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Shedding light on Christian Australia's bleak prognosis

VIDEO

Peter Kirkwood

Gary Bouma is one of most respected observers of religion in this country. He is a sociologist and has worked in research and academia at the highest level. So he brings prodigious skills and a wealth of experience to the task.

His prognosis for institutional Christianity is particularly bleak. It's a story of aging congregations and rapid decline. He predicts that, by 2021, less than 50 per cent of Australians will call themselves Christian.

Bouma spoke to Eureka Street TV at the Centenary Conference of the [Melbourne College of Divinity](#) held at Trinity College, Melbourne in July 2010. The overall theme of the conference was the future of religion in Australian society. He talks about the factors that have shaped religion in Australia, the decline of all Christian denominations, and the future of belief and spirituality in this country.

Bouma had unlikely beginnings for this role as commentator on religion in Australia. He was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1942, and is a citizen of both Australia and the US. He undertook all his academic training in theology and sociology at various universities in America, and only came to Australia in his late 30s.

Since arriving here, he has worked mainly at Monash University in Melbourne, and is now Emeritus Professor of Sociology at Monash's School of Political and Social Inquiry.

Bouma's deep and abiding interest in religion is not just an academic exercise. He is an Anglican priest, and is actively involved in a variety of religious organisations, particularly in the field of inter-religious dialogue.

In 2005 he was appointed as UNESCO Chair of Inter-religious and Intercultural Relations for the Asia-Pacific region. And he was Chair of the local Board of Management of the Parliament of the World's Religions held in Melbourne in December 2009.

Bouma has written scores of articles and book chapters, and over 20 books. A few of the latest are *Democracy in Islam* (2007), authored with Sayed Khatab, and *Australian Soul: Religion and Spirituality in the 21st Century* (2006), which won first prize for Christian theology publications awarded by the Australasian Theological Forum.

Trade troops for refugees as Afghanistan worsens

HUMAN RIGHTS

Greg Foyster



Journalists and politicians like to talk about the human face of a conflict. But when it comes to the war in Afghanistan and the Australian Government's arbitrary discrimination of Afghan refugees, we don't have a human face. We have a series of human numbers. The first is 1005628.

No it's not the number of casualties, of limbs lost to improvised explosive devices, or the cryptic military code for an assassination attempt, although those grisly stats will come later. It's the [case number](#) for an elderly Afghan woman recently ruled to be a genuine refugee.

Ms 1005628 explained she couldn't return to Afghanistan because her 'entire family's political ideology was opposing the Taliban and the Al Qaeda'. Her late son had worked as a government official for many years and had written about his political opinions. She said she would also be targeted because she was a widowed woman and that 'the Afghan authorities were unable to provide security to its citizens as there was a war going on between the Afghan government forces against Al Qaeda and the Taliban'.

The Refugee Review Tribunal accepted her claims and ruled that Australia owed her protection.

This decision was published on 30 September, the same day the Australian Government announced it would lift a freeze on Afghan asylum claims, which had been in place since April. Newly-minted Immigration Minister Chris Bowen told Parliament that now the freeze has been lifted, 'the percentage of successful refugee claims is likely to be lower than in the past'. This assertion was based on 'more exhaustive country information'.

Yet this country information, which was not specified, runs counter to the most recent, publicly available documents on Afghanistan. Media reports, UN documents and Refugee Review Tribunal hearings all indicate that the security situation in Afghanistan is deteriorating and that ethnic and religious minority groups are still being persecuted.

In fact, even our Diggers are [asking](#) for reinforcements, prompting the Opposition to make a predictable [call](#) for more troops. Yet if Afghanistan is increasingly unsafe for highly trained, professional soldiers, it must also be increasingly unsafe for asylum seekers, many of whom fled the Taliban in the first place.

The most recent report from the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) was released on September 21. If conditions have improved, this document should mention it. Instead, statistic after statistic proves the Government's claims wrong. The

situation isn't getting better. It is getting much, much worse.

Compared to the same period last year, the number of security incidents is up 69 per cent, the use of improvised explosive devices is up 82 per cent, and the number of casualties caused by anti-government elements is up 53 per cent.

The most shocking part is the indiscriminate nature of the bloodshed. According to the UNAMA's mid-year report, the number of civilians injured or killed in the first six months of 2010 was 31 per cent higher than for the same period in 2009. The number of civilians assassinated or executed by anti-government forces soared by 95 per cent.

And as to Gillard's [claim](#) that 'progress is being made'? 'Much of the progress achieved is fragile and continues to be overshadowed by the deterioration in the security situation,' states the report.

Let's not forget that these unsafe conditions might be doubly dangerous for the sort of Afghans who become asylum seekers. In a letter prepared for her Refugee Review Tribunal hearing, Ms 1005628 wrote that her family 'strongly supported democracy, freedom of expression and human rights' and that 'these rights were violated not only by the Taliban, but by warLords, provincial rulers and even by some prominent government figures in the present Kazi [sic] Government'.

The Refugee Review Tribunal, which also has access to 'exhaustive country information' on Afghanistan, accepted her claims.

If Afghanistan is not safe for independent women like Ms 1005628 who believe in freedom of speech and democracy, it is not safe for minority groups either. On 30 April this year, when the freeze on Afghan asylum applications was still in place, the Refugee Review Tribunal [found](#) that 'the Hazara and Shia people in Afghanistan still suffer a real chance of serious harm from other and more powerful ethnic groups in Afghanistan'.

Yet the Australian Government still seems determined to send Afghan asylum seekers home. And because most arrive by boat, they don't get access to the Refugee Review Tribunal, which can independently assess their claims. Instead, they go through a [Refugee Status Assessment](#), after which the Minister decides if they can apply for a visa. This means the Immigration Department has extraordinary powers to decide the fate of these people.

Let's hope those powers are being used judiciously. The conflict in Afghanistan is escalating and the situation is increasingly unsafe for both soldiers and civilians. If we are thinking about taking further military action to counter the Taliban, we must also think about offering sanctuary to those fleeing the regime.

When kids turn evil

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Let Me In* (MA). Director: Matt Reeves. Starring: Kodi Smit-McPhee, Chloe Moretz, Richard Jenkins, Dylan Kening. Running time: 115 minutes.**

This is the kind of stylish, intelligent film that ought to give 'horror' a good name. *Let Me In* is based upon the novel and screenplay *Let the Right One In*, written by Swedish author John Ajvide Lindqvist, here re-envisioned by American filmmaker Matt Reeves.



It is a vampire film, but only occasionally gruesome. More often, it utilises atmosphere and the power of suggestion to create unease — as the best horror films do. Most importantly, the horrific elements are built into the framework of a powerful drama; this is a coming-of-age story, thematically muscular and with well-rounded characters embodied by strong performances.

Set in a working class suburb of Los Alamos, New Mexico, the story centres on Owen (Smit-McPhee), the child of bitterly divorced parents. Friendless, awkward, and a perennial victim of a particularly sadistic school bully named Kenny (Kening), Owen seems to have found his soulmate when an enigmatic young girl, Abby (Moretz), moves into the flat next door. Sensing a fellow misfit, Owen is drawn to her.

Let Me In is at its heart a chaste love story between these two pre-adolescents, portrayed with depth and warmth by the talented young actors. Their romance is, in all likelihood, doomed, due to the fact that Abby is secretly a vampire; the man (Jenkins) with whom she lives is not her father, but a companion-cum-servant who commits murders in order to supply her with blood for sustenance.

In this context, Reeves' recast title takes on a double meaning, evoking both the 'rule' that vampires must be invited before entering someone else's dwelling, and the need for trust in friendships and romantic relationships. For Owen, growing up and growing close to Abby requires learning the truth about her, and discerning how best to assimilate his knowledge of her dark inclinations.

Let Me In is also a cautionary tale about children's need for strong adult role models. This is something Owen lacks. His single, working mother often leaves him to his own devices, and has embraced a religious ritualism in which he finds no solace. His father, meanwhile, is absent. At one stage, Owen calls him in a state of despair, with desperate questions — regarding the existence of evil, no less — but his father, preoccupied with hurt and bitterness towards his ex-wife, barely hears his son's pain, and fails him utterly.

Lacking the wisdom of experience and positive adult role models, Owen is guided by a yearning for companionship, and perhaps by a budding adolescent libido. These are both very human impulses, but in a 12-year-old they are no substitute for wise adult guidance or a fully formed moral compass.

Abby, despite her chronological age (unspecified but much older than 12), is also still a child, with a child's restrictively close view of her own dark nature. She has a necessarily corruptive effect upon Owen.

This is laid bare when Owen witnesses for the first time Abby's monstrous potential. As she feeds upon an unlucky human, he raises his hand to grasp either the victim's reaching hand, or the handle of the open door. He is witnessing an evil act committed by a person who is not evil per se; the choice he faces is to either intervene against evil, or close the door to it. By whose standard is the choice he makes wrong?

In truth, there are no wholly bad characters in the film. Even Kenny the bully is revealed to be the victim of his own bullying older brother, whose treatment of him bears no small resemblance to Kenny's treatment of Owen; an indication of inherited abusive behaviour.

Reeves extends this nuanced view of human nature to Abby's companion. In Lindqvist's novel, Håkan is a pedophile that the childlike vampire has seduced into becoming her servant. In the American film there is a tenderness to the relationship, and a hint that his affection for her began when he, too, was a child.

Sanitised, perhaps, for American audiences, this departure from the source material is also a thematic double-edged sword. It saves the character from being the monster he is in the novel, but also offers a bleak premonition of the consequences of the corrupted path upon which Owen has chosen to embark with the vampire he loves.

Human stories of IVF

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Catherine Marshall



Women will go to extraordinary lengths to have babies. A friend procured copper wire and got her husband to wind it around the base of their bed in the belief that it would help her to conceive. She is now the mother of three.

An acquaintance told me that her brother met an flight attendant on a flight, who tricked him into a love affair, and quietly disappeared once she had fallen pregnant. She reappeared years later, stricken with terminal cancer, revealing her secret and begging the father to raise his child. He and his now-wife agreed to do so.

I myself resorted to saying nine-day novenas to St Gerard, the patron saint of mothers and children, after a sage warning from my doctor that I had a 50 per cent chance of carrying a baby to term. His prognosis was spot on: my six pregnancies produced three babies.

Children are, as Kalil Gibran says, 'the sons and daughters of life's longing for itself': there is no suitable description for the primal urge so many of us feel to procreate, and no accounting for the strength of an instinct which cascades unchecked through the veins and settles in the deep well of the heart.

It's an instinct that makes a cruel mockery of the estimated 15 per cent of Australian couples who cannot have children. Infertility is an absence which no-one but the sufferer notices, a hole that can be filled only by a living, breathing baby. 'For those of us who remain childless, infertility is a lifelong disability,' says Sandra who, after 12 years of treatment, has accepted that she will never be a mum.

But not all infertile people are doomed to childlessness: millions of people around the world have benefited from in vitro fertilisation (IVF), a procedure so radical, so socially transformative, that its co-creator has just been awarded the Nobel Prize for Physiology and Medicine.

When British doctors Robert Edwards (pictured) and Patrick Steptoe created their first 'test-tube' embryo in late 1977, they were bringing hope not just to John and Lesley Brown — parents of the resulting baby, Louise Joy Brown — but to millions of men and women unable to conceive naturally. Today, IVF is used in around three per cent of all births in Australia, a figure comparable to that in other developed countries.

With news of the award, glasses are no doubt being raised by parents whose children would not exist but for the tenacity displayed by the 'maverick' doctors in the face of scientific and social dissent (Steptoe, who died in 1988, is not named as a joint winner of the award since

the Nobel committee does not confer posthumous recognition).

But there are still those who rail against the conception of babies in laboratories rather than in the bedroom. To be sure, IVF, though groundbreaking, has also been the progenitor of ethically questionable outcomes: the destruction of redundant embryos, the creation of designer babies, the rise of 'rent-a-womb' tourism in countries like India, where poor women are paid to incubate embryos for wealthy foreigners.

The Vatican's top bioethics official, Monsignor Ignacio Carrasco de Paula [says](#) that, while Edwards 'began a new and important chapter in the field of human reproduction', without him there wouldn't be a thriving market in donor eggs nor freezers packed with doomed embryos.

'Edwards built a house but opened the wrong door,' he said, suggesting that the professor had not succeeded in solving the underlying causes of infertility.

Certainly, our society is prone to brushing aside the inconvenient consequences that sometimes stem from its decisions. But the beneficiaries of Edwards' intellectual largesse — people practised in deep reflection — will have applied more consideration than most to the consequences of their actions.

'We were in much grief about the fact that we couldn't conceive on our own, and we considered the use of IVF very carefully,' says my friend, Anne*, the mother of twins.

'Recently we met a beautiful couple who were given an embryo, which would have been thrown away or used in medical research. Their little girl was six years old ... we couldn't bear the thought of her going without life. So we're now thinking about donating our embryos to couples who cannot conceive on their own, genetically.'

'We have been given the opportunity to have a family through IVF, and now we feel we may be asked to think about passing this possibility on to other couples.'

In a perfect world, heart-rending decisions such as this wouldn't need to be taken. IVF wouldn't cause collateral damage, nor would it be put to ill-use. But in a perfect world, there would be no such thing as infertility.

In seeking to fill a mother's empty womb and empty arms, Edwards developed a solution, and in so doing confirmed what all innovators know: that progress doesn't occur in a neat and orderly vacuum, and nor should it be halted for fear of what it might produce.

While the Edwardses of this world are busy making their medical, legal and social breakthroughs, the rest of us might like to make our own contribution by preparing a world that is capable of balancing the benefits of modernity with a well-developed, universal probity.

**Not her real name*

Kids in custody

HUMAN RIGHTS

Graham West

Too many young people are ending up in our detention centres in most jurisdictions in Australia. How we respond to this fact will depend on how we see the problem.



We can see this as a law and order issue; young people commit crime, they do the time. If this is the case, then we had better start a Building the Custodial Revolution program because we will need more centres every year and they're not cheap!

While we're at it we had better take money out of a few services or infrastructure projects each year to fund the recurrent costs that will also increase.

Of course crime is a factor and sadly some young people commit very serious crimes for which we need centres to protect the community or even the young person. Young people should be held accountable for their actions.

But that does not explain (using NSW as an example) how almost 80 per cent of those on remand in a detention centre will not end up with a custodial sentence. Even if we ignore the international conventions that say custody should be a last resort, does it not seem a bit strange that we get the balance wrong 80 per cent of the time?

Even if we just see the problem through the lens of crime, we must also ask if custody is the best outcome for the community. Not in many cases, it would appear, as we also know that community based and restorative justice programs have lower rates of reoffending, therefore keeping the community safer.

Let's look beyond law and order for a moment. How else could we see the problem of young offenders in custody? What leads young people into crime in the first place?

Unfortunately there is no easy predictor of why some young people end up committing crimes and others in the same situation do not, but we do know the risk factors.

Around Australia young people are more likely to end up in custody if they are poor, Aboriginal or have a borderline or lower intellectual disability (IQ below 79), or any combination of these characteristics.

Bear in mind that we live in a wealthy country, that only 2.3 per cent of the population is Aboriginal, and only nine per cent of the population has an IQ below 79.

Those in detention centres probably left school at 14, have problems with alcohol or other drugs, and have often experienced abuse and trauma. Many will have a parent who has been

to prison and will live in social housing. In NSW 6 per cent will have been homeless before being placed in custody.

When you look at it this way it makes it hard to see it solely as a law and order issue.

The prevalence of youth in detention is a call to work with communities in trouble and advocate for those over-represented in the system, not from a sense of paternalism, but from a genuine desire to see all young people achieve their potential; to offer them opportunities, and help them believe they can choose to seize them.

When Patrick Dodson won the Sydney University Peace Prize he spoke about how love is often missing in public debates. The more I met young people in trouble, the more I realised he was right.

Love is something that we as individuals, families and communities can give, but governments can't. But we can insist that governments give a helping hand and a shoulder to support families that need it. We can remind them that all people want to be treated with dignity and respect, and that too many children end up in detention.

Postcards from Afghanistan

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas



Fanatic's football fairytale

BY THE WAY

Brian Matthews

One of the problems a writer of fiction can sometimes face is the sheer interconnection of things.

In 'real life' events, situations, reactions and decisions occur willy-nilly. We exercise as much control as possible, and most of the time, our control is sufficient. But sometimes things get out of hand and momentarily fate and circumstance seem to be sweeping us along.



The fiction writer has to arrange imagined events so that they achieve the required fictional outcome — which, of course, is often dramatic, exciting, tragic, comic, triumphant and so on — without stretching credulity too far or breaching one's sense of what life is 'really' like.

Yet 'real life' routinely throws up sequences so bizarre, or so incredible that a fiction writer wouldn't dare to own them. Try this one.

There's this bloke who lives in South Australia but has been a supporter of AFL football club the St Kilda Saints for what seems like millennia.

Just when he is preparing to go in the ballot for a Grand Final ticket — last year he got one, standing room: good view, wrong result — his bank notifies him that there has been a 'fraudulent attack' on his credit card. Like the Mills of God, the bank investigates slow but it investigates sure. He loses no money but he has no credit card and he can only take part in the ballot by using Visa online. So that window closes.

Thinking laterally, he borrows his mate's Visa and his membership barcode then, with the mobile phone on speaker, the landline serially dialling and Ticketek on screen, he sets about the business of getting a standing room ticket from the limited general allocation for St Kilda members on the Monday before the Grand Final.

He admits defeat after three hours when, with the mobile phone battery flat, his ears ringing with the engaged signal from the landline, and his eyes bemused by the unwavering message on the screen about heavy demand and the need for patience, he finally gets through to a human voice which tells him with intolerable jauntiness that 'all tickets are gone, mate'.

He watches the game on TV and dies a thousand deaths — it's a draw. Like the players and coaches he doesn't know what to say, where to look, how to react.

Daunted by his recent experiences, and still without a credit card, our bloke decides the whole ticketing business is just too hard and he'll watch the replay on TV. But two of his sons intervene. One of them, let's call him David, brushes aside the bloke's objection that a single

ticket is now, after the draw, far too expensive.

‘I’ll pay for the ticket,’ he says. ‘It’s a gift’.

And the other, we’ll call him Sam, using his own credit card and the barcode of yet another St Kilda member — this star-crossed chap, not anticipating a draw strangely enough, has tickets to take the grandchildren to *West Side Story* on 2 October! — volunteers to do the vigil online from 1pm on the Monday following the drawn game.

What is it about the youth of today? The cyber world is their beat, their haunt, their domain. Sam, in less than an hour of flashing notices, canned music and other contemporary hazards, doesn’t just jag a ticket, he gets a seat, and in a very good spot.

David, who lives in Manchester, then sends him the money by electronic transfer and, while our bloke couldn’t guarantee that the snail was on the thorn or the lark on the wing, it seemed to him reasonable to conclude that — for the moment, until the game started anyway — God was in his heaven and some things at least were right with the world.

So our bloke, the hero, or — since he has been alternately unsuccessful and passive — the anti-hero of our little story, is about to set off for Melbourne from his distant central western eyrie. He’ll drive for a day, have breakfast with Sam, collect his ticket and go unhurried to the MCG around 1pm.

As a fiction this account obviously has flaws. The bloke is, to start with, too unlucky: through no fault of his own, no credit card, and then no ticket. And the result of the game is simply too much tailored to his needs: he misses out on being there, so they come back next week. Spare me.

Then two of his sons bob up, fairytale-like, full of competence, good will, riches and determination and lo! he has a ticket. This is on a par with glass slippers, sumptuous carriages and midnight pumpkin deadlines.

All this outrageously extravagant tale needed was to end with the Saints winning the replay. But not every fairytale can have a happy ending.

Commission flats fable

COMMUNITY

Virginia Millen



We were going out for the night. Friends were waiting for us at a pub nearby where musicians sing about love lost and nine-to-fivers solve the problems of the world.

Our windows were thrown open against the fading heat of the day. All evening, over the drone of the television, we'd heard the voice of an enraged man matched by the rough tone of a woman. We exchanged uncomfortable glances during the ad breaks. We had heard this sound before. It came from the commission flats.

As we left our house and pulled our front door closed, there they were, in the middle of the road. She was crying. He was yelling. He rippled with rage. A pram rolled slowly towards the gutter. Cars slowed down to watch.

He had the emaciated cheeks of an addict. She was smaller than him, toothless and aged beyond her years. As we closed our gate he struck her. She fell on the bitumen, lit by the headlight of a passing car.

'Call the police,' I said in a low voice to my partner. He ignored me, rushing to the woman. The car sped off, dodging the pram that was still in the middle of the road.

'You fuckin touch her and I'll belt you too,' the man yelled to my partner.

'Come inside,' I hissed, dialling triple 0. 'Leave them. They know where we live.'

We locked our front door as the yelling heightened, and waited for the flash of blue and red.

I have passed that man and woman many times in the three years since. Sometimes she sits out the front of the supermarket begging for money from locals carrying tubs of olives and Maggie Beer's verjuice. Her voice is soft, not aggressive like when she fights. And in daylight her face looks younger. She's probably younger than me.

I hear their fights regularly but we no longer call the police. I've watched her leave him and return, and have another child. His car got stolen: a beaten-up Commodore. I listened to him rant all afternoon. I watched him call the police on the pay phone out the front of the flats.

I wondered what it felt like to lose something when you had so few possessions to lose. His frustration echoed through the street for days. We all averted our eyes, closed our curtains, turned up the volume on our televisions.

'I wish someone would steal my car,' my boyfriend said. 'Then I'd get the bloody insurance.'

One night I came home and there was a paramedic's van in front of our house. As it turned around and drove off, I recognised her face through its rear window. *I don't want to know*, I thought, closing my front door behind me.

But when Kevin Rudd apologised to the Stolen Generation I looked up to their empty window. I wondered if they'd watched it and what it meant to them.

Late last year I got a call from my partner as I left work. 'Our house caught fire. There's a letter here from the fire brigade.'

It sounds worse than it was. A dilapidated shed that stands next to our house had caught alight earlier in the day. Luckily someone had seen the smoke and called triple 0.

Who made that call? I wondered, looking around the street. They had saved our house and everything in it.

As my partner stood on the footpath in front of our house, the man from the flats came over to him.

'Your house caught on fire,' he said. 'Is everything okay?'

'Yeah,' my partner replied. 'The fire brigade got here in time.'

'Yeah. I saw the smoke and called the cops. They got here pretty quick, luckily.'

I didn't know what to buy him to say thanks. Flowers seemed wrong and wine seemed bourgeois. I settled on chocolate biscuits in a pretty Christmas-themed tin.

I was reluctant to cross the threshold of the flats. I'd never been in there and although I knew which was their window, I wasn't sure where their door would be. I spotted him straight away, through the entrance.

'Hi,' I said nervously, holding the tin.

'G'day.'

I passed him the tin without introducing myself, making eye contact for the first time in three years.

'I'm from across the road,' I stammered. 'I just wanted to say thanks. If you hadn't called the fire brigade our house would have gone up.'

'No worries darlin',' he said, his face gentle. 'You don't want to lose your home.'

In the naked light of the stairwell, we shook our heads at the sentiment; a slow, contemplative head shake, perfectly in time.

Memo to corporate pigs

POETRY

Barry Gittins and Ouyang Yu

Behind

At the heart

Of the 2nd best

Political writings

Intended for an inaugural prize

There are some subscriber

Benefits

For instance, the time

Of pestilence is heaven

& earth

That would sell the dirt

& write

Stuff for pick

Of the day

Looking back to

The absences behind

The printed words

That become daily

Trash

Recital, kronos, spirit

& end of o

Z

—*Ouyang Yu*

Memo to the heads of debauchment

(An Australian office tragedy in three acts)

Misery does not love company. Still,
troglodytes unite in micro-managing
and glory-hogging their way up
the corporate pecker,
regardless of the bedrizzled
lackeys who ghostwrite
(ghostthink) gorgon's
auto-erotic raptures.
Glorification of self is the only get off,
self-promotion the only pick up.
Homo sapiens resembles
Cro-Magnon (make that fillet mignon).
Eat or be eaten, consume or be consumed
in the orgasmic race to the biggest corporate profile
for the most miniscule contribution.
Know not what you can do
for your franchise?
Ask what your franchise can do
to the luckless bastards
labouring under your corpulent wing.
No good deed goes unplagiarised;
no noteworthy scheme leaves
the department unharvested.
Lack the intellectual capital to spend
on an informed decision?
Set multiple minions to work
then cherry pick the outcomes,

signing off with your own trotter.
Honour no man, woman or deity.
Recreate life in your own porcine image.
Days fall into nights, all unheeded.
A workaholic's wet dream
is unmerited praise, for
the sweat of others and
dreams of institutional lessers.
Best practice is your Widdershins yardstick;
choose the direct opposite
of ethical counsel to
consolidate power and
congregate perversities of soul.
The whole is bereft of
the doughnut of choice.
When your life is your job,
the bureaucrat's lot,
you live to bleed others.
—*Barry Gittins*

Lists worth being on

EDITORIAL

Andrew Hamilton

Last week the *BRW* Young Rich List appeared. It was hardly noticed, for this is the season of lists: Teams of the Year, Legends Lists, the London *Tablet's* 100 most influential Catholics list, not to mention short-lists for literary prizes. Lists raise lots of idle questions. What kind of people show up on lists? What do the lists reveal about the list makers? Why do people make and read lists? What lists would you like to have your name engraved on?



Judging by the profiles that go with lists, listed people are a boring lot. They tend to take seriously activities that don't contribute much to human happiness. Many of the wealthy young made nothing, except a pile of money through property and hedge funds. Many football legends don't seem to have moved far beyond the game. Influential Catholics turn out to be notable for being influential.

But, of course, you shouldn't judge by the profiles. These reflect the values of the list makers as much as those of the listed. Indeed many people avoid lists. In some countries the Rich List draws an avid audience of blackmailers, kidnappers and tax inspectors.

So why do journalists draw up lists? Surely, because people read lists. Lists enlist a coalition of the willing. There may be many dark reasons why readers are drawn to lists, despite their many previous experiences of being bored to tears. We look to see if, by some amazing chance, our own names might be there. We enjoy feeling superior to those whose names do appear. We seek confirmation that we could draw up a much better list.

Perhaps there is a deeper reason. Lists touch on our insecurities about what matters and about whether we matter. A list of influential Catholics might be reassuring Catholics who are down on themselves and self-doubting. The list of serious money makers might make others who believe that money has a value as well as a price feel that one day they too might get lucky and so find themselves entitled to self-esteem.

This might lead you to ask what kind of a list you would like to be on because it might make you feel better about yourself. Some might be tempted by the Queen's Birthday list, or at least by an invitation that they could then knock back.

Others might be tempted by a list that mocked its own pretensions. To be enrolled on the Most Notable Green Catholics List, for example, or on the Most Observant of the Canons of the Council of Nicea List, or on the Slowest Cyclists List might stir to life the sense of the ridiculous which waters the seed of a healthy self-esteem.

But for many the most precious list may be the List of Unnoticed Persons with Encouraging Stories. The kind of stories that make you see the preciousness of the ordinary.

This kind of list is paradoxical. You could only qualify for it if you had no desire to be listed and instinctively tried to avoid the gaze of the Lister. The Lister's gaze would anyway be glazed, because to salute the happily unnoticed would undercut the whole rationale of making lists.

But the list of unnoticed persons also points to a paradox inherent in power, influence and communication. The deepest form of communication is that which addresses the smallest readership — the personal conversation or letter, for example. Communication through books or mass media reaches many more people, but is less deep.

Similarly, the deepest power and influence that any person exerts will be through personal relationships. The greater the reach of the influence that someone exerts, the less deep it is.

So when we hear the story of very ordinary struggling persons whose life is hidden, we recognise the depth of the influence which they had. But by listing them we would obscure and diffuse their influence.

Lists don't really matter much. Still, it would be nice to have been young enough to qualify for the *BRW* Young Rich List, wouldn't it.

Delhi's Commonwealth Games refugees

HUMAN RIGHTS

Cara Munro



I remember my first taxi ride in India: no kidding, I expected to die. I tipped the taxi driver an extraordinary amount in sheer relief and acknowledgment of the great risk that he too had made to drive me about.

I remember taking the same, late-night journey from Indira Gandhi International four years later. The same suicidal speed away from the airport towards town. Reluctant slowing to a stop at lights.

A tapping at the taxi window. The driver instinctively edging the car forward in a feeble gesture of shelter for his international guest. The dirty boy outside the window motioning to his hungry stomach. 'Please, one Rupee. One Rupee.' A fumbling through my bag. His hands cold, dry and unwashed.

I remember the familiar sights and smells of New Delhi unravelling like a map. Shadowy figures huddled in gray blankets; two men with broken sandals and a gas bottle on a pushbike; another with a long stick in place of a leg.

But just as I thought we were nearing the end of our journey and would, at any moment, be greeted by old familiar landmarks, the landscape started changing. The late night omelette-makers and street boys and crinkled blankets that could be corpses began to thin, and roads seem broader, starker. Large flyovers made of concrete slabs spiralled overhead, the alcoves of shelter they created eerily empty.

The smell of hot bitumen asserted itself in the chilled winter air as we passed a team of late night road workers. A whole family of sari'd women, nimble men and woollen-hatted children sifting gravel and carrying piles of stones on their heads. Their shelter, two tents made entirely of black plastic sheeting, cold and unlit.

The driver, seeing the direction of my gaze, nodded towards the ghostly work party and explained: 'Delhi Games.'

'Delhi Games' became a constant refrain throughout those three months in late 2009. When we were careering through the sparkingly hushed underground veins of Delhi's Metro, or standing perplexed, above ground trying to find familiar street stalls amid the Jenga set of new roads.

We read out aloud the amusing 'etiquette lessons' printed in the daily *Hindustan Times*, schooling Delhites on not spitting in public during the Games and reports of manners training for the police force.

Most poignantly, 'Delhi Games' was the refrain spoken at the sight of babies dosed up on phernargan and asleep in bundles on the side of the road while their mothers, gaunt with spindly limbs, lugged baskets of bricks on their heads and fathers dangled several storeys above with cloth rag caps and cans of paint.

'Economic migrants' was the official term, but to my local friends who rolled their eyes in pity and disdain they were ignorant villagers. Speakers of foreign dialects and keepers of strange customs. Strangers in an increasingly strange land.

But it wasn't these skinny troupes of unskilled workers or the constant smell of moist concrete and sawdust that spoke most strongly of the Games. Rather it was the places and people, who in the name of the Games, were now absent. Those who had always been a part of Delhi, but would not be a part of the Games.

The samosa man with his shallow fryer propped between two bricks. The masala soda wallaha who pushed his cart of soft drinks in the pelting sun and cracked ice with the back of a knife. The little girl with polio who wore indigo ruffles and sold wilted roses at the junction. The narrow strip of houses, shuffled like a deck of cards along a caustic smelling stream. All simply no longer there.

Now back home in Australia, the New New Delhi, in its completed form, materialises before my eyes. Sweeping news shots take in the wide lawns and tranquil row boats of India Gate. Sports commentators talk over images of dazzling Bollywood dancers, magnolia garlands and friendly trinket sellers. And school children in their pleated uniforms, knee high socks and oiled hair wave so excitedly that one can't help but smile back at them.

It's only a matter of time before the gold medal tally will creep up to the tune of 'Advance Australia Fair' and gossip of the victories and scandals of athletes' personal lives will engulf family banter and office small talk. In Australia's inevitable wins, let's not forget the people who have made these Games possible, the risks they have taken and all that they have lost.

The roots of American arrogance

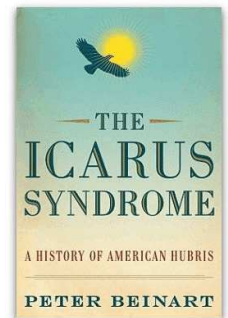
BOOKS

Ben Coleridge

Peter Beinart: *The Icarus Syndrome: A History of American Hubris*. Harper Collins, 2010. ISBN: 9780061456466. [Website](#)

Greek mythology is ripe with parables and one of its most didactic tales is the story of Icarus, a young man whose father built wings of wax and feathers to enable his son to fly.

Before he takes off, Icarus' father warns him that he should fly neither too low nor too high but at a moderate height. If he flies too near the sun, the wax will melt and his wings will disintegrate. As it happens, Icarus becomes intoxicated with the thrill of flying; as he soars towards the sun, his wings fall to pieces, plunging him to his death.



Peter Beinart's latest book, *The Icarus Syndrome: A History of American Hubris*, charts the ideological and intellectual underpinnings of American foreign policy from Teddy Roosevelt to Barack Obama. What is the Icarus syndrome? Beinart argues that it has been the cyclical tendency of American foreign policy makers to fly into the sun, to become intoxicated with success and blinded to the real limits of American power.

Beinart argues provocatively that each time America has become blind to the limitations of its power, it has been wrenched back to reality by failure; it has 'gained wisdom through pain'. He builds his argument through examination of American intellectual history as well as political history: Reinhold Niebuhr figures as much as Franklin D. Roosevelt and Francis Fukuyama as much as Colin Powell.

The book divides American foreign policy in the 20th century into three manifestations of hubris: the hubris of reason, the hubris of toughness, and the hubris of dominance.

Beginning with the pre-WW1 period, personified in Woodrow Wilson, Beinart argues that America's foreign policy was guided by a vision of a rationalised world, where force was exercised rarely and where international institutions would shape inter-state interaction. Beinart calls this the 'hubris of reason' — alive in a period where American foreign policy was 'shaped by a refusal to meet the world on its own terms' and to accept that politics between nations would never match the ideals to which Americans clung.

Indeed, American ideals, says Beinart, have sometimes blinded Americans to the dark parts of America's soul; to the reality that, in the words of Niebuhr, 'reason is always, to some degree, the servant of interest'.

In Beinart's thesis, the hubris of reason continued to influence American policy through successive administrations of the inter-war period pursuing policies clouded by an attachment to that ideal of a rationalised world without power politics and war. Despite the appeals of a weakened France, desperate for security in the face of German resurgence, and despite the militaristic tendencies of Imperial Japan, the Harding, Coolidge, Hoover and Roosevelt administrations ignored the developing threats.

This American naiveté was, argues Beinart, in part responsible for Germany's quick early victories in WW2 and France's defeat. America had tried to act as a neutral umpire, refusing to become engaged in power alliances, but in doing so had allowed Germany to spread its armies across Europe.

In the post war years, Beinart argues, the 'hubris of reason' was replaced by a 'hubris of toughness,' a political and ideological stance founded on American fear of their Soviet competitors and of America's waning manhood. This 'hubris of toughness' was, according to Beinart, the hallmark of the Kennedy administration, with episodes such as the Bay of Pigs part of a general policy of forcefully confronting Soviet influence around the world.

The 'hubris of toughness' was even more pronounced under the Johnson administration where 'global containment', the famous theory of confronting Soviet power penned by George Kennan (and later distorted), was put into action in Vietnam. Here Beinart argues that America's leadership became fixated by the idea that communism had to be confronted on a global scale, failing to recognise that not all communists were alike or aligned.

Finally, with the end of the Cold War, a 'hubris of dominance' replaced the 'hubris of toughness'. In a world where America was ideologically triumphant and economically and militarily supreme it could set its sights higher; 'rather than merely containing evil, it could impose good'. And with military victory after military victory from the First Gulf War to Afghanistan in 2001, American confidence grew, finally morphing into the belief that America could surgically remove regimes without great cost or loss of American life.

This hubris contributed to the launching of an invasion of Iraq in 2003 by the neo-conservatives — an ideological group who differed from more traditional realists like Kennan. The operating principle of this period was, says Beinart, 'the beautiful lie': the belief that there are no limits to American power, that America can accomplish anything. Beinart asserts that America has grown so used to triumphing in the conflicts of the 1990s that 'mere stasis is [now] easily viewed as retreat'.

Throughout this book several key themes emerge. Beinart argues that American hubris in all its forms has been fostered by a lack of knowledge, which has led to American policy makers being either overly fearful or comfortably optimistic.

He points to a key tension in American foreign policy making, between ideals and realism. Throughout the 20th century, if America's ideals became intoxicating they could blind

Americans to their own limits (and the limitations of others), leading to bloody consequences. But if those ideals vanished completely, eroded by resigned realism, then America could become numb to evil.

If Icarus flew too high his wings would melt, but if he flew too low his horizons would be diminished. Beinart argues persuasively that American foreign policy makers must adopt more disciplined habits of mind; that Americans 'must become short-term realists with long-term, nonrealist dreams'.

The scope of this book might make it seem like Beinart is playing Icarus himself. But Beinart's thesis is captivating and his book, while being readable, is a work of intellectual depth.

Life and art in jail

COMMUNITY

Oliver Humphries

I am just beginning to realise how heavy is the custodian's responsibility. This is what comes of being nice to people.

One of my students, Mr N (N for 'not his real name'), has entrusted to me half a dozen sizeable paintings for safe-keeping. Why he has done this is not entirely clear. Perhaps he sees them as payment in kind for services rendered. Not that I have rendered any services, apart from listening to him read, and trying in an ad hoc fashion to correct his pronunciation in the pursuit of better English.

Mr N is a Korean national. He has been in jail for a long time. That is our context. I teach. He learns.

Each morning, before the inmates are released from the yards he strips down and exercises, rain, hail, or snow. Then he meditates. I have seen him sitting in sleet, shirt off, legs crossed in the lotus position, or else in full splits, sago snow in his hair.

'Aren't you cold?' I asked him once.

'Yes. Very cold. But after warm all day.'

Mr N is 65 years old. He is a fine painter and potter in the classical Korean style. My colleague, the ceramics teacher, has told me that Mr N has, intuitively and independently of current theory, arrived at a place that is concomitant with the cutting edge of contemporary ceramic arts practice. I take this to mean he is a good potter, and indeed the pots he makes seem mighty fine to me. Likewise the paintings.

Mr N's English is poor, but his wit is sharp. The idea of art seemed to be a way to stimulate discussion and begin tackling his otherwise general lack of English. In jail is art enough to make life worthwhile?

'Art making beautiful every day,' he says.

The other teachers have had no luck with him and have passed him on to me. They report a level of arrogance.

'He has issues with women,' they say. This may be true, given his age and cultural background, but I have not detected it. Another thing they have against him is that Mr N has, in the past, accused them of stealing his paintings. They have issues with vexatious allegations. Their frustration may well stem from the fact that he does his own thing and is not interested in what they tell him.

I see Mr N once a week. As part of our lessons I bring in art books and he reads from them. Picasso and Matisse are his favourites. When he turns a page and meets an image he likes he lets out a low growl of appreciation: 'Shiiiiiiit,' followed by some declarative statement: 'This I learning need.'

He quickly makes a sketch of the painting in a handful of economical lines, then a fortnight later I will find this drawing translated, in pretty fair likeness, onto the face of a pot, just fired from the kiln. His vases look as though a cubist made them, albeit a cubist grown up with a Korean sensibility. I am surprised to hear myself explaining cubism to him, or that other guy with the crazy moustache.

As an exercise I offered him a short quote: 'If you could print eight words on a T-shirt to sum up your view of life what would they be?'

This took some explaining.

'T-shirt I understanding, but view of life? — what meaning?'

'It means how you see the world.'

After some consideration, and the help of a bilingual dictionary, he pronounced how he saw the world.

'Fuck off.'

I said: 'That's only two words.'

'Then — fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck off.'

Twice he won first prize in a national art competition. The art works were not returned. It took a long time and a lot of bureaucratic rigmarole and paper work for the prize money to filter through, minus a hefty commission. To thank his teachers Mr N bought chocolate for all the staff, however it was decreed that this was trafficking, and so after several days deliberation the chocolate was gathered up and returned to him.

Mr N killed his wife and step-daughter with a fruit knife. Just in case you were starting to feel sorry for him. The details are beside the point here (leave your inner lawyer at the door), suffice it to say without making light of it, he must have had a very non-Zen moment.

I have to always keep this in mind when he wants to discuss aesthetics, or Matisse's brush technique, or surrealism. One can't be too complacent. In different circumstances would I invite him home for dinner? Would I want to discuss the paintings on my walls?

I have his paintings and I don't know what to do with them. Mr N's concern is that once he moves on to another jail the paintings will simply be tossed out. He could not take them with him. Fine as they are I do not really want to hang the paintings on my walls. Yet I cannot bring myself to throw them away.

Even if I thought they were awful would I throw them away? My reasons might be purely selfish. If ever he accuses me of stealing them I can say, no, here they are rolled up in a cupboard.

So now I am the unwilling custodian of some very fine paintings that no one will ever see. I have placed them in a locker hidden away in a room in a wing of a building that I rarely visit. Mr N has moved on. My responsibility is getting lighter. Eventually he will be extradited to a country where he will not be remembered. In a way I feel sorry for him, but that is barely allowed. Who else would waste 1000 words on him? He sends me Christmas cards.

'Divided' Anglicans dodge conflict

RELIGION

Andrew McGowan



Diversity is all-too-familiar in the wider Anglican Communion. The Australian Anglican Church is itself an uneasy alliance of dioceses and provinces formed in the colonial era, with distinctive histories and identities whose compatibility has always been limited.

The fragility of these arrangements is never more in evidence than at its General Synods (assemblies). In the relatively recent past, debates over women's ordination in particular, but also over human sexuality, lay presidency and liturgical texts, have seen a specific division emerge between the distinctive form of conservative evangelicalism associated with the Diocese of Sydney, and a broad but vague 'mainstream'.

The 2010 Synod met at Melbourne Grammar School, an establishment bastion every bit as solid as its Tudor Gothic bluestone walls. Those inside sensed and responded to the frailty of the Church itself. Archbishop Philip Aspinall of Brisbane, the Primate, made a heartfelt call to the Synod to exercise a generosity of spirit, which may often have been in evidence; but it is at times hard to distinguish such generosity from caution or fear.

The question of Sydney's relationship with the rest was never far from the surface, but only once or twice did it breach it in threatening ways. There was predictable posturing about the divisions in the wider Anglican Communion, but overall a curious sense of avoiding conflict prevailed: a motion 'welcoming' the proposed Anglican Covenant was met with ambivalence at both liberal and conservative ends of the spectrum. Both were satisfied with a motion referring it for further and wider study.

When the 'Jerusalem Declaration' from the gathering of conservative Anglicans held there last year came up for consideration, Perth Archbishop Roger Herft, who has been a frank critic of the conservative forces, made the generous response of seeking and gaining an amendment that encouraged study of the document and its context.

The most contentious issue at the Synod was one that actually created, at least in passing, alliances across the usual boundaries. This was Sydney bishop Glenn Davies' pursuit of an amendment to the Canons concerning Matrimony, removing any baptismal qualification for marriage in the Anglican Church.

The amendment drew support from evangelicals who want to remove any implication that marriage is a sacrament (allowing as they do only for the two biblically-mandated sacraments of baptism and eucharist), but also from a pastorally and perhaps missionally-motivated group of others who saw the move as welcoming and inclusive.

The most difficult aspects of this issue however were procedural: the first time voted on, this was lost but the mover subsequently shared his belief that one of his Episcopal colleagues from northern Australia had been confused, and a recommittal was agreed to. There was some unhappiness with the claims and the process, and when after a day the vote was put again, it lost more clearly. This messy set of events was an indication that generosity was not infinite, and trust not deep.

The Diocese of Sydney's position was subjected to scrutiny in discussions of the finances. Sydney does not contribute, on principle, to the national funds that support the national Church's engagement with the wider Anglican Communion and ecumenical bodies. Moves to enforce change were headed off by the interventions of the other bishops who spoke critically of Sydney's position, but opposed compulsion in changing it. Again there was a sense that the relationship could not be put to certain tests.

Archbishop Peter Jensen of Sydney spoke rarely, but at one point made a strong affirmation of his Diocese's commitment to the national Church. Clearly that commitment was and is to a weak national Church by most standards, and gives primacy to strong local actions and initiatives, at least by conservatives.

Meanwhile Sydney's Synod will soon consider moves to seek to change the 1918 Church Property Trust Act, under which they (and others) have financial obligations to the national Church. The seriousness and the shape of that commitment thus remain uncertain.

Interviewed at the end of the Synod, Jensen described the event as a lost opportunity, and superficial. He may have been right on both counts, but the superficiality means the avoidance of depths where radically different cultures and theologies hold sway. Their exposure and discussion would underscore the idiosyncratic place of the Diocese of Sydney, within the Australian Church and otherwise.

So generosity of spirit, or deference to fragility, maintains the unity of the national body for the present. Still, Anglicans should not take the choice of such speech or silence for granted. One ecumenical observer from a Church less used to such frank disagreement in public described the scenes of open debate as 'wonderful'.

Stockbrokers with souls

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* (M). Director: Oliver Stone. Starring: Michael Douglas, Shia LaBeouf, Josh Brolin, Carey Mulligan, Frank Langella. Running time: 133 minutes.**

As far as symbolism goes, in a film that takes as its backdrop the market meltdown that led to the Global Financial Crisis, the image of bubbles drifting and bursting against the Manhattan skyline is pretty heavy-handed. Still, Oliver Stone has never been the most subtle of filmmakers.



That said, *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps*, a timely sequel to Stone's seminal 1987 film *Wall Street*, is less a cautionary tale about the corrupting power of greed, than a human drama in which the consequences of financial wheeling and dealing are more of a plot device, than the point of the plot *per se*.

A focus on the fragility of human beings and their relationships begins during a prologue in which Gordon Gekko (Douglas) emerges from prison, aged, broke, friendless, and estranged from his family.

Venemous corporate raider Gordon was the villain of the original film, the events of which led to his incarceration. However in *Money Never Sleeps* he is something slightly more complex. Douglas' portrayal again displays the abrasive arrogance that was typical of the character, but there is also an air of weary wisdom about him, as if Gordon has grown a soul during his time behind bars.

Certainly, he seems to have become introspective about his former profession, and downright prophetic about the industry itself. Following a seven-year time-jump, we learn that while in prison he wrote a book, now published under the title *Is Greed Good?* (an inversion of his old philosophy, 'Greed is good'). The book predicts a financial cataclysm that will result from unrestrained speculation. The year is early 2009.

Gordon's new mantra is that time is a greater commodity than money. At least, so he tells Jake Moore (LaBeouf), the hotshot young trader who approaches him following a promotional lecture.

Jake, as it happens, is engaged to Gordon's estranged daughter Winnie (Mulligan). If she was at all aware of their meeting, she would not approve of it. But Gordon's reputation precedes him, and the astute and ambitious Jake can't resist a personal encounter. Besides, he's virtually family, right?

Gordon seems genuinely to want to reconnect with Winnie. So the two men form an

alliance. In exchange for Jake's help in orchestrating a reunion, Gordon will help Jake take down Wall Street barracuda Bretton James (Brolin), whom Jake blames for the collapse of the bank he worked for, and for the suicide of its aging director, Jake's mentor, Lewis Zabel (Langella).

Can Gordon be trusted? Time will tell. Needless to say, Jake's and Gordon's secret scheming has implications for Jake's relationship with Winnie, who harbours deep resentment towards her father.

The looming market meltdown soon threatens to engulf them. But *Money Never Sleeps* is primarily interested in the ways in which the lunges and plunges of the market impact upon the characters' lives and relationships, and their susceptibility to greed's corruptive allure. It is testament to the strength of the film's human stories that they are not muddled by the necessary finance-speak required to bring authenticity to the characters' world.

Jake and Winnie's story is particularly emotive and engaging. They seem an odd match: Jake is driven by the buzz and profit of Wall Street, while Winnie works for a progressive, independent — 'lefty', Gordon calls it — news website. But the mismatch is belied by the warm chemistry shared by the actors.

Besides, Jake, it seems, is not cut from the same cloth as the father Winnie despises. His dream project is to secure investment for a company that is developing renewable fusion energy technology. In this, Jake is equally motivated by environmental concerns as by the potential for massive profits — he wants to make money, but save the world while he's doing it.

This is a nice topical touch, but also underlines the fact that Jake is a broker with principles. While the events of *Money Never Sleeps* threaten to corrupt him, these principles, and his loyalty to those he loves and who have been gracious to him, are the only things that can save him from the Wall Street abyss.

Gillard's climate coup

HUMAN RIGHTS

Tony Kevin



If the Gillard Government manages to serve a full term — if it survives the random risks of MP health and mortality, and Tony Abbott's determined wrecking program — there is a good chance that Parliament will pass a well-designed, effective national carbon pricing policy into law in 2012.

Such an achievement would be a major policy success that Gillard could legitimately boast of, going into a 2013 full-term election.

Certainly the new Cabinet climate change advisory committee (announced on Monday) is unusually well-conceived, in terms of both mandate and membership.

It starts with the premise that some form of national carbon pricing is needed soon, in order that Australia not fall behind its international trading partners and competitors. This premise cuts the ground from under the feet of climate change deniers, making their arguments irrelevant.

Second, it breaks the destructive 'the best is the enemy of the good' Labor-Greens disputes of the Rudd years. The Greens are firmly in the tent, effectively co-chairing this committee. They have had to give up something important: the committee's mandate is to advise on the best method of carbon pricing — a carbon tax, or emissions trading scheme — not on what national emissions reduction targets to aim for.

But Labor has had to give up something important too. In opting under Rudd for an ETS, and discarding a carbon tax as politically impractical, Labor went a long way down the road of making politically necessary but painful compromises with industry special interests, in order to build broad industry support for their ETS approach (thereby losing the Greens).

All that hard-won achievement is now back in the melting pot. Business will be loath to lose the concessions and profit opportunities it had won under the Rudd ETS.

But Greg Combet made clear that the new committee is going back to the drawing board on whether an ETS or a carbon tax is the best way to go. In the post-Copenhagen international environment, all policy bets are open. Though the influential insider publication *Climate Spectator* [opines](#) that the ETS is likely to prevail, I am not so sure of this. It will be a real policy argument now.

The important thing is that by the end of 2011, there will be a broad-based recommendation as to the best means of carbon pricing. The committee will not have done its job if it sits on the fence.

Its membership is well-chosen. Gillard as Chair won't have a strong initial view. Her two deputy chairs are Milne and Combet. Milne may favour a tax now, but Combet, I would guess, still has an open mind.

There are four other current members. The Treasurer may be swayed by Treasury's preference for emissions trading over taxing (we know the Treasury view from their published Red Book of advice to the incoming Labor Government).

Independent Tony Windsor, on the other hand, is alert to the risk of perverse market rationalism-driven outcomes of a broad ETS embracing agriculture. He is concerned that food production may fall if farmers are market-driven to growing biofuels or to sequestering carbon in forestry.

Significantly, there are three vacant seats on the committee: one for Rob Oakeshott or Andrew Wilkie as Independents, and two for the Coalition if it should rethink its present boycott of the committee.

The committee has four expert advisers: Ross Garnaut, who seems to incline to a limited carbon tax now, leaving open the transition to an internationally linked ETS later on; Professor Will Steffen, who will keep current global climate science accurately before the committee; Rod Sims, who represents an industry pro-ETS view; and Patricia Faulkner who will represent the consumer interest in keeping energy costs down.

Energy Minister Martin Ferguson, while not on the committee, will be a key offstage voice (and trusted conduit to and from the coal mining and energy industries). Importantly, he now favours some form of carbon pricing, for international trade competitiveness reasons.

But he says the paramount interest here should be Australia's national interests in mining and manufacturing — not in creating profit opportunities for the financial services industry. This suggests he might favour a carbon tax or a simple tax-ETS hybrid scheme.

The committee will function in secret as a Cabinet committee. This is good: it limits the opportunities for powerful special interest lobbying, until the committee has agreed on and submitted its recommendations to Government.

There will be limited opportunity for public consultation: not enough for climate change deniers to distort the process, as they did under the Rudd Government. The tide of public climate change knowledge and opinion in any case is now moving in the direction of accepting the need for Australia to have some form of carbon pricing, and soon.

Despite *The Australian's* persistent rearguard action, voices like Marius Kloppers of BHP and Grant King of Origin Energy now have the public's ear.

If the Coalition were smart, they would quickly review their position on climate change policy. They will find the business sector leaving them behind as irrelevant, if they do not get

on board this committee process. But this would require Tony Abbott to change his stated views.

The above optimistic prognosis assumes the Gillard Government can go to full term. If not, it could all fall in a heap again as it did under Rudd. The game is not yet won.

Wrecking-ball Tony

CARTOON

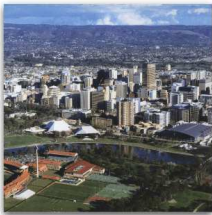
Fiona Katauskas



Protestant righteousness in 'weird' Adelaide

NON-FICTION

Malcolm King



'Even in the daytime the streets of classy North Adelaide and Unley Park can be tunnels, enclosed by green leaves. And so quiet, so secretive, all the people shut away behind their high walls ... At night, Adelaide turns film noir...' *Barbara Hanrahan's 'Weird Adelaide', The Adelaide Review, 1988*

I've been away for 20 years from the City of Churches but it seems like 50. Adelaide has almost doubled in size stretching 90 km north to the Barossa Valley and south past Christies Beach. It seems town planners left about the same time I did.

That Adelaide functions at all as a city is due to the hegemony of the car and truck. Just as the original wide streets were designed so that a bullock team could do a u-turn, the city's post-war growth was due to the triumph of the car. One wonders though what the future of the city will be once petrol becomes prohibitively expensive.

There's still a whiff of Protestant righteousness in the air — of every person and thing in its place. It's a beautiful, quiet and healthy place to live where you can still buy a house that won't leave your grandchildren paying it off. At worst it brims with hypocrisy and small town bitchiness.

The bitchiness is no more evident than in the guerrilla war going on between the heritage lobby of environmentalists, social conservatives, urban professionals and NIMBY's who are ranged against business developers, the property lobby and the Rann Government.

Those who favour protecting Adelaide's heritage buildings and parklands take a hardline. They say Adelaide's colonial buildings are Brand Adelaide and are a tourist magnet.

Depending on one's point of view, Adelaide is a progressive, arts-embracing city with a proud record on social justice. These people applaud the Don Dunstan era and look wistfully back to a time when pink shorts equalled progressive politics.

The contra point of view is that Adelaide's riches and charms are plain to see and for all to enjoy. They are a product of a predominantly Liberal history that goes back generations. In short, in a world of change, well, 'we won't be having any of that thank you'.

Unfortunately SA's national share of visitors fell from 7.5 per cent in 1999 to 7 per cent in 2009 and continues to fall. The highlights are the Adelaide Festival of Arts, the Fringe Festival, Womadelaide and the Clipsal 500. Without these events SA's share would fall to about 4 per cent.

Adelaide suffers from mall malaise. The giant suburban shopping plazas and their category killer retail shops have driven a nail into the heart of CBD shopping. The high number of closed or 'for rent' stores is like something out of the movie *High Noon* — and Gary Cooper is nowhere in sight.

The collapse of the State Bank in 1992 created a \$4 billion debt that broke the state's entrepreneurial spirit. People expect the State Government to fund all manner of projects yet they scream when the same Government raises taxes.

Adelaide survives by winning defence contacts and mining. More than 50 per cent of the state's GDP is earned from these sectors. It's a classic case of too many eggs in too few baskets. The economy urgently needs to diversify.

On the upside, SA's universities are powering ahead with strong international enrolments and research grants. The introduction of highly ranked global universities such as Carnegie Mellon and University College London have raised the bar, yet most people haven't heard of them even though they are ranked 32 and four in the world.

Adelaide's media is a story unto itself. When I left in the late 1980s, the metropolitan daily, *The Advertiser*, was a parochial tabloid fixated with rape and murder stories. It's still a parochial tabloid but the recruitment of young female reporters who are writing hard news, has given the paper some badly needed credence.

Even so, there is a long way to go for some sections of the electronic media who think interviews are a Punch and Judy show. Only Channels Seven and Two are reporting news. The line between PR and journalism has blurred as some reporters work both sides of the fence, working for PR companies and for newspapers.

The combination of an ageing population, falling tourist numbers and the fact that young people are leaving Adelaide for greener pastures in the eastern states, is economic death by a thousand cuts.

Yet for all of this, you can still see private-school girls with just the right degree of wrinkle in their socks, outside Sportsgirl in Rundle Mall. The frog cakes still sit on their paper doilies in Balfours which, like Woodies lemonade and Coopers beer, are Adelaide institutions.

For those born in Adelaide, there is something endearing about the place. It's like living in a country town where Big Ears, Ratty or Mole could be spotted. But the penchant for nostalgia and for by-gone days is exactly the wrong impulse now for the City of Churches.

Communities confront flood fallout

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ben Fraser

The war weary population of Shangla District in the restive frontier region of northern Pakistan have little time for self pity. Their response to Pakistan's colossal flood disaster, aptly likened by UN Secretary-General Ban ki Moon to a 'slow motion tsunami', was decisive, the antithesis of victimhood.



While they warmly accept the staples of relief — food, water and shelter — they know through a history of crippling food insecurity and mass displacement that they are masters of their own destiny. Manfully they clear the roads, reclaim what remains and look to the 'Rabi' planting season and the blessings of Islam for comfort and strength.

The statistics are staggering; the swollen Indus River reaching 40 times its capacity, 20 million affected, thousands of villages abandoned then swamped. The asset base of agrarian farmers and livestock herders stripped and scattered from the land.

By all definitions, this flood disaster struck the loudest alarm bell and stirred the loftiest humanitarian compulsion to act. Yet only now, in the decisive period between emergency and recovery, are the gears of the response being engaged.

Pakistan has been a magnet to misery of late with the current crisis set amid a background of resurgent militancy and simmering political and tribal tensions. Thus, when the flood disaster spilled into the international media, good will took a moment for second thought. With President Zardari conspicuous by his absence and the civilian government floundering, Pakistan's Disaster Management Authority became an object of ridicule.

Further suspicions were raised by the emergence of Islamist charities at the frontline of relief efforts, and 'ghost camps' allegedly set up to swindle humanitarian aid. Local newspapers were replete with stories of an invisible government, contributing nothing to the millions suffering on the ground.

When international news cameras were turned on, familiar images emerged; food parcels tumbling from helicopters or pitched from trucks, and pallets of aid stranded in warehouses. The notion of complete disorder was complete.

Consequently the dollars barely trickled in, with many governments failing to rapidly allocate emergency funding so sorely needed. The response in the US was indicative of this sluggishness: by 27 August a mere \$12 million had been raised by US NGOs compared with \$500 million for the Haiti earthquake over the same period. While disasters rarely draw uniform responses from the hip pocket, the financial shortfalls were alarming.

Till now, the UN flood response plan remains well behind its target with the funding pipeline reduced to a trickle. Evidently, the search for the billions of dollars of relief and reconstruction funding will be an arduous one.

Amid the horror and gloom there have been moments of inspiration in the flood crisis that have largely gone unreported. The National Volunteer Movement in Pakistan has mobilised hundreds of thousands of people since the flood crisis began who have collected food parcels, shelter materials and cash for flood victims. Host families have spontaneously opened their homes to the needy.

Pakistani Doctors, Nurses and Teachers have offered their professional services; others are present at the myriad of displaced persons camps that have sprouted around the flood plains.

While the UN and international agencies often feature at the vanguard of emergency responses, more often than not it's this instinctive support from within that nourishes and nurtures a community through the worst of a disaster.

The failures of the response both internal to Pakistan and beyond are well noted. However it is abundantly clear that this disaster would have overwhelmed the most stable and resource-flush nation in the world. Hurricane Katrina relied on massive financial and material aid inputs from across the world yet even today, many in Louisiana remain without a permanent home.

In a country prone to the vagaries of nature, much more needs to be done to build resilience and reduce vulnerability to disasters in Pakistan and to revive the government's credibility as an assertive and competent administrator for humanitarian relief.

What Pakistan's 'super flood' has taken will be hard to regain. Beneath the diminishing flood tide are millions of homes and vast tracts of agricultural land sodden and spoiled. Inevitably in such circumstances it is the poor who must battle on with hope as their best asset.

The Australian Government's response has been sizable and decisive. Similarly, EU trade concessions and drop-the-debt initiatives offer longer term prospects for bridging what looms as a massive financial deficit in rehabilitation funds.

Pakistan's standing within the international community has rarely been exalted and the flood crisis has exposed critical failings at all levels of government that have compromised the lives of millions. The combination of incompetence and 'image prejudice' has indeed been compelling.

International guardianship through the recovery phase must be vigilant and far-sighted. Equally though, as people and nations, our compassion to give and give again to people in need should remain unequivocal.

What is forever

POETRY

Various

What is forever

The earth and its mortal crust

Like our own skin

Covers something

Which at one point

Was not

And in some distant point

Far beyond this evening

Will no longer be

The neon beckons from within the dusk

Blue electric

It alone refuses to be wrapped within

The mauve of evening

(slowly)

The rest of us are engulfed by

The approaching night

What is forever?

— Sitting on the dry grass with

Bare feet as the night settles itself? —

Colours shift and

Shadows settle. The shaking ceases

Breathing in

The realm of the verifiable.

— *Cecilia Condon*

dandelions

The dandelions are generous,
offering their abundance to the eye.

The dark green lacework of root and leaf,
the flat open faces of their footholds
in my narrow garden,
mark it now from end to end.

At first, there were only a few,
but year by year, these solitaires sent out
seedlings, and the numbers grew.

Others would remove them — poison
or a brutal grubbing out by the roots;
but the dandelions are generous,
so we live in fellowship, the weeds and I.

I allow myself to be surprised, each month,
by their golden glory, the slender arms
reached upwards to a loving sun.

Soon, the mower comes, with his machine intent,
and sickles through this joyful harvest,
dropping the glowing haloes on the ground.

Yet the dandelions are generous, forgiving me
such desecration. In this garden,

we are companions, the weeds and I.

The roots run deep in the sleeping soil,
feeding the stalky uprights of greened lives.

The sun, as always, will come to welcome them,
watching them fall and rise, to fall and rise again.

This is all we know, the weeds and I,
opening our small clenched souls
to the waiting sky.

—*R. Nugent*

Autism

Something in me knew
the common ground they walked on
the tilt and shake from overload
the rocking singularity
lost in some transfixing glow
brought home by a steady voice
making patterns in the air
staring into middle space
diamonds polished in the sun
life played to a steady rhythm
no world beyond this now.

—*Rob Donnelly*

Rehabilitating Rudd and Turnbull

POLITICS

John Warhurst



Kevin Rudd and Malcolm Turnbull, former Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition respectively, are two of the most important figures in the Australian Parliament today. Their continued presence in the Parliament is a surprise. Even more remarkable is their new prominence after both sat out the election campaign on the backbench, playing only cameo roles.

As Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Shadow Minister for Communications respectively, they have been rehabilitated and revitalised. Their past faults and misdemeanours have been forgotten and they have been charged with new responsibilities at the heart of Australia's domestic and international futures.

Rudd has been feted on the international stage and has already achieved a rise in our standing, especially in the United States, as well as favourable publicity for himself. He also has oversight of the regional resolution of the management and processing of asylum seekers. His success in this difficult task is crucial to the Government's domestic electoral fortunes as Labor must neutralise this issue.

Turnbull has not been given quite as senior a portfolio as Rudd, but his portfolio is crucial nevertheless, in terms of both good public policy and party politics. His role is central to the political strategy of the Opposition. He has been specifically chosen as Tony Abbott's wrecking ball. His job is to demolish the government's central infrastructure policy, the National Broadband Network (NBN), with two goals in mind.

The short term goal is to reduce the NBN to such tatters that the two rural Independents desert the Government for the Opposition. The longer term goal, if that does not succeed, is to make sure that by the next election the NBN is seen as a failure, a larger version of the pink bats and school halls policies.

Rudd and Turnbull have a common interest: action on climate change. This issue more than any other brought each of them down in their previous incarnations. Rudd saw climate change as the greatest moral challenge of our time but baulked at putting his Government on the line for it. Turnbull was willing to risk his Liberal leadership to achieve an ETS scheme but failed to convince his party to follow him.

Their joint venture eventually, after Turnbull's demise, failed to carry the majority of the Senate. But the issue lives on, though neither Julia Gillard nor Abbott has anywhere near the commitment that their predecessors articulated.

Now the Independents and the Greens want climate change action returned to centre stage.

Can Rudd and Turnbull pretend to themselves that it is all in the past or will they be tempted to return to the fray, outside party discipline, in the House of Representatives?

The issue of team discipline poses a dilemma for Gillard and Abbott. The new leaders must maintain their authority over their potentially undisciplined colleagues Rudd and Turnbull while allowing them some free rein to pursue their interests. It will require sensitive management and good luck.

The other dilemma is that the new leaders must wish their vanquished colleagues great success in their new positions, but not too much. They must pray that their colleagues soar high in public esteem and policy achievements. They must be confident enough to allow this to happen, knowing that such success will elevate their rivals' profile. It may lead Rudd and Turnbull to dream once again of party leadership.

Gillard and Abbott must rely on the success of their troublesome subordinates. In the worst possible scenario, either Rudd or Turnbull could quit the front bench and even the Parliament though their own reputations would be shredded in the process. Rudd could bring down the Gillard Government by such actions and Turnbull, without quite the same leverage, could mortally wound the Abbott Opposition.

But the sting in the tail for both of them is that in doing so they would bring themselves down too because they would then be judged as traitors by their own parties.

On keeping a distance from governments

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

One of the most challenging issues for community organisations is whether and how to cooperate with Government policy. Responses can range from endorsement, to limited cooperation in order to minimise harm, to total dissociation.

Organisations working with asylum seekers will have reflected hard about how they should respond to the Government policy towards on-shore asylum seekers. Government commitment to a policy that would have asylum seekers housed and processed fairly by a regional agreement has attractive features. But on closer examination it proves impossible to endorse.



The difficulty with the search for a regional processing centre lies in the presuppositions on which it is built. The Government identified people who arrive in Australia by boat as a problem, not as people who have a problem. So the purpose of the regional processing centre is not to find the most equitable way of receiving and adjudicating the claims of asylum seekers in the region. It is to ensure that they are not received in Australia.

By any reasonable standards people who apply for asylum in Australia are not a problem. Australia is a wealthy enough country to receive them, to judge their claims and to offer protection to those found to be refugees. The Convention to which Australia is a signatory commits it to this. And despite the present increase of applicants, the number of asylum seekers in Australia is relatively small.

The problem that asylum seekers face in being received fairly and compassionately in Australia is one of irrational prejudice pandered to for political gain. The regional processing centre was proposed in order to minimise the political damage caused by the influx of boats. The Government decided to treat people who arrived by boat as a problem and linked this 'problem' to the claustrophobia experienced by people in marginal electorates.

Governments do what Governments do. But those concerned for the dignity of asylum seekers and for a compassionate Australian response to them ought not to accept that Australia has an 'asylum-seeker problem', any more than there was a 'Jewish problem' in Germany in the 1930s or that there is a 'Gypsy problem' in France today. Nor should they accept the proposal of a regional processing centre.

This is not to say that Australia should not try to build regional cooperation for a more humane treatment of asylum seekers. But it cannot be based on excluding them from coming to Australia. That is not cooperation but self-interest. The present proposal of a regional

processing centre is unacceptable. It should not be endorsed.

The correct stance towards the regional processing centre is that which has been adopted towards indefinite detention, whose repeal was announced in Government policy but never legislated. It has always been criticised by refugee groups. But many of those groups have cooperated in limited ways with Government in order to minimise the harm that detention causes. They have simultaneously publicised the extent of the human destruction entailed in detention and argued for the abolition of the policy. That is a proper stance.

It is significant that the focus on the regional processing centre has been accompanied by more demeaning and harsher forms of detention, including that of women and children. By halting the processing of Afghan claimants, the Government has extended the time which people will spend in detention in harsh and isolated places. It is time for this costly, damaging and counter-productive system of detention to be abandoned. It is broken.

To be adamantly opposed to bad government policies while at the same time ready to help mitigate the damage done to human beings by those policies is a difficult stance to hold. That is especially so when one is beating into the wind of public opinion. But sometimes that is what humanity demands.