported multiculturalism and refused to use Australia's 'Christian heritage' to wedge out non-Christians from the mainstream.

During an episode of ABCTV's Q&A on 27 August, Mr Abbott claimed, 'I think everyone who has grown up in a western country is profoundly shaped and formed by the New Testament, because this is the core document of our civilisation.' In other words, he linked being Christian with being Western.

He went onto make both Jews and Muslims feel somewhat left out of the 'western civilisation equation' when he described the Koran as 'the Old Testament

on steroids’.

As a South Asian Muslim, I’d like to think many Christian believers would be as incensed by attempts to treat Christianity as a uniquely Western phenomenon as I am when Islam is treated as a uniquely Arab phenomenon. Talking about monolithic and mutually exclusive Christian and Muslim ‘civilisations’ and ‘countries’ is nonsense.

This fixation with Christianity as a Western faith defies Christian reality. We often forget that Dili and Manila have probably a higher proportion of their populations Catholic than most Australian cities.

I wonder how many Catholics often associate the skin tones, exotic culture and poverty of the world’s largest Catholic continent with Catholicism. How many Australian Catholics would recognise the popular beliefs and practices (such as adorning churches with a dark-skinned Jesus) of their Latin American co-religionists?

Naturally if I were to make an ambit criticism of Christianity based on the extreme poverty and draconian politics of Latin America, Catholics would be justified in poking their fingers at me and ridiculing my simplistic reasoning.

Much prejudice in Australia directed toward Muslims arises from our understanding that they are mainly Arab or Middle Eastern. Much is made by tabloid columnists and shock jocks when persons of ‘Middle Eastern appearance’ are apprehended by the police.

It’s as if being Christian and being Middle Eastern are incompatible. Yet the vast majority of Australians of Arabic-speaking heritage are, in fact, Christian. More importantly, Christianity itself is a Middle Eastern faith. The city of Bethlehem is today a town in the occupied West Bank, and the liturgy of churches in the area where Christ was born is conducted largely in a Middle Eastern language.

In his book *From the Holy Mountain*, a book which all Western Christians should read, Scottish writer William Dalrymple visits a Syrian church where hymns are sung in the language of Jesus. Not just the words but also the music of these hymns dates back to within a few centuries of Christ. It’s likely that very similar hymns were sung by the early Church, if not by the disciples. Yet these had a distinctly Syrian flavour to them.

The Suriyani (indigenous Syrian) Church is one of the oldest organised churches in existence, and to this day one can find churches in Syria where Muslim worshippers take part in Christian liturgy side by side with their Christian neighbours.

Australia and other Western countries don’t have a uniquely Christian heritage. South America, Arab League states, Turkey, Iran, Africa and South Asia (to name a few) all have an indigenous Christian heritage. Maybe we would stop stereotyping non-Christians when we stopped stereotyping Christianity.

Thoughtful flesh consumption hard to swallow

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



The shameful practice of Japanese dolphin slaughter was depicted in the documentary *The Cove*, which was screened in Australian cinemas last month. It focuses on the activities of dolphin defender Richard O'Barry, who was once a tormentor of dolphins as trainer of the '60s TV dolphin Flipper.

We chastise Japan for such barbarity, and refuse to countenance Japanese claims that eating whale meat is integral to their culture. But we hold fast to our own convictions that meat consumption is part of the national character, and rarely question whether it is sustainable at current levels.

We are keenly aware that meat production is a major contributor to the Australian economy. Perhaps unwittingly, we marginalise the vegetarians among us, and treat activists from groups like PETA with scorn because we have justifiable criticisms of some of their positions.

Meat consumption is in fact an ethical issue. We need to look upon our selection of what to eat as a moral choice, not just a working out of how to satisfy our human urges most effectively. We readily understand that sexual desires need to be met in a context of moral probity, or it's likely we will cause psychological damage to ourselves or others. But gluttony aside, food consumption is most often regarded as morally neutral.

The latest [Just Comment](#) briefing from the Edmund Rice Centre challenges our preconceptions about eating meat. It argues that food consumption has serious impacts on climate change, environmental degradation, use of resources, and more. For example, the livestock industry accounts for 18 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions, which is higher than the contribution of transport. This is due to the emission by livestock of gases such as methane and nitrous oxide, which are very powerful greenhouse gases.

The briefing paper puts forward eating less meat and animal products as 'one small way for individuals to make an impact on some of the massive injustices facing our world'. It suggests that as little as one meat free day per week can make a difference, and that such an action is readily affordable when compared with other options such as solar panels or a hybrid car.

As the paper suggests, 'our diet is one thing that we have the power to change and make a definite impact with'.

