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## Jesuit's vision for a pluralist Australia

### VIDEO

*Peter Kirkwood*

It is disappointing that both Labor and Liberal leaders are spruiking policy that taps into negative community feelings toward 'the other' when it comes to asylum seekers and a 'smaller-growing Australia'. This reinforces fear and creates division.

In Monday's *Australian*, respected commentator, Paul Kelly, [criticised](#) it as 'a dismal and disreputable stand driven by polling'. And in an opinion piece in *The Sydney Morning Herald* on 19 July, Tim Costello [argued](#) that 'an election fought on such an issue is likely to tear at the very fabric of Australia's egalitarian psyche and take us back to the very worst of the race debate that fostered the rise of Pauline Hanson and One Nation'.

Francis D'Sa, who features in this interview, offers an alternative vision embracing multiculturalism and religious pluralism, which are global realities today and will become increasingly so in the future. (Continues below)

D'Sa knows this reality well. He is a Jesuit priest and theologian from Pune in India, part of a Christian minority in a country whose majority is Hindu, but which also has large numbers of Muslims, Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists. He has become well known as a specialist in inter-religious dialogue, speaking and writing extensively on the appropriate theology that will promote understanding and good relations between different cultures and faiths.

D'Sa spoke to Eureka Street TV at a conference at the Australian Catholic University in Brisbane called 'Dreaming a New Earth: Indigenous Spiritualities and the Vision of Raimon Panikkar', and the interview is sponsored by the University's [Asia-Pacific Centre for Inter-Religious Dialogue](#).

D'Sa is one of the leading scholars worldwide on the theology of [Raimon Panikkar](#), who is a pioneer in promoting inter-religious dialogue. Panikkar, now 92 and only recently retired, was born in northern Spain of a Spanish Catholic mother and Indian Hindu father. After ordination as a Catholic priest, he was one of the first Western academics to go to India to study Eastern religions.

Panikkar has three doctorates, speaks a dozen languages, and is a prolific author, having written some 40 books, including a number of seminal works. On returning to Europe after many years absence, when asked about his faith pilgrimage, Panikkar answered with his now famous and often quoted reply, 'I left as a Christian, I found myself a Hindu, and I return a Buddhist, without having ceased to be a Christian.'

As well as being a student of Panikkar, D'Sa has also collaborated with him, most recently on the Spirit of Religion project. Over three years scholars from all the major faiths met for a

week every six months to discuss problems and issues from the perspective of their respective religion.

D'Sa also has impressive academic credentials and experience. For many years he was Professor of Theology and Indian Religions at the Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth Pontifical School in Pune. From 2003 to 2008 he was Professor of Missiology and Dialogue of Religions at the University of Würzburg in Germany, and has lectured at a number of universities in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Portugal.

In 2007 he was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Frankfurt for his work in intercultural and interreligious dialogue. He is now Director of the [Institute for the Study of Religion](#) in Pune.

He has written and edited a number of acclaimed books in English and German, including *The Dharma of Jesus*, *Theology of Liberation: an Indian Biblical Perspective*, and several word indices of Sanskrit religious texts including the *Bhagavad Gita*.

## What welfare policies?

### POLITICS

*Frank Quinlan*



In June the Government passed a bill extending blanket [welfare quarantining](#) from a handful of trial sites to the entire Northern Territory and then across the country.

The Opposition Leader Tony Abbott supports the policy. In an address to the Sydney Institute this week, he asked, 'if the automatic quarantining is just and fair in the north, why not implement it elsewhere?'. 'An incoming Coalition government', he added, 'will carefully review the operation of this wider form of quarantining after July next year, when it has been in operation for 12 months, with a view to extending it more widely across Australia.'

The Coalition's approach seems very similar to the Government's. But welfare quarantining is bad policy, especially when applied to whole populations. Early indications from the Northern Territory suggest that the program has little, even negative, effect when applied to whole populations. It is a rhetorical response to a political problem, not an evidence based response to very real, urgent social problems.

According to the National Welfare Rights Network there were more than 341,000 people on Newstart Allowance for more than one year as of June 2010, an increase of 40,000 since December 2009. These people are living in chronic poverty. Yet the lack of substantial welfare policy in the election campaign so far suggests the social services sector will be expected to go to the polls without knowing what the major parties plan to do to address long term unemployment and poverty.

Susan Helyar, National Director of UnitingCare Australia, notes that income management consumes thousands of dollars per recipient — almost all of it spent on government administration and bureaucracy. And she rightly points out that this money 'could be much better spent on rolling out programs that work'.

To highlight just one example, there are huge unmet needs for mental health services among the unemployed. A 2003 study by the Australian National University's Peter Butterworth found that over 30 per cent of single women with children receiving income support were suffering from anxiety disorders and over 20 per cent from affective (depressive) disorders. It's hard to imagine that income quarantining is an effective treatment for anxiety and depression. The unemployed are already burdened by substantial 'participation' requirements.

Caring for children will often mean caring for their parents. Like all of us, income support

recipients may need a push from time to time. But decisions about how obligations should apply ought to be made on a case by case basis by workers who know the person's circumstances and their local community. We don't need populist, one-size-fits all schemes that divert scarce funds away from services and into the Centrelink bureaucracy.

Rather than rhetoric about welfare quarantining, the sector needs long term commitment to programs and services that help parents keep their children safe from violence, support the work of schools and teachers, and help parents provide children with healthy diets. We need to provide high quality services for those parents with mental health problems and the minority with drug and alcohol addictions.

Social services agencies need firm, costed commitments from government that program funding will be secure and responsive to the needs of clients. Without such commitments agencies will have increasing trouble recruiting and training the staff needed to deliver programs and think strategically about how to provide better programs in future.

The current kind of content-free campaigning, appealing to popular biases and stereotypes but not delivering detailed commitments, has real consequences for the social services sector and the people it serves.

Following the furor over the mining super profits tax, the Government demonstrated that it can resolve uncertainty in an industry if it chooses to. Like the mining industry, whose planning for the future was hampered by uncertainty regarding future tax arrangements, the social services sector still doesn't know what concrete policies it will be dealing with after the election.

Unlike the mining industry, the social services sector doesn't have millions of dollars to spend to bring it to the attention of the public.

Populist responses such as welfare quarantining create the impression of action, without the substance of policy and planning, and are a distraction from the major issues.

## Asylum seeker's island hell

### FILMS

*Tim Kroenert*

***South Solitary* (M). Director: Shirley Barrett. Starring: Miranda Otto, Barry Otto, Rohan Nichol, Essie Davis, Marton Csokas, Annie Martin. 116 minutes**

*South Solitary* is billed as a romance, but its first half might sit comfortably in boxes labelled 'psychological thriller' or 'black comedy'. The title refers to a lighthouse island, a lonely, stony protuberance in the path of the Roaring Forties. Here, isolation and the wild landscape seem prone to agitate the wild aspects of human nature.



To this place comes 35-year-old Meredith (Miranda Otto) and her uncle Wadsworth (Miranda's real-life father, Barry), who is the new lighthouse keeper. Ominously, we learn that Wadsworth's predecessor committed suicide on the job.

Meredith is a woman-child, gentle but easily manipulated. She approaches the island wide-eyed, clutching a pet lamb and smiling in wonder at the sheer beauty of her new home. But before she reaches *South Solitary* she is put upon by unkind forces. Two boys appear on the cliff and call for the boat to turn around and go home.

If this is a heavy-handed allegory for the experience of asylum seekers, it is not entirely out of place. Meredith seeks asylum from secret, personal horrors that lie in her wake. A fresh start represents a chance at solace, although she continues to be oppressed by the perennial belittlement of her loveless uncle.

The curdled milk of human unkindness flows readily upon the island. Meredith's beloved lamb is immediately co-opted by Nettie (Martin), the young daughter of the assistant keeper, Harry (Nichol). This could be seen as a simple act of generosity to a child, but it also hints at Meredith's pliability, which becomes important as the film progresses.

Harry's family, it turns out, believed he was next in line to become head keeper. His wife Alma (Davis) therefore resents Wadsworth, and takes this out on Meredith with scathing passive aggression. Meredith seems constantly under threat: even Alma and Harry's children (including the boys from the cliff) flit about like bedraggled rejects from *The Village of the Damned* (and Nettie seems a likely contender to become a future serial killer).

One of the film's most memorable scenes sees Alma interrogate Meredith about deeply private details from her painful past. Alma sits in smug judgment, utterly compassionless, openly contemptuous. Meredith, lacking the self-esteem to reject this unjustified attack — it's none of Alma's damn business, after all — is humiliated.

In this scene writer-director Barrett demonstrates an ability to set dramatic tension squirming in the dark cracks of human awfulness. The same can be said for Meredith's encounters with the predatorily charming Harry, and his increasingly explicit advances. Barrett's film displays great insight into the darker nuances of human nature.

It's a shame that *South Solitary* falls down when, in its second half, it blows into more romantic waters.

A chain of events leaves Meredith alone on the island with the other assistant keeper, Jack (Csokas), an introspective loner haunted by memories of war. The remainder of the film deals with Jack and Meredith's gradual opening-up to each other. It is, frankly, dull, not helped by the entirely uninteresting Jack — if you want to see an example of 'overacted introversion', take a look at Csokas' melodramatic moping.

The lackluster second half does not diminish the harsh, memorable glare of the first, nor Miranda Otto's brilliant performance as Meredith. Although Meredith is a woman robbed of power, there are prickles in her personality that suggest a strength of character that may emerge, if she is permitted to grow up.



## Will a real university please stand up

### EDUCATION

*Neil Ormerod*



In 2012 Australian universities will be undergoing the most radical shift in government policy since the Dawkins reforms of the 1980s created the 'unified' system.

Under those reforms 'Colleges of Advanced Education' were rebadged as universities with the expectation that over time they would become major tertiary educators along the lines of then existing universities. Some have succeeded, while others have struggled.

A major benchmark for government in this regard is 'research outputs', the ability of universities to produce quality research of international standard. Hence the 'Excellence in Research Australia' (ERA) exercise which has recently convulsed our tertiary institutions.

The new reform, recommended by the Bradley Review, is that rather than funding being allocated to institutions which must then admit students according to a quota determined by the government, the funding will instead follow the students. So universities must compete for students.

The student is now the sovereign consumer of an 'education product'. A marketplace of universities and other tertiary colleges will hawk their wares in a bid to attract the best and brightest. Whether all the present universities will survive in this competitive marketplace is an open question. I'm sure a number of vice-chancellors are having sleepless nights pondering their decreasing enrolment figures.

One consequence of this change is that the distinction between public and private tertiary institutions will become largely irrelevant. Private universities such as Notre Dame Australia and Bond University will be able to compete for students on the same basis as any other university. So will other specialist private providers with government recognition, such as private theological colleges and small liberal arts type colleges.

Of course all this is a long way from a conception of a university as a place of 'learning for learning's sake'. Universities are no longer places where students have time and space to grapple with the hard questions of life. Rather it is a place where they juggle study with part-time work commitments (on average over 20 hours per week), aiming to move into one of the various professions open to graduates of professional degrees.

The clear goal is not learning, but employment — teaching, nursing, accountancy, medicine,

law, engineering, media and so on.

All this begs the question of what we mean by a 'university'. Although I am not personally a great fan of etymologies as a basis for answering such a question, in this case it does give us some idea of what the great founders of our modern institutions meant when they established the first universities.

Like the similar term 'universe' it relates to the notion that there is one word, one verse, one narrative, one story, which holds the diverse offerings of the university together under a single vision.

For the original founders of universities the preeminent source of this integrating vision was theology, nobly assisted by philosophy, as a handmaid or prolegomenon to theology. Of course with the increasing marginalisation, or even exclusion, of theology in most modern universities, philosophy has often been left to undertake the task alone. But increasingly philosophy too has been marginalised. Even prestigious Australian universities have cut back their philosophy schools and programs to the barest of minima.

The student consumers intent on a career have little place for philosophy in their program, except for perhaps an excursus into an appropriate 'professional ethics' course.

In fact universities are simply no longer universities in the classical sense. They are multiversities, or pluriversities, offering multiple and competing academic disciplines which slice up the world and human existence into manageable pieces. They never talk to one another unless absolutely necessary, and lack any sense that there could ever be some larger integrating 'verse'.

Mirroring our post-modern culture, the grand metanarrative is dead. Plurality reigns.

Ironically one of the other reforms suggested by Bradley is the formation of what will be 'specialist universities'. These are universities which focus on one or maybe two disciplines. The first cab off the rank is likely to be Melbourne College of Divinity, which this year celebrates its centenary.

If successful, this new university will have the integrating vision sought by the original founders of universities, but it won't have the component parts that need to be integrated. Theology and philosophy are fine disciplines on their own, of course. They can also provide a higher vision, but must themselves be in constant dialogue with others in order to do their job properly.

Indeed the only genuine 'uni'-'versities', in aspiration if not necessarily in performance, in Australia are the two Catholic universities, Australian Catholic University and Notre Dame Australia. Both have as their charter the Apostolic Constitution, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, which speaks of the integrating role to be played by philosophy and theology in tertiary education. But of course in practice, the same academic silos operate everywhere, preventing genuine

dialogue and integration, leaving students to try to put together the pieces as best they can.

And so, will a real university please stand up and be counted? If not perhaps we could take the next step and call them multiversities, apart from a few specialist bodies, because that is what they really are.

## Defying the ebook revolution

FICTION

*Brian Doyle*

Went to return a book to the library the other day and it refused to go in the BOOKS ONLY slot. Odd. I tried again several times, thinking perhaps I had suddenly aged beyond belief and could not muster the muscle to cram it through the wall, but no, it was the book itself, adamant, recalcitrant, bristling and ruffling indignantly, that would not allow itself to be returned.



This was a conundrum unlike any I had known before.

I tried the return bin in the library parking lot, a steel tank big as a refrigerator where I have seen many unusual things, among them a small boy climbing into the bin to see what it was like inside, people tossing books at the maw of the bin from moving cars, and a man with a ball-peen hammer attacking the bin for reasons that remain murky.

But again the book refused to be returned.

I should perhaps note that this was the first volume of Jan Morris's magisterial *Pax Britannica* trilogy, *Heaven's Command*, an unbelievably great book, the single best-written history I have ever read, and this includes William Manchester's glorious first two volumes about Winston Leonard Spencer-Churchill, which remain superb even though I cannot forgive Manchester for dying on me before he finished the third and concluding volume. The sheer nerve of the man, leaving me hanging like that.

I tried the AUDIOVISUAL ONLY slot in the adjoining gaping steel bin, to no avail, and then tried the AUDIOVISUAL MATERIAL ONLY AND WE MEAN IT slot by the front door, looking around carefully to see if there were any slimy little kids who would rat on the strange man stuffing books into the wrong slot, but there weren't any, not even the usual ubiquitous Girl Scouts with their rickety card tables and boxes of howling sugar and those evil laser glares they deliver when you say airily that you bought 50 boxes yesterday, they can smell lies, you know, like wolves do, and did you know there are ten million Girl Scouts worldwide, try to think of that without a shiver of fear as you crawl into bed tonight.

I thought about just heaving the book at the door of the library and shuffling away briskly, pretending to scour the heavens for falcons and rockets, but that would be a disservice to the holy librarians, and it was a moist day also, and no man in his right mind would leave a genius like Jan Morris out in the rain, so I tried to stuff the slot one last time, this time with as much of a manful effort as I could muster, which wasn't much, which made me think ruefully of the Girl Scouts again, so I sat down to ponder.

There was a powerful temptation to blame Jan Morris for this turn of affairs, but she's

Welsh, and you can't insult such a heroic muddy nation, and she's the finest writer in the world, not to mention by all accounts the absolute soul of gentle courtesy, and then I thought about blaming the Girl Scouts somehow, but then it occurred to me to wonder why the book was so adamant about not being returned.

Because I am afraid no one will ever check me out again, said the book suddenly. I was wondering when you would ask. Because I am not stupid and all this talk about the whole world going utterly digital gives me the roaring willies. I don't want to be kindled. I don't want to be electrified. I like the heft and thud and thump of me, the smell and substance. I like traveling in cars and planes. I like beds and couches and beaches. I like hands and bellies. I like kids poking into me by accident.

I like the cheerful mind who made me. I like that she scribbled me in inks of various colors in notebooks of various shapes in more countries than she can remember. I like that they printed thousands of me with paper and type and glue and thread and cloth.

I like the crumbs and coffee people spill on me. I like the way people flitter their fingers along my shelf-mates and alight on me and pull me down and flip me open and get absorbed and have to hustle to borrow me when the librarians bark the time. I liked being borrowed and not downloaded. I like being in the trunk of your car and being read in pubs and hotels and dens. I like kids' voices in the other room from where I am being read. I like being stacked by the bed with Pico Iyer and Silver Surfer comics and the Bible.

I have lived in this library for 40 years and I'll be damned if I will go back in there to molder until the revolution converts me and my friends into digital bits. I know what I am about, and if the British Empire stood for anything it stood for making dreams real by force of will and character, and I dream of being held by hands and heads and hearts until my pages melt in the rain and the words in me dissolve into dust. Any questions?

I sat there dumbfounded, as you can well imagine, and then I went home and did the only sensible thing to do, which was to write to Jan Morris. She replied immediately, the soul of gentle courtesy. 'Try returning it at the same time as you donate my newest book,' she wrote, which I did, and this worked, which is something to think about, and so we come to the end of this essay, looking both ways for Girl Scouts.

## The trial and sentencing of Comrade Duch

POLITICS

*Tony Kevin*



This is a story of accountability, in an exemplary and symbolic sense. In this story, context is everything.

An elderly man has just been sentenced to 30 years prison (which means an effective 19-year further prison term, as he was in prison awaiting trial for many years already). Why is the sentencing of this one man, who was the head of the Khmer Rouge regime's main interrogation centre in Phnom Penh during its years of power, so important?

Comrade Duch was found guilty of all charges against him in the joint Cambodian/United Nations court, set up in Phnom Penh to try Khmer Rouge crimes against humanity. The court's gestation was painfully slow: Duch is the first person to be tried here. Next year, four surviving senior members of the Khmer Rouge political leadership from 1975–79 will go before the court, if they are still alive.

Duch was not a member of the top leadership. He was a middle-ranking Khmer Rouge cadre, a former teacher, tasked to administer the S-21 interrogation centre at Toul Sleng, a suburb of Phnom Penh. Here, tens of thousands of Cambodians were imprisoned, interrogated, tortured, and executed at a nearby killing field. All were suspected of being enemies of the Khmer Rouge: many had been previously active in political or military roles before the Khmer Rouge victory in 1975, or were Khmer Rouge cadres themselves who had fallen under the suspicion of an increasingly paranoid and fanatically nationalist regime.

The regime was toppled in 1979 by a Vietnamese invasion, which replaced it with a Communist state under Vietnamese protection, the State of Cambodia.

Around 1.7 million Cambodians are estimated to have died during the Khmer Rouge regime. Many died of starvation and disease under forced labour conditions, but many others died by mass execution. There were killing fields all over Cambodia, where people were killed on orders from local party cadres. People were clubbed to death or pushed off cliffs, for the most minor breaches or for having bourgeois class backgrounds.

S-21 was different. It became the leading interrogation centre for people suspected of political crimes (and their families). Here, the Democratic People's Republic of Kampuchea (DPRK) set about devouring its own people.

Hun Sen was a young minor DPRK cadre from the suspect eastern region, who saw the writing on the wall. He fled with comrades to Vietnam; he would have probably died in Toul Sleng otherwise.

Following the fall of the regime in 1979, the movement did not die. It was kept alive and well supplied in the Cambodian-Thai borderlands, as a military and political insurgency backed by China, the Western powers and ASEAN, which saw a common interest in humiliating and weakening Soviet-backed Vietnam.

With Western support, the DPRK held the Cambodian seat in the UN until the early 1980s, when the seat was declared vacant. The State of Cambodia, now led by Hun Sen, was never granted legitimacy by the UN. It voluntarily surrendered power to a UN-led transitional administration (UNTAC) in 1993, following the UN Cambodia Peace Accords. Hun Sen later re-consolidated his power in 1997, after a failed attempted coup by his royalist co-prime minister and rival, Prince Ranariddh. He remains in firm power today.

From the beginning of the UNTAC presence, there were hopes to bring former Khmer Rouge leaders to trial. But deep mutual historical resentments and suspicions between Hun Sen and the UN Legal Division impeded progress towards agreement on matters of the court's structure and process for many years.

Eventually, a compromise was reached: a joint Cambodian/UN court, funded internationally and with Cambodian and international judges, and sitting in Cambodia. It was understood that the court would seek to try only a small number of leading Khmer Rouge cadres, starting with Duch.

The court's role would be largely symbolic and educational: it would not seek accountability for the many thousands of people who could be brought to trial for crimes committed during the Khmer Rouge regime. Such people are quietly living in villages, their identities known to their neighbours, all over Cambodia. For them, a charitable line has been drawn over their pasts.

Was the Duch trial and sentencing selective justice? In a sense, yes. He had the bad luck to be identified by an Irish journalist, while living quietly in a village. He might easily have got away with it, as many others have.

But the name of Toul Sleng, like Auschwitz, carries a special symbolic weight.

Duch's exemplary trial and sentencing for crimes against humanity, in an internationally recognised court process, is as important for Cambodia as the post-1945 Nuremberg trials were for Germany. This trial was open to be seen, live and on television, all over Cambodia. Cambodians — a majority of whom were born long after the Khmer Rouge regime — heard Duch's classic Nuremberg defence: that he was only following orders, and that he feared for his and his family's life if he did not. They now have seen that the court rejected this defence.

This is an important lesson for Cambodians, a people used to accepting without question the legitimacy of state authority: that sometimes, if a state becomes evil, its orders must be resisted.

This is not just a lesson for Cambodians. The trial of Duch offers a quiet reminder that national sovereignty is not absolute: it can't excuse atrocities committed by a regime at home and against its own people. The duty to protect human life is indivisible, and cannot be shrugged off for diplomatic convenience or strategic advantage.



## Gillard's momentum

CARTOON

*Fiona Katauskas*



## Nothing underhanded about Labor-Greens deal

### POLITICS

*John Warhurst*



The preferential voting system produces, or at least encourages, preference deals. It is that simple. The deal is played out in party how-to-vote cards which advise voters how to fill out their ballot papers. They are as old as the preferential system itself, especially at local electorate and state level. Relatively new though are the highly disciplined national deals, in line with the general tenor of modern Australian politics.

The term deals suggests something underhand, but these are generally fairly benign arrangements between like-minded parties on both sides of politics. This means that the majority of the supporters of the parties involved are already inclined to vote that way anyway. If a party leadership attempted to direct preferences against the general disposition of their followers then a grassroots revolt might occur. Leaders have to be careful what they do.

The how-to-vote card merely attempts to firm up the situation, perhaps adding another 10 per cent of second preferences to what would have occurred anyway without any guidance at all from above. So the impact of these deals should not be exaggerated. They probably matter most when there is a genuine market for preferences, as between competing minor parties such as the Greens and the Democrats.

Examples of preference arrangements include those long-established between the Liberals and the Nationals when they compete with one another in what are called three cornered contests. This arrangement attempts to avoid second preference votes drifting away from the Coalition towards Labor.

Other past examples range from the Liberals and the Democratic Labor Party through to the Liberal Party and Family First in the 2004 election, a deal initiated by then Liberal Prime Minister John Howard himself. The Greens and the Democrats have each entered preference arrangements with Labor on a number of occasions.

At first, however, the Democrats refused to enter preference arrangements or even to distribute preferences in individual seats on the grounds that such a practice was against the participatory ethos of the party and besmirched its independent image. They issued double-sided how-to-vote cards to avoid taking sides.

What is in it for the parties concerned? Overwhelmingly the reason is electoral benefit. The relationship has to be a win-win situation. In the House of Representatives the benefits are almost all with the major parties as usually only the preferences of the minor parties are

distributed. Rarely does the minor party have any chance to win in the House of Representatives.

In these cases the support of the minor party must be bought in some way. This is often simplified as 'support in return for concessions'. The concession made by the major party may be a promise to introduce a policy dear to the heart of the minor party.

There is a special type of preference deal called cross-house trading. The major party mainly gains electoral benefits in the House of Representatives; the minor party gains benefits in the Senate where they have a real chance of winning a seat. Here the preference deal can mean life or death for the minor party. When the Democrats and the Greens were neck-and-neck, as in Western Australia on several occasions, the deal effectively decided the result of the final Senate seat.

Naturally those who feel jilted cast scorn on the deals and imply the worst. That has been one reaction to the Labor-Greens deal in this election.

But deals rarely signify private policy deals. They are about win-win electoral benefits. Nevertheless they do leave the parties open to legitimate criticism that they are in a closer than usual relationship that muddies their independent images and restricts their freedom to move. They also can be seen as another step towards a centralisation of politics that neglects local circumstances, such as the qualifications of individual candidates and the wishes of local party members.

But when they feel uneasy about what headquarters has agreed to, local party members at polling booths tend to undermine the national deal in any way they can. After all voters can quite easily throw the how-to-vote card in the bin. Many do.

## Ode to f\*\*\*book

POETRY

*Cecilia Condon*

**f\*\*\*book**

Irresistible

F\*\*\*book will f\*\*\*

You. You

Wont like it

(even though you give it the thumbs up)

Your profile

Your pics, updated

Your 746 Friends

Fend off the texture of the universe

Behind the screen

Everything seems

Simple

And still

Behind the screen

The existential IT

Is nothing but grit

Rolling between our fingertips

(We swept IT away to make room for a wall of info)

Do you remember me?

(my friend)

Do you recall  
The hum  
That spiraled beneath  
Everything we ever said?

Where are you I wonder?

What are you doing right now?  
— George is in a relationship  
— Rebecca thinks everything is better with a handle  
— Sam is trying to avoid love  
Somewhere inside the abysmal darkness she sleeps tonight  
Wondering when she can quit this crawling

Anyone who wants a kiss  
Can always get one  
But  
Avoid love at all costs (she says)

It will eat you for dinner  
It will break the teeth in your mouth  
Even if you keep your lips shut  
It will keep a list of your tears  
And sing them back to you at anytime of the day  
Long after they have dried

— Richard just ate his weight in chips  
— Alex invites you to his robot party

And everybody is planning to come  
Together  
At last  
At long, long  
Last  
To look each other in the eye

**Brought to you by Pepsi**

The shaking hand  
Unshaken  
Is not alone

The ice blocks quiver in their glass  
Melting into the Pepsi  
Chinking softly against one another in the fizz  
Before they vanish

The phone rings, the fridge hums and your  
Sweet heart beats  
For what and whom do the other bells toll?  
In between this mysterious toil  
The advertisements and diversions  
The electric shocks, the grand sky and  
The fabulous lives  
Of others  
Glitter in a bright corner to the left of us  
I see them

Standing over there

— Clementine and Winston, Penelope and Odysseus, Jane and the chimps, Marilyn and the camera, Nietzsche and some grey matter —

They glisten and  
Our footsteps beat to the hum of their distant laughter  
Taken all together we are  
Everything, separated by nothing  
But a few thousand hours  
And  
A few million metres  
And in time everyone arrives  
So on and on and on  
We shake  
We fizz  
We chink

### **In India**

The sun rises above us  
For the first time  
  
Eyes and eyes and eyes and eyes and eyes  
Overlap  
And wash over one another  
Each the centre of everything  
Without ever tipping the balance  
One way or the other

An old man breaks  
His back beneath me  
And my mates  
A woman chokes on her quiet tongue  
A nephew with his jealous uncle  
Lug us about on the backs of stinking camels  
With all the other fools  
Ashamed, we smile for the camera  
And marvel on demand  
At the groggy sunset, masked in dirt ...!

All the voices gather together  
Waiting for the train  
To take them somewhere else  
A fearless crowd await the future  
Aunties and patriarchs and daughters and Gods with arms and arms  
All piled together on the platform floor at four  
In the morning  
Waiting for the sun  
To rise

They are not afraid of anything  
Not bright pink  
Or melodrama  
Not a moustache  
Or grime  
And grease or gold



They are not afraid of us  
Though we come with a warning  
Wearing our guns so they show  
So they know

That we are not afraid to shoot  
We are not afraid to pay  
And  
We will pay  
To extract ourselves from this crush  
We will pay for a slice of silence  
Clean and empty  
Wrapped and  
Fresh  
Protected from flesh  
Cut off from everything  
Anyone else has to say  
Shhhhhhh

We can pay  
And we will pay  
For separation from  
The parched dust floating up towards the clouds for  
A little kiss  
Dust floats up  
Trying to drink the sky  
Dust floats up from beneath the burden of a billion footsteps

A billion breaths

The bloody sky

Was once was so blue  
But after the billionth sunrise

It holds every

Body

In its arms

My last Indian sun is setting

So can't you spare me

Just this once

The parade of crooked elbows

Unfinished legs

Withered eyes

And festering belief

Yes. Yes. Yes.

I believe you

And I believe

All the smoking bones cast into the river

Will sink toward salvation

Toward a love

I cannot wash off

My hands

No matter how many fingers I fill

With gold

Swimming and drowning in my sea of privilege

I wonder

'Is it raining where you are?'

Don't forget me

Like I will forget you

Don't forget that

We can pay

And we will pay

For your absence

With your absence

## Gillard bombing on moral leadership

EDITORIAL

*Michael Mullins*

Jesuit bishop Enrique Figaredo of Batambang Cambodia recently [called](#) on the Australian Government to ratify the international Convention on Cluster Munitions, which comes into force on Sunday. His plea will probably fall on deaf ears, but there are strong reasons why it should not.



The [Convention](#) outlaws the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of the insidious and destructive weapons. They are large bombs that scatter thousands of small 'bomblets' over a wide area. While the bomblets are intended to explode before or upon impact, this doesn't always occur. The unexploded munitions can lie buried and dormant for many years until they eventually explode and maim or kill innocent civilians. They caused more civilian casualties in Iraq in 2003 and Kosovo in 1999 than any other weapons.

Australia was one of the 107 countries that adopted and signed the convention in 2008. However we have not proceeded to ratification despite Foreign Minister Stephen Smith [declaring](#) earlier this year that 'Australia is committed to a world free from cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war'.

In fact, before it eventually signed in December 2008, Australia was one of the nations actively frustrating international attempts to ban cluster bombs. At the time, the *Sydney Morning Herald* [reported](#) that France and Britain supported the ban, but Australia wanted to maintain the right to engage in joint operations with nations such as the US and Israel which were major users, producers and stockpilers of the weapon. Australia's Defence Department [maintained](#) that a ban would 'put Australia at a serious military disadvantage in future conflicts, which would be detrimental to our national interest'.

It appears that national interest and national self-interest are one and the same thing.

Australia dragging its heels on ratifying the cluster munitions ban is unconscionable. But what is worse is that, unlike Kevin Rudd during the 2007 election campaign, current Labor leader Julia Gillard appears to be in no mood to countenance conviction politics, which would be needed to move forward on ratifying the cluster bomb treaty without further delay. This and other moral concerns will always receive less priority when consensus rules.

It's easy to recall the glory days of the *Kevin07* era when Rudd said he would ratify Kyoto, and he did exactly that as soon as practicable after his government was elected. This time around, it's consensus all the way. Increasingly it's looking as if the Gillard Government does not deserve to be elected if Australia is serious about wanting to be a morally responsible international citizen.

## A Shakespearean view of Australian politics

### POLITICS

*Adrian Phoon*



Shortly after Kevin Rudd was ousted from the Lodge last month, Malcolm Turnbull decided to console him with some words from Shakespeare. In a Fairfax op-ed entitled 'Axed and humiliated: Someone should give this poor bastard a hug', Turnbull [quotes](#) Coriolanus:

You common cry of curs, whose breath I hate  
As reek of the rotten fen, whose loves I prize  
As the dead carcasses of unburied men  
That do corrupt my air, I banish you!

The Roman general Coriolanus is a reviled control freak, full of patrician disdain for the plebeian masses. He turns on Rome and defects to the enemy. Not a kind comparison to make.

Of course, Turnbull's own bloody leadership spill last year was more like something out of *Titus Andronicus*: like that tragedy's characters, the Liberal Party was predisposed to mutilate and cannibalise.

Shakespeare's plays have long been mined for political parallels. These comparisons thrive partly because Shakespeare is the acknowledged master-observer of human behaviour. His works are recognised as a readymade source for human archetypes and circumstances.

It has to do with the inherent drama of politics. Political crises can be extraordinarily theatrical (which is why they lend themselves so readily to stage and film adaptations). And some of our political leaders often seem to adore the limelight.

Usually we compare politicians to either Richard III (for cunning Machiavels) or Julius Caesar (for victims of political assassinations). Less often, Richard II (for doomed philosopher-kings) might get trotted out.

Comparing politicians to Shakespeare's characters is easy enough to do. Just take an incident — say, Julia Gillard's successful negotiations with the mining bosses — and find a vaguely appropriate analogue in Shakespeare: 'Our stern alarms changed to merry meetings.' That's Richard III.

Politicians sometimes invoke Shakespeare to flatter their own cause. But this rhetorical trick is fraught with dangers. The first risk is that they come off sounding pompous. The second

risk is that their analogies backfire.

In 1938, Neville Chamberlain prepared to fly off to Munich to appease Hitler by agreeing to the annexation of Sudetenland. He quoted *Henry IV*: 'When I come back I hope I may be able to say, as Hotspur said in *Henry IV*, "Out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety".'

But Arthur Greenwood later pointed out in the House of Commons that Chamberlain had failed to quote the rest of the passage: 'The purpose you undertake is dangerous; the friends you have named, uncertain; the time itself unsorted; and your whole plot too light for the counterpoise of so great an opposition.'

When pundits and comedians invoke Shakespeare, the connections are almost always mischievous. In the lead-up to the 2008 US presidential election, Stephen Colbert [compared](#) Barack Obama to Hamlet, 'an egghead elitist who can't make up his mind', is 'haunted by his father', and 'drove a good woman insane' (Hillary Clinton). John McCain was either Macbeth or Prospero, 'a powerful old man who lives in isolation with a hideous creature no one likes'. Cut to a picture of McCain with Joe Lieberman.

In the same episode of *The Colbert Report*, Harvard Shakespeare scholar Stephen Greenblatt compared Sarah Palin to Bottom from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Bottom 'thinks he can play all the parts, ready for anything, but is actually a horse's arse'.

Not all Shakespeare analogies are withering. Novelist Zadie Smith once likened Barack Obama to Shakespeare himself, whose capacity for sympathetic understanding is vast and various, and whose politics is notoriously difficult to discern from his works. Both Shakespeare and Obama, Smith [argued](#), were able to transcend party lines and cultural divisions. A high compliment to Obama, indeed.

In the long run, though, such flattery may be worse than a withering comparison, since it only sets up your hero for failure. With the US riven more than ever by party lines and cultural divisions, Obama will fall short of Shakespeare's apolitical reputation. But do we really want our politicians to be apolitical and never take a stand? Now that would be a tragedy.

As the Australian federal election looms, Shakespeare will inevitably re-emerge in our politics. Those who become victims of Shakespeare analogies should note: it's arguably better to be compared to a Shakespeare character — no matter how noxious the comparison — than not to be compared at all. A comparison suggests you have somehow erred magnificently; no comparison suggests that you possess no character.

Australian columnist David Burchell recently surveyed 'Shakespeare's gallery of tragic heroes' for 'somebody whose personality and predicament could be fitted' with Rudd. But, he [claimed](#), 'I couldn't see my way through it'. For Burchell, Rudd's inconsistency on policy issues made him worse than a tragic failure; it made him a failure lacking any stature, tragic or

otherwise.

As he hits the election campaign skids as a backbencher rather than Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd may well look back nostalgically on those days when he had to suffer Malcolm Turnbull's slings and arrows.

In the meantime, this election takes us into undiscovered country, as both Labor and the Liberals offer up people who were not even their own parties' leaders this time last year. To lead Australia or not to lead Australia? For Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott, that is the question.

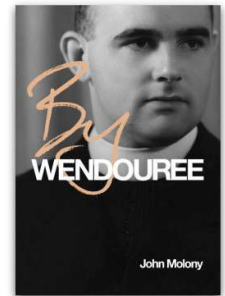
## Elegy for a priestly life

### BOOKS

*Andrew Hamilton*

**John Molony: *By Wendouree, Memories 1951-1963*. Connor Court Publishing, Ballan: 2010. ISBN 9781921421402**

*By Wendouree* is the second volume of John Molony's memoirs. It follows *Luther's Pine*, a vivid re-creation of his childhood and seminary days, which concluded with his ordination in Rome. An elegantly and often lyrically written work, its elegiac tone invited readers to ask what might have happened in succeeding years to explain this edge of sadness.



*By Wendouree* describes Molony's years of post-graduate study in Rome and his exploration of the Catholic movements that flowered in the Vatican Council. The story concludes with his resignation from the priesthood some years after returning to pastoral ministry in Ballarat.

The second volumes of autobiographical sketches rarely live up to the promise of the first. Like Maxim Gorky, whose magic *My Childhood* was followed by the less lustrous *My Universities*, Molony writes well but not as engrossingly in this second book. It inevitably lacks the sense of unlimited possibilities that *Luther's Pine* displayed. The patterns are already fixed, and transitions are freighted with past history.

But the personal story retains its interest, and Molony illuminates many aspects of the larger history of his times. In particular he experienced the vitality of the Catholic movements that flourished after the 1939 war. The Jocist movement led by Joseph Cardijn that animated the Young Christian Workers and Young Christian Students movements in Australia was particularly significant in his life.

He also had time to observe the broader development of Catholic Action in Europe and Australia. The relationship of the Catholic Church to politics was fraught in Italy where the election of a Communist government was a real possibility. His experience and reflection there led him to be reserved about Bob Santamaria's movement in Australia. He thought that the close relationship between the Church and political life that it entailed could only lead to grief.

He also disagreed with Santamaria's attempts to centralise control over Catholic groups in the universities and over the YCW. Molony formed very cordial relations with Archbishop Justin Simmons, Daniel Mannix's unwanted assistant. Simmons indeed would have liked him as his assistant bishop. In his judgment of people with whom he agreed and with whom he disagreed, Molony is consistently generous and perceptive.

One of Molony's early books was a perceptive study of the Roman mould of the Australian



Catholic Church. His own story offers material for complex reflection on the effects of residence in Rome on young students for the Catholic priesthood, and so on the churches to which they returned.

To an Australian country boy with little knowledge of the history of his own land, Rome offered a sense of a long history written into the stones of the city. It allowed seminarians to see themselves as heirs to the finest flowering of Rome in the Catholic Church. Their Rome was Catholic Rome. Add to that an abundance of churches and splendid liturgy everywhere round, and the imaginative power of Rome for young men can readily be understood.

Their Rome, too, was hierarchically constructed. Their colleges were likely to be headed by monsignors, with Cardinals as presidents. And at the centre of this world, holding it together, was the Pope who, like the Cardinals, was not a distant figure but was regularly seen and occasionally spoken to and was the subject of normal college gossip.

This experience inevitably shaped students' understanding of the relationships between local churches, and between the Pope and their bishops. The more powerfully because seminarians were drawn from many lands and visitors came from around the world. The narrowness of the Roman stage was obscured, and the international pretensions of its setting embellished.

But Molony was able to go beyond Rome as a centre of church government to see the reality of church life for struggling Romans. He had pastoral care for a poor Roman parish community. There he tested against the reality of a hard headed congregation the ideas he heard from Cardijn and others about a reflective and cooperative ministry.

Molony's eventual resignation from priestly ministry receives only a few pages at the end of his book. When he returned to Ballarat to pastoral ministry, he experienced increasing discouragement and isolation. This compounded the lack of support he had received during his years in Rome. He gave himself fully to his ministry, but found the relations with those senior to him cold and repressive.

When considered from the perspective of the final chapters of *By Wendouree*, the incorporation of Luther into the title of the first volume seems full of portent. Like Luther in his early years as an Augustinian monk, Molony had an extremely high and idealistic understanding of priesthood to which he gave himself fully. By the standards he set himself he could only have judged himself a failure.

But in contrast to Luther, he never discovered the grace that would free him from the guilt and anxiety caused by his not meeting the expectations made of him. Nor, like Luther, did he reject the pattern of church relationships and theological assumptions that endorsed these expectations. He simply lost hope that he could live as a good priest.

Despite the fruitfulness of his later life, the elegiac tone enshrines his memory of failure and

of exclusion from a garden to which he had been given access. Readers who have been given such generous access to so many gardens through this and other works of Molony will feel for him in his sense of loss. But they will find it impossible to share his critical judgment of himself.

## Aker sacking an example for political parties

SPORT

*Andrew Hamilton*



It seems appropriate that Jason Akermanis was shafted in the middle of an election campaign. The tensions between conflicting interests that led to his sacking have also been exhibited in the election campaign. But in politics they have been negotiated much more disreputably.

In the Akermanis story the individual good, the common good and the good of sectional interests have clearly stood in tension with one another. Akermanis' individual interest was to exploit his footballing talent in order to increase his income and to prepare for a media career after football. So he contributed to the media while continuing to play football.

The common good to which Akermanis contributed by playing football was the happiness and success of the Western Bulldogs. This was not incompatible with his individual interests, but stood in tension with them. Comments by an individual on the club to which he belongs are always likely to threaten the culture of trust on which the welfare of the club depends.

The sectional interests in the Akermanis affair were the media to which he directly and indirectly contributed. Controversial stories that provoke internal conflict are the food and drink of sports media. The thirst for sensational stories was in tension both with the good of the club and ultimately with Akermanis' own good.

The end of the affair saw the club properly gave priority to the common good over Akermanis' individual good. But it also revealed the conflict of interests inherent in the financial reliance of football clubs on the media. The interest aroused by the media adventures for which Jason Akermanis was sacked by the Bulldogs ultimately provides the justification for the media to invest in football, and so underwrites the existence of the Bulldogs and other football clubs.

The tension between the individual good, the common good and the good of sectional interests seen in Akermanis' sacking turned malignant in the Melbourne Storm affair. The common good of a happy and successful team was completely compromised. The good of individual players was secured by clandestine payments.

It then became apparent that sectional interests in the form of a media company effectively controlled the Storm. It sacked its independent directors, commissioned studies which were not made public, and cited the studies in order to apportion and publicise blame and innocence in the scandal.

It was hard to avoid the conclusion that the good of sectional interests — profitability and

avoidance of embarrassment — was given highest priority. It was also difficult for anyone outside the world of Rugby League to understand why any player with self respect and any interest in belonging to a strong club would want to join a club run in this way.

That brings us despondently to the election campaign. It would be possible to see the replacement of Mr Rudd by Ms Gillard as reflecting the triumph of the common good in the form of the party over the good of the individual. But in elections the individual good is really represented by the political parties. Their desire to rule is in tension with the good of the nation, the common good. And the good both of political parties and of the nation stands in tension with sectional interests — with business, media and influential groups of voters, for example.

This election campaign is peculiarly depressing because the tension that ought to exist between the parties and common good has collapsed. The treatment of the mining tax and of emissions trading showed that both parties were prepared to sell out to vested interests. They showed themselves equally ready to pander to the prejudices of voters in marginal seats when responding to asylum seekers and to immigration.

The irony of the campaign so far is that, as the common good has become identified with the interests of the parties, the wind has been taken out of the sails of sectional interests. The media which have generally promoted selling out to the big miners and endorsed a populist exclusion of asylum seekers have found that the Coalition, which normally represents their cause, has dealt itself out of further restricting the rights of workers and of opposing moves that will limit business migration.

But sectional interests are experts in making wind, and doubtless they will be able to work effectively on the self-interest of both parties. In the meantime, though, we can feel sorry Aker in his disappointment, but encouraged that the Western Bulldogs have had the courage to give priority to the common good over individual and sectional interests, come what may. And we can dream of a distant day when the senior figures in political parties may follow their example and also lean into the wind.

## Caravaggio's profane eye for the sacred

### APPLICATION

*Luke Walladge*

It was always going to end badly.

He ran with a rough crowd, did Michelangelo Merisi de Caravaggio. Roaming the cobbles under moonlight, a captive to his vices, the father of modern art was an incident waiting to happen. He promised rivals he would 'fry their balls in oil' and fought duels for the honour of prostitutes. He drew steel on a waiter over a disputed plate of artichokes. He wounded policemen. He killed a man in the street and had to go on the run.



And finally, 400 years ago this week, he died penniless, desperate, feverish and alone.

Yet somehow, during it all, he produced what may be the most arresting, influential and remarkable art in the history of the Christian West.

Caravaggio was the Jim Morrison of his time — Rimbaud with a paintbrush. There was little that was pious or holy about the man with a gift for holy and sacred art. Caravaggio's world was the world of drunken singing, back-alley brawls, prostitutes, thieves and ne'er-do-wells. Not for him the abstinence of the monk. Caravaggio desired the physical, the earthly.

But perhaps if he hadn't been such a drunken, violent, criminal, he may never have been human enough, disturbed enough or repentant of enough sin to produce the terrible realism for which he is justly famous.

Much has been written about Caravaggio's technical genius, his ability to use light and contrast to throw his subjects into stark relief. Artists owe much to his work, not just his arresting colours but also his skill at painting from life without repeated sketches. The direct-to-canvas approach gives his work an immediacy and an intimacy that drags us into the scene, grabs us, forces us to engage with what the artist makes us see.

It is in this drama of the sudden, the explosive, that Caravaggio breaks down the wall between the viewer and the viewed. One cannot be disengaged from his work. Look, he says, look at the great and terrible acts happening, right here, right now! Look on and be amazed. Look on with awe and wonder.

But the genius and the impact of Caravaggio goes far beyond the technical. In his *Young Sick Bacchus*, we begin to see the early stirrings of his revolution. Bacchus is not a beautiful cherub, as we expect, but a green-tinged, unhealthy adolescent. A closer look shows the filthy fingernails, the rottenness of the grapes, the pallor of the skin. Instead of the divine becoming

human, the all too human has been infused with the divine; Caravaggio has reversed the order of things.

This, of course, was an age when art was supposed to represent the higher things, the pure and the noble. But Caravaggio never did things the way they were supposed to be done.

Has there ever been a better statement on our spiritual blindness than his *Calling of St Matthew*? Among the pickpockets and cardsharps, Christ slips in almost unnoticed. No choirs of angels, no trumpets. The players at the table are too engrossed in their gambling to notice the Son of God — all except Matthew, who points to himself as if to ask, 'Who, me?'

Has there been a more realistic, more human depiction of the Assumption than his *Death of the Virgin*? Caravaggio's apostles are not sainted men of grace, but rather all too frail, sobbing, silent in their grief. This is no breach of doctrine. Rather, it is acknowledgement that the promises of faith do not remove pain — that doubt and fear and sorrow are not failures of God or man.

Caravaggio brings us, the ordinary soul, into the picture. At the same time as he breaks down the barriers between the observed and the observer. He introduces the common, the profane, into the sacred.

Is there a better expression of the Incarnation?

It is the story of faith that we are found by God where we are — in our inadequacy, our pride, our sin. Truly, we are not left there to our own devices, but while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. And it is for that truth that Caravaggio's art, 400 years after his death, is as worthy today as it was when he lived.

Time and again his art confounds us, grounds us, brings us back to the essence of things. Not for a brawler and drunkard and possibly bipolar criminal is the false piety of haloes or the cleanliness of saints. Caravaggio knew the darkness, knew dirt, knew sin. He knew the taverns and smell of rotting meat, the markets where you could find flesh and fraud and nearly always someone wailing with dysentery. His Christ dwelt among the sick and came to save the lost.

We need to be reminded that Christ called the imperfect — Matthew, the crooked tax collector, for one — not the pious. The church is not a house of saints but a refuge for sinners. Caravaggio gets the intersection of humanity and divinity, of light and dark, just about perfectly right. We can identify with his subjects because he identified with them himself, often to the scandal of patrons and priests.

But in bringing the beggar to the table, Caravaggio's paintings still show us what Jesus of Nazareth was on about with his radical talk of redemption — no haloes, just humanity.

## Sympathy for the man who killed God

### FILMS

*Tim Kroenert*

**Creation (PG). Director: John Amiel. Starring: Paul Bettany, Jennifer Connelly, Toby Jones, Jeremy Northam, Martha West. 108 minutes**



One hundred and fifty years after its publication, Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, as articulated in his opus *The Origin of Species*, underpins mainstream science and animates debate among scientific and religious communities. The BBC backed biopic *Creation*, based on the biography *Annie's Box* written by Darwin's great-great-grandson Randal Keynes, highlights a similarly heated dialogue occurring for Darwin on a deeply personal level.

Darwin (Bettany) is a man of decimated faith. The cause of the decimation was the death of his eldest daughter, Annie (West), whose ghost visits him throughout the film. The delusional Darwin seeks advice and comfort from this apparition of a child who, in life, had a curiosity about and fascination with life and the world that reflected his own.

Darwin is a man who is well aware that his obsessive pet theory has the potential to destabilise the devoutly religious 19th century English society in the midst of which his work takes place. This potential is highlighted none too subtly by biologist Thomas Huxley (Jones) – nicknamed 'Darwin's Bulldog' for his advocacy for Darwin's evolutionary theory – who early in the film congratulates a horrified Darwin for having successfully killed God.

This notion seems to terrify and haunt Darwin. Despite his scientific convictions and his professed lack of faith, the idea of 'killing God' causes him great anguish. In one scene, after a night spent scribbling his manuscript, he is shown frantically scrubbing at the ink stains on his fingers – Lady Macbeth trying to remove mythical blood.

His anxieties are exacerbated by the concerns of two devoutly religious people in his life, his wife, Emma (Connelly), and his once close friend, Rev. Innes (Northam). Darwin's marriage is strained by his and Emma's failure to confront their grief over Annie's death; Darwin's planned sleight against religion intensifies the tension.

His relationship with Innes, meanwhile, suffered its greatest blow when (we learn in flashback) Innes punished Annie at school for repeating her father's theories.

The film is kind to all parties, except perhaps to the callous scientist Huxley, whom Jones portrays as an arrogant, spitting villain. It is certainly unrelentingly sympathetic to Darwin; almost overbearing in its efforts to portray him (his semi-regular dips into madness and his obsession with quack medical cures) as a broken and troubled man.

The film's apparent unwillingness to cause offence is to its detriment. There is an insipidness to the film that is unlikely to please parties at either extreme on the science-religion spectrum, although those who have settled in a middle ground such as intelligent design may be drawn to its clever tagline 'faith evolves'.

That said, the emphasis on Darwin's relationship with Annie is effective, particularly in scenes where he regales her (or her ghost) with tales of his exploits in the Galapagos Islands. The film aims for the personal rather than polemical, and exhibits much charm in that respect.



## Moving forward from East Timor Solution

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

*Frank Brennan*

The Australian people are now deciding whether they want to 'move forward' with Julia Gillard or 'stand up for Australia and for real action' with Tony Abbott. In the mix is the divergent stand on the processing of unvisaed asylum seekers.



The Rudd Government scrapped the Pacific Solution and temporary protection visas (TPVs), insisting that detention of asylum seekers would be a last resort with an assurance that health, security and identity checks would be complete within 90 days.

The Opposition insists that these reforms put sugar on the table attracting asylum seekers to engage in secondary movement so as to obtain a more benign migration outcome. The Abbott led opposition would take the sugar off the table reinstating TPVs and the Pacific solution.

Mind you, there is no evidence that TPVs reduced the attractiveness of Australia as a destination, given that boat arrivals increased the year after TPVs were first introduced. The initial deterrent effect of the Howard Pacific Solution was the pronouncement by the Prime Minister that proven refugees would not be allowed to settle in Australia. Most of them did eventually settle in Australia or New Zealand, being indifferent about which side of the Tasman ditch they ended up.

So the practical deterrent effect of TPVs and the Pacific Solution second time around is now in doubt. It's like the threat to turn around the boats. These 'deterrents' do not work and people keep coming whether or not there is sugar on the table. The asylum seekers figure, 'At least there is a table. We may just have to wait longer.'

There is a new common thread between the major parties. They are both open to the idea of a regional processing centre for asylum seekers who reach the region in direct flight from persecution in faraway places like Afghanistan, Iraq and Sri Lanka. Gillard, at pains to distinguish herself from her predecessor, has publicly floated the idea of a regional processing centre in East Timor.

Given that Kevin Rudd refused point blank to discuss the matter with Jose Ramos Horta, President of East Timor, on his state visit to Canberra on Rudd's last day as Prime Minister, Gillard decided not only to raise the topic with him but to herald the conversation even before Australian officials had the opportunity to discuss the matter with the governments of East Timor and Indonesia.

This was a move designed purely for domestic electoral consumption, taken with a reckless

disregard for the niceties of international diplomacy.

The Timorese are used to short term, half clever ideas from Australians when dealing with asylum seekers. Back in 2001, the Howard Government, wondering what to do with the 433 persons on board the Tampa, asked Horta and other Timorese leaders to take them, as a favour. The Timorese were minded to help out their big neighbour, in part as a gesture of thanks for all Australia had done for them.

Sergio De Mello was head of the UN in Timor in those days. He had worked for UNHCR and insisted that such a move would be unprincipled. It was, and it did not happen.

A regional processing centre may be a good idea. Its location in East Timor would be unprincipled and unworkable. Gillard's pre-emptive announcement will ensure that it will be anywhere but East Timor.

The Europeans have been trying for years to float the proposal of a regional processing centre. It has got nowhere. A decade ago, Philip Ruddock even sounded out the Indonesians about the lease of an Indonesian island for such a centre. He got nowhere. If such a centre were to be established, there would be a need to fulfil the following conditions:

1. Humane detention
2. Transparent, timely and fair processing
3. Reasonable access for lawyers, health professionals and other support personnel
4. Prompt resettlement on establishment of refugee claims
5. Local community acceptance of the facility
6. Avoidance of the honey pot syndrome
7. Assistance to those whose asylum claims are rejected for safe and well-organised return to country of origin

Presuming the major political parties agree to these preconditions, the matter should now be put aside during the election campaign, allowing the new government of whichever

persuasion to work through the detail of these preconditions.

Health Minister Nicola Roxon rightly concedes there would be a need to consider the psychological health of people, including children, in such a facility. There would be a need to consider how the 90-day rule for processing might be fulfilled.

When the Pacific Solution was in place, my own visa to visit Nauru at the request of the Church community there was cancelled peremptorily by the Nauruan government. Ruddock assured me he had not blackballed me but he 'could not speak for Alexander' (Downer).

Access would need to be assured, even for do gooders!

A true regional response to the issue would include the possibility that refugees could be resettled in any of the participating countries, including East Timor and Australia.

When a detention centre was set up at Baxter, many local residents at Port Augusta complained that the detainees received better food and services than they did. Such complaints will be commonplace and even more justified in places like East Timor.

If the centre were located in East Timor, the thousands of asylum seekers waiting in Java could simply ride the ferry to Kupang, travel overland through the porous East Timor land border and ask for residence in the regional processing centre, awaiting prompt resettlement in Australia or New Zealand. That would be a real honey pot.

In principle there is nothing wrong with a regional processing centre. But its location and working principles await more mature consideration than Gillard gave in her Lowy Institute address. No matter who is elected to govern, they will readily appreciate Rudd's hesitation in raising the matter directly with Horta.

This idea requires a lot of detailed diplomatic work behind the scenes. If Gillard is elected Prime Minister, it could be Rudd's first real test as Foreign Minister. Whoever is elected, and wherever such a centre is located, it will not be East Timor.

To 'move forward' together and 'take real action' on this issue, we will need to look elsewhere in the region.

## I am every asylum seeker

NON-FICTION

*Greg Foyster*



I was born in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. I was born in Kashmir, between India and Pakistan. I was born in Iran. I was born in Iraq. I was born in Sri Lanka.

I worked as an architect, building up my business. I worked as a negotiator, liaising with the government. I worked as an engineer. I worked as a veterinarian. I worked as an accountant.

I am a member of the Hazara ethnic group. I am opposed to the government's occupation of Kashmir. I am a firm believer in women's rights. I am a whistleblower for government corruption. I am an ethnic Tamil.

I was held down while I watched my father beaten to death. I was kidnapped by the government and taken to an interrogation room. I was knocked out with the butt of a rifle. I was shot three times. I was arrested and put in a camp.

They kept me in a solitary cell for four days without food or water. They drove a nail through my thumb and put fresh chilli in the wound. They beat the soles of my feet with canes. They pulled out my fingernails. They placed a metal roller on my shins and applied pressure until I screamed.

I bribed a guard to help me escape in the middle of the night. I fled through the mountains and a farmer smuggled me across the border. I hid underground for five months. I sold my property and used the money for a plane ticket. I cut a hole in the wire fence and crawled through the jungle to a safehouse.

I got on the first boat I could, wherever it was going. I paid a man \$7000 to take me somewhere safe, but he left with my money. I spent months in Indonesia hiding in the forest. I was dumped in the middle of the ocean and had to swim to shore. I arrived on Ashmore Reef and collapsed from thirst and heat exhaustion.

I was so relieved to be in Australia! I was happy to be safe from the militia! I was alive, I was overjoyed, I was finally free!

I was then locked up on Christmas Island for three years without a lawyer. I was put behind bars and razor wire in the middle of the desert. I was called by a number not a name. I was kept in an isolation cell. I was beaten and abused by the guards.

Why am I locked up if I haven't committed a crime? How can I be in prison without a trial? Why can't they treat me like a human being? Why am I kept here all alone? Why haven't I

been told when this will end?

I am depressed and have constant headaches. I am frightened and wake up screaming. I am losing my mind. I have sewn my lips together. I have tried to kill myself.

I didn't want to be a refugee. I didn't want to come to your country. I didn't want to leave my family. I didn't want to lose my house. I didn't want to have to start again.

I am not here to get rich. I am not here to receive charity. I am not here to steal your job. I am not here to cheat the system. I am not here by choice.

I am here because otherwise I would be dead. I am here because the militia threatened to kill me and my family. I am here because I was shot. I am here because my house was burned down. I am here because I have nowhere else to go.

I was born in a dangerous land. I was persecuted for who I am and what I believe. I was tortured in an interrogation room. I was dumped in the ocean. I was locked up in detention.

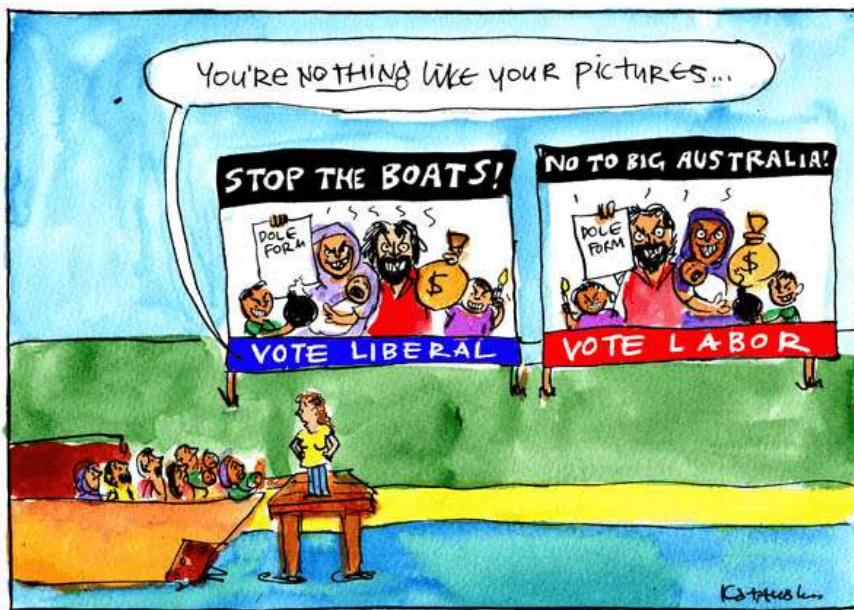
I am an asylum seeker, every asylum seeker, and this is my story. I am not a 'queue jumper'. I am not an 'illegal arrival'. I am not a 'political issue'.

I am a human being. Please treat me like one.

## Campaign of caricatures

CARTOON

*Fiona Katauskas*



## Charlie Darwin

POETRY

*Various*

### Passing beauty

It's moving, just ahead  
of the player's most clever feet.  
Every four years, we fill a cup,  
then pour it out, a month of dreams.  
Was it just last week that Bergkamp  
flicked with orange elegance,  
side-footing space and time?  
No, he is long gone now,  
off fielding forty years.  
Others follow. Messy time  
melts beauty, remoulds it,  
casts it always anew.  
It never ages, constantly fired,  
as we fade, we watchers,  
yesterday's players, passing.  
Twenty sips at the cup  
will fill a lifetime;  
held safe in keeper's hands.

—*P. S. Cottier*

### Charlie Darwin

On the back of a ten pound note  
Definitely simian features beneath those whiskers —  
The eyes too close, the low bridge of the nose,

Those long ears; pendulous lobes.  
There's definitely a great big hairy chest,  
Beneath that stiff Victorian coat.

—*James Morris*

**Not a prayer, more like express post**

Our miners  
Which art in Australia  
Famous be thy names  
Thy hearts awaken  
Thy profits share  
With the poor both here and overseas  
Show us this day our country's generosity  
And forgive us our honesty  
As we forgive those who spin profits against us  
And lead us not into depression  
But deliver us from crass greed  
For thine is the earth's wealth, today's potential glory  
But it's never for ever  
Amen

—*Jill Sutton*

**Time lingers**

to wash away words  
while the leaf dreams  
inside the leaf  
the flower lifts its head  
from its scattered sleep



and meets the sun

—*Lidija Å imkute*

**In all the many malls**

Lou Reed still belts it out

While Andy Warhol revolves at

33rpm from far down below

Watching history repeat

Into naughty noughty nostalgia

For such bravado can only be

Applauded if tickets sell

While greatest hits fill the shelves

In all the many malls

—*B. W. Shearer*

**before the fall**

before the fall of thinking,

before rain,

before the song of wet earth,

low white noise.

hear it as the chant of

the unseens —

ripple in a magpie's throat —

as the sigh

of a city's prayer cushions —

forgiveness

has the weight of faith and cloud.

and now rain,

symphonic on tin, washing

walls of doubt

—*Kevin Gillam*

**Indications**

A pall descends,  
a noticing of mixed arrangements,  
appointments double booked,  
time out of kilter, meetings not attended.

Reticence accompanies engagement,  
reluctance to become too fully present,  
consciousness of a cloudiness in days  
formerly transparent.

Voice tone, word choice alter.

Less apparent, the picking up and putting down  
or starting to put down, a wrong drawer opened;  
actions observed, corrected.

From lull and torpor brisk activity  
sharpens awareness. A task completed  
seems to satisfy.

Emergence and retreat conform the days.

—*Lerys Byrnes*

**paint**

your paint  
is layered, scraped  
& wiped coloured  
borders divide  
the canvas like a country  
like the parts

of a long marriage  
a chorus of roles  
sung around  
& around in the cry  
of grandchildren  
& their grandchildren  
fluttering a story  
a blanket shake song of dust

—*Rory Harris*

**Black cockatoos**

Presaged  
by primordial cries  
slow  
and awkward  
they came,  
pulled as if  
by unseen strings  
to feast on pine seeds  
Mourning-suit black,  
collapsing  
like broken umbrellas  
in the foliage  
And with the balance  
and poise  
of trapeze artistes,  
slightly tipsy  
They swing, shuffle

and sidle

their way

to lunch

—*Roland Ashby*

**Astronomy**

The astronomical

paradox

is closest

when farthest

away.

—*Michael Crotty*

## Taking science back from the scientists

### SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

*T. J. Martin*



The aim of a University education, in the view of John Henry, Cardinal Newman in the mid-19th century, is not primarily to fit students for this or that particular profession, but to develop their minds, to be able to exercise judgment, engage fruitfully in debate and conversation, to interpret what is happening in society and to bring insights to bear on these events.

My working life has been in biological sciences and I've always been grateful for my good fortune in seeing the complexity, beauty and coordination of the processes in the living cells of the body. In my case it invigorated a belief that there must be a higher influence that is ultimately responsible for this — and such a belief remains entirely consistent with evolution as proposed by Charles Darwin.

Another view often expressed is that science understands this complexity more and more, and this process of revelation really means that science can explain everything. Currently that is a confrontational topic between religion and science, but there is really no basis for such confrontation. It is made popular by a number of most strident publicists, who despite the fact that they believe there is no God, spend an inordinate time and effort in discussing him.

Scientific research poses ethical questions that need to be considered when embarking upon experiments. For example, the question of experimentation on human embryos for the purpose of making embryonic stem cells. For the most part, such ethical questions require little more than sound logic and common sense in resolving them, but in an increasingly secular society it has become the fashion to blame religion for any constraints put upon the advances that could be made in science.

I believed it was not right to manufacture human embryos for research, but I decided to use scientific arguments against this. In fact that made the task easier. It was truly astonishing to see how regularly very bad science was presented publicly by scientists who wanted to do such work.

The result was that a great deal of bad science won much positive publicity. What is needed to combat that is more people in the community who are capable of thinking things through and reaching their own conclusions.

By no means should one simply accept as truth the science presented through the lay press. Work to develop your own coordinated views. A fundamental question that applies across the board to ethical questions in science is: in a world where we are capable of doing everything, should we do everything we can do? I think not.

In this area of embryonic stem cell research, eventually a wonderful outcome was achieved in the last three to five years, led by the work of a young Japanese scientist, who is actually an orthopaedic surgeon. What Shinya Yamanaka did was genuinely revolutionary. Through trial and error he arrived at a simple set of genes to add to normal body cells to make them behave like embryonic stem cells — that is, they were capable of being changed to any cell in the body. In doing so he overcame the ethical problems associated with the use of ES cells, and so has changed the climate around such work irreversibly.

He had embarked upon this work because he felt that it was not right to use embryos for research, and set about seeking an alternative in a positive way.

There are very many areas of our future development that will be influenced by scientific advances. Science will produce new industries and jobs, and will enable us to tackle seemingly intractable social and environmental problems. With these will certainly come ethical questions, for which educated people need to be prepared.

The community needs to be much more capable of questioning and understanding science — and with questioning comes understanding. It's up to the community to press for this with its questioning, and educated people in professions such as teaching and nursing are people that we will be relying on to lead the way.

Generally speaking, the amount of knowledge we acquire is sufficient: what is more important is to make our own synthesis of that knowledge. Don't leave science to the scientists. Don't have them tell you what is good for you. Make them accountable, be constructive critics and analysts by collecting the necessary facts, identifying errors in logic, and looking for the truth.

## Forget Keating-Hawke soapie, give Rudd a hug

EDITORIAL

*Michael Mullins*

Last Thursday Prime Minister Julia Gillard [told](#) journalists at the National Press Club that she is enjoying the latest public stoush between former Labor Prime Ministers Bob Hawke and Paul Keating.



‘What I’d say is they are two great Australians passionate about their politics, passionate about their politics to this day, having a passionate discussion,’ she said. ‘I’d have to say as someone with an intense interest in politics I’m enjoying it and I think many in this room probably are as well.’

She is implying that the arguably indulgent second Blanche d’Alpuget biography of Hawke, and the vitriolic [response](#) from Paul Keating, represent little more than soap opera for political junkies. If, as it seems, that is true, it does underline the rapaciousness of dwelling on the political past in this manner.

On the other hand, good stories of the twists and turns of political legacies can make a serious contribution to nation building, and they should be given more attention. Perhaps the best example is the bond that has developed between former bitter enemies Gough Whitlam and Malcolm Fraser, which should not be written off as an amusing quirk of fate.

Instead it is the stuff of divine grace, and together they provide a model for national reconciliation. Rather than squabbling over the past, they have proved they can work together to contribute to improved governance. For example, before the last federal election, they made a joint [statement](#) stressing the link between ministerial accountability and political integrity. Their story witnesses the reality that what unites us is stronger than what divides us. It is worth repeating and celebrating.

Appropriate regard for the dignity of current political players will also prove crucial for Gillard. Whatever transpired in Parliament House on the evening of Tuesday 23 June, it remains in the balance whether former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd will prove an asset or a liability for the Labor Government, assuming that it is returned to office at the election on 21 August.

When it’s time to determine the makeup of the new Federal Cabinet, Gillard, and those whose opinion she values, including the public, can choose whether to give him the benefit of the doubt. With lessons to be learned from the examples of recent scorned Labor leaders Simon Crean, Kim Beazley and Mark Latham, there is a variety of opinions. One that is worth quoting is that of Frank Brennan, [published](#) in *The Australian* on Friday, who longs for a political morality to guide politicians at times of political upheaval.

‘Some [politicians] have put store in loyalty; others have subscribed to the ‘whatever it takes’ school of politics. Before the election is called, it is appropriate to note that Rudd did a power of good leading us on issues such as the Aboriginal apology and sparing us the worst of the global financial crisis. We can express regret at the way Rudd was done in, regardless of which way we will vote at the election. And we can ask in a non-partisan way that he just be left alone or, as Malcolm Turnbull suggested, given a hug.’



## Election year blogs stifle democracy

### POLITICS

*Ben Coleridge*



With the campaign underway for the 21 August Federal Election, the blogosphere is erupting with comments, arguments and counter-arguments, swamping the browser with opinions from a jungle of sources. New online discussion spaces have been opened and the mainstream press is flooded with commentary.

In the comments section of one blog, a person had left the warning, 'be careful, blogs can be dangerous'. This comment provoked the response: 'Dangerous? The blogosphere expands public discussion, how can that be dangerous? Isn't that democratic?'

The truth is that much blog commentary does not fit the definition of discussion — in my dictionary, 'critical examination by argument'. It is instead often mere assertion and/or animadversion.

Nevertheless, democracy as discussion is an interesting idea. Walter Bagehot, one of the early editors of *The Economist*, famously coined the phrase 'government by discussion' to describe democratic government. Point taken: obviously democracy does involve a lot of discussion at many different levels.

But the idea has limitations: for example, perhaps the inconclusiveness of discussion gave rise to the notion of parliament as a talk-shop where nothing is ever resolved and talk is itself the purpose. Moreover, the fact that in a democracy we are free to 'discuss' is not an unqualified benefit. Simone Weil (pictured) wrote that the notion of a 'right' is far removed from the 'pure good'. Why? Because 'the possession of a right implies the possibility of making a good or bad use of it'. Some discussions can be bad discussions and not necessarily good for democracy.

We need to find a stronger idea than the idea of 'government by discussion' to describe what we should hope of democracy, including in its blogosphere expression. As the blogosphere reminds us, discussion can be driven by manifold motivations: particular interests, prejudices, leisure choices, friendships and so on. People engage in discussion for the sake of it, as a way of communicating, of expressing opinions and sharing information.

But 'discussion' does not necessarily imply a process driven by the desire to reach common goals. On the other hand 'discussion' and its associate 'argument' can imply the impossibility of commonality. Indeed, 'discussion' is not a process that necessarily implies the achievement of anything beyond the airing of points of view.

Another way of thinking about democracy is through the idea of 'democracy as public

reasoning’, an idea which has been floated by various philosophers including Weil, John Rawls and Amartya Sen.

Unlike ‘discussion’, ‘reasoning’ implies a strong purpose — you don’t reason without a hoped for conclusion based on reaching shared commitment. The notion of ‘public reasoning’ implies a collective effort to solve problems based on mutual respect. As Adam Lister puts it, ‘the distinctive contribution of public reason is to constitute a relationship of civic friendship in a diverse society’.

Anyone who has wanted to contribute to a media forum but who, after reading the comments stream, has reflected on the pointlessness of the exercise, will understand the value of the two things that a culture of ‘public reasoning’ would provide: purpose and respect.

The fact that we are ‘discussing’ (making assertions and arguing) more than ever before due to the internet and the blogosphere, does not prove that our democracy is in better shape. In the deluge of commentary which floods across online media forums, many voices are drowned out.

For example, on certain online forums (including mainstream media outlets) it is impossible to refer to religious faith without being smothered in vitriol. This environment precludes reasoning because reasoning, unlike argument, requires a willingness to listen to the other and to approach questions through mutual respect. It even requires us to step outside our own positional view of the world and into someone else’s.

Reasoning also takes time, since it involves, according to the dictionary, the need ‘to think out a problem logically’ in a process of ‘drawing inferences from facts or premises’. It is demanding of time in a way that does not particularly suit our contemporary habits of instant response via blog comment, ‘tweeting’ or poll responses.

Of course the idea of ‘public reasoning’ does have limitations: we cannot always overcome differences or find common ground. But inherent in it is that enabling objective, how to find a way forward with reference to each other.

Which brings me back to my initial remark about the onslaught of commentary across the blogosphere. The question is, do the hundreds of blogs, online media outlets and sources of on-the-go information help us to reason with each other? Or do they inhibit public reasoning and replace it with mere ‘discussion’? If they inhibit our reasoning together, then how do they really deepen democracy?