

Christmas challenge for a nonviolent Australia	
<i>John Dear</i>	<u>1</u>
The beer jingle that saved Christmas	
<i>Brian Doyle</i>	<u>3</u>
Rights for kids at Christmas	
<i>John Falzon</i>	<u>5</u>
When my kids believed in Santa and God	
<i>Catherine Marshall</i>	<u>8</u>
War on terror is beyond the joke	
<i>Justin Glyn</i>	<u>11</u>
Giving ice-cream to strangers	
<i>Phoebe Marsh</i>	<u>13</u>
North Korea's new season of hope	
<i>Binoy Kampmark</i>	<u>15</u>
Don't stoop to stupid policy over boat tragedy	
<i>Aloysious Mowe</i>	<u>17</u>
Missing Christopher Hitchens	
<i>Frank Brennan</i>	<u>19</u>
Feast of the fantastic	
<i>Peter Gebhardt</i>	<u>22</u>
Witnessing Washi's wrath and aftermath	
<i>Fatima Measham</i>	<u>25</u>
Bill Gates shows us how to give	
<i>Michael Mullins</i>	<u>27</u>
Questions surround latest asylum seeker boat disaster	
<i>Tony Kevin</i>	<u>28</u>
Shocking scenes from a teen pregnancy	
<i>Madeleine Hamilton</i>	<u>31</u>
Life lessons on the Thai-Burma border	
<i>Duncan Maclaren</i>	<u>33</u>
Julian Assange's clear and present danger	
<i>Tony Kevin</i>	<u>35</u>
Savaging sex and religion	
<i>Tim Kroenert</i>	<u>38</u>
The truth about China the climate scapegoat	
<i>Sean McDonagh</i>	<u>40</u>
Confronting the beggar dilemma	
<i>Gillian Bouras</i>	<u>43</u>
Learning to walk and to dance	
<i>Various</i>	<u>45</u>
Fraser and Whitlam's fruitful rivalry	
<i>John Menadue</i>	<u>48</u>
The dark heart of a European Christmas	
<i>Bronwyn Lay</i>	<u>50</u>
The good journalist and the assassins	
<i>Andrew Hamilton</i>	<u>52</u>
Teachers' uprising	
<i>Brian Matthews</i>	<u>54</u>
Save the world with salad	

<i>Ruby Hamad</i>	56
Why I don't preach on abortion	
<i>Andrew Hamilton</i>	58
Pope on the run	
<i>Tim Kroenert</i>	60
The best teacher I ever knew	
<i>Frank O'Shea</i>	62
Gay marriage debate has a long way to go	
<i>Frank Brennan</i>	64
Reinventing the Aboriginal sports icon	
<i>Michael Visontay</i>	67
Lesson for heretics	
<i>Various</i>	69
Making friends with the landmine capital of the world	
<i>Michael Mullins</i>	72
Afghan terror past and present	
<i>Jan Forrester</i>	74

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

Responsibility for editorial content is accepted by the publisher.

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

Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned.

PO Box 553
 Richmond
 VIC 3121
 Australia

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

Christmas challenge for a nonviolent Australia

POLITICS

John Dear

When the nonviolent Jesus was born into abject poverty to homeless refugees on the outskirts of a brutal empire, angels appeared to impoverished shepherds singing, 'Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth!' Peace was coming. They were so excited, they couldn't contain themselves.

That child grew up to become, in Gandhi's words, 'the greatest nonviolent resister in the history of the world'. He taught peace, lived peace and blessed peacemakers. 'My peace is my gift to you,' he said. When we refused to learn 'the things that make for peace', he broke down and wept.

He took action to end systemic injustice, in a nonviolent way. For his civil disobedience he was brutally executed by the empire. When he rose from the dead, he came back not seeking vengeance, but once again, offering his gift of peace. 'Peace be with you,' he said over and over again.

Two thousand years later, the world remains stuck in the old cycle of empire, war, poverty, and injustice. This time, however, the empire's weapons have the power to destroy the planet. The money spent funding our wars and weapons bankrupts us and leaves millions in hunger.

On top of that, our greed and systemic violence destroys the environment. Catastrophic climate change is our own fault, and may bring unprecedented 'war on earth'.

In the US, many of us work daily to resist the American empire. We pray, protest, write, and speak out. We stand up, sit down, camp in, occupy, cross the line and go to jail. In short, we do what we can to welcome the Christmas gift of peace.

This year, America's deadly outreach has come to Australia, a place I have grown to love during my visits and speaking tours. I think the US military presence there could mark the beginning of the end of your hallowed land.

My advice? Don't welcome the American military. Don't let them stay. Don't let them plan future wars in Asia from their new Australian base. No good can come of its presence in Australia. It will only lead to further wars, greater insecurity, more death and destruction. Resist the American war machine.

That's actually the message and challenge of Christmas. If the birth of the nonviolent Jesus heralds the coming of peace on earth, then each one of us is called to join God's global peace movement and do what we can to welcome that gift of peace.

Each one of us is needed to help stem the tide of war.

Australia is called to lead the world toward a new future of peace, not continue the downward spiral of global warmaking. It should stand up and say *No* to US militarism.

I hope people of faith in Australia will speak out with renewed vigour against the US military and pursue the Christmas vision of peace. I hope they will organise and build a nonviolent movement to turn away the US military presence and herald the coming of a new nonviolent Australia.

'Peace on earth' means 'No More War!' From now on, we work for a world beyond our wildest imaginations — a world without war, nuclear weapons, poverty, violence, or environmental destruction. Once we achieve that, our celebration of the birth of the nonviolent Jesus will ring true.

The beer jingle that saved Christmas

NON-FICTION

Brian Doyle

The elementary school Christmas musical production season being upon us again like a cougar on a fawn, I am powerfully reminded of my own first experience in musical theater, the memory of which still makes my mother spit her apple tea across the table when I bring up such things as a hickory tree peeing in his pants, and a striped bass assaulting an eggplant, and, my mom's favourite moment, a young teacher cursing in Gaelic into her microphone near the end, and my dad's favourite moment, my kid brother Tommy suddenly singing *When you're out of Schlitz, you're out of beer*, which was not in the script at all, and was something of a conundrum, as my dad says in his inimitable style, as the boy did not drink beer, no one in the house drank beer, and if any of us were to drink beer, certainly we would not be drinking such a vulgar amalgam of wet air and insipid jingles, purveyed in cans of suspicious origin, which is how my dad talks.

This production was in the auditorium of Saint John Vianney Grade School, near the Atlantic Ocean, which is how we came to have a striped bass, as the young teacher was a student of local flora and fauna, and allowed her charges, the fifth grade plus a few slumming kindergartners (thus my kid brother Tommy) to choose any local plant or animal to impersonate, although she overruled a few choices, like rumrunners and gunsels.

My memory is not what it used to be, but I have a clear memory of a ragged front line of ducks and potatoes, those being then the most famous products of our island, and then a taller motley back line of fish, bushes, trees, birds, deer, and a horseshoe crab, this being a boy whose mother worked in the theater.

My kid brother Tommy was a horse, which suited him, for you never saw a child who looked more like a horse, it was a stone miracle how that boy carried his head as a child, and I was an apple, because my mother had burned all her time on my weeping brother Tommy and left me to my sister, who draped me in a red jacket and told me I was now an apple and if I complained to mom she would snap my fingers like brittle twigs.

I remember that there was a flounder near me, a silent boy named Michael, and an osprey, a foul-tempered girl named Grace, and my friend Billy, the tallest boy in the class, who was a glossy ibis, and I remember my mom and dad and brothers and sisters sitting near the statue of Saint John Vianney the Confessor, my sister ostentatiously glaring and cracking her knuckles, and that's all I remember of the production, other than the hickory tree incident.

My dad, however, is one of those rare souls whose memory has improved remarkably as he aged, and he says he remembers the day as golden and miraculous as if it was born yesterday.

You were so terrified we thought you would faint, he says, and your friend Billy, the tall boy, looked queasy beyond compare; your brother Tommy, however, looked calm and cheerful, probably because no child ever looked more like the part he was to play. Your mother does not like to speak of this, but, sweet Jesus, that boy had a head like a suitcase. He had the single largest head I have ever seen on a human being, big enough to require his own zip code. His head was so big it had different weather on either side. Try to imagine what it was like bringing this child to the barber. You should have seen the barber's face.

Anyway the production started well but quickly fell apart, and indeed the young teacher, who was from a large family in Scotland, as I recall, used foul and vulgar language in the old tongue. Things fell apart further and then for murky reasons your brother Tommy stepped forward and sang that beer jingle, a moment I will savour on my deathbed. Some moments are unforgettable for reasons we cannot articulate, and for me that is certainly one of them. It is not every afternoon, I can safely say, that a boy with a head the size of a suitcase sings a beer jingle on stage in an auditorium featuring not one but four statues of the Madonna in various stages of her holy and blameless life.

Other than the moments during which you children were born, and the moment your mother married me, and the moment she did not die on the surgeon's table that time, and the moment the war ended and I was not dead as she and I expected me to be, I believe that might be the greatest moment of my life.

You and your brothers and sister and mother were all there, the lovely old tongue was in the air, the Madonna hovered nearby with her enigmatic smile, we were all young and strong and in the fullness of our days, and humour, which is the greatest and holiest of gifts and virtues, as you know, was everywhere like a generous ocean.

Your mother does not remember that day as clearly as I do, but I remember it as if it emerged a moment ago from the unimaginable hand of the Maker, and that was a holy day. *When you're out of Schlitz, you're out of beer*, bless my soul, where that boy learned those lines is a mystery to me. I think I better lie down now, but not before I become as the hickory tree, profligate with the waters of the Lord released upon the thirsty earth.

Rights for kids at Christmas

POLITICS

John Falzon

We love democracy. How can we not, we tell ourselves, when we look at the alternatives? It's interesting though to reflect on what democracy means to us. We generally measure it by the extent of the right to vote for our political representatives or by the plurality of political parties.

Slovenian philosopher, Slavoj Zizek, says democracy is the ancient Greek name for 'the intrusion of the Excluded into the socio-political space'. This is a useful conceptualisation. It raises the practical question for any society as to where the excluded are. When you start to think about the excluded and ask why their exclusion is happening you begin to re-evaluate the strength of your democracy.

As Italian political theorist, Domenico Losurdo has written: 'Democracy cannot be defined by abstracting the fate of the Excluded.' If we love democracy we will want to find out who is excluded and why. We will not be satisfied with glib justifications that put the blame squarely on the shoulders of the excluded. We will take practical steps to remove the structural causes of exclusion.

One of the decisions at the recent ALP Conference that has gone almost unnoticed is the resolution to appoint a National Children's Commissioner. This was moved by the Member for Fremantle, Melissa Parke, who chairs the UNICEF Parliamentary Association, and was strongly supported at the conference and later by groups such as the St Vincent de Paul Society, UNICEF and Save the Children.

Children and young people figure prominently among the excluded in our democracy. Hopefully the appointment of a National Commissioner for Children will be an important step in creating a vehicle for their intrusion into the socio-political space.

During the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay's visit to Australia earlier this year she urged the Federal Government to appoint a commissioner to protect the rights of vulnerable children. It has been 21 years since Australia ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which affirms that children are entitled to enjoy the same human rights as adults.

It is time we took seriously our obligations to prevent the growing inequality of resources and opportunities that condemn many children to exclusion and disadvantage. Article 4 of the convention states: 'Governments must undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognised in the convention.'

Most states or territories already have a designated commissioner or guardian for children and young people. The appointment of a National Children's Commissioner would help provide a coordinated approach to children's rights in

this country. Australia would also be following the example set by New Zealand and England who have already appointed people to such positions.

In 2009 the Federal Government developed the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children (2009—2020). Not surprisingly the release of the 12-year plan further highlighted the inadequacy of existing state and territory frameworks.

The easiest approach, of course, is to blame parents. This, sadly, has been the basis upon which numerous government policies have been predicated.

These policies include SEAM, which links school attendance with income support for Aboriginal families, compulsory income management, and a new round of persecution for young single mothers, which the government is set to introduce in ten trial areas from 1 January 2012. Teenage mums in these locations will be threatened with the suspension of their social security payments if they do not attend school or return to study within six months of giving birth.

The government can threaten with all the sticks under the sun but this will not lead people to learning. They can suspend a young mother's entire income if they want. This will cause hardship for both mother and child and will mean that the young woman will need to get assistance from her extended family or friends, neighbours or a charity. But will it instil a desire to learn? Not likely.

Following the ALP Conference's resolution Dr Norman Gillespie, Chief Executive of UNICEF Australia, spoke of 'the need to give voice to children and young people who are so often excluded from the decisions that affect them'. I cannot think of a better way to begin than by challenging the hopelessly paternalistic policies the Government has taken to championing in a moment of ideological madness.

You don't strengthen and respect the rights of children by humiliating their parents and tearing down their communities. Rights don't fall from the sky.

They are built on a firm foundation of a strong and respectful social security system (not one with income support levels that are below the poverty line); a job guarantee; and high quality social infrastructure, especially in areas of, and among cohorts experiencing, concentrated exclusion.

This includes the provision of appropriate housing, education, health, transport and childcare as well as family support and youth programs.

Another area of concern that seems to slip under the radar when we talk about children is the growing trend in Australia towards insecure and casual employment. We have the second highest rate of workforce casualisation in the developed world. The affects of income inadequacy, job insecurity and irregular work hours have serious impacts on the children in these households.

The appointment of a National Children's Commissioner won't solve these social problems overnight but it will send a powerful message to the community that

children's rights are human rights.

At Christmas we remember the intervention of the Divine in human history on the side of the poor and oppressed. It is a good time to reflect on the story of God coming into our midst as a child on the margins of Bethlehem, an intrusion, par excellence, of the excluded into the socio-political space.

When my kids believed in Santa and God

PARENTING

Catherine Marshall

The evolution of childhood is most faithfully documented by the Christmas lists delivered into my hands with diminishing credulity each year. They record my children's growth more accurately than their physical measurements, which are etched in startling increments all the way up the kitchen wall.

They are source documents recorded first by me, the adult scribe chronicling the material desires of my not-yet-literate toddlers, then in their own flawed phonetic script, and later still in the insolent scrawl of youths who have outgrown religion and artifice.

I store these lists in The Special Box, a battered blue receptacle whose contents have multiplied over the years so that their excess must now be contained in a sterile plastic trunk.

Here they lie with other tangible remnants of my children's pasts, love letters they have written me, gifts they have conjured from paddle pop sticks and beads and scraps of felt, spontaneous notes thanking me for taking them to the park and for 'making us smart', and informing me that 'I have left a kiss for you on the Butter Menthol wrapper!' Each is the token of a pure and ebullient love.

The early lists are infused with the wonderment of those ensnared by the Christmas myth, with requests preceded by deferential 'pleases' and premature 'thank yous' and premised on the naïve certainty that even the most excessive of desires can be filled.

My older daughter, at seven, imagines a Barbie doll that does not exist, one that has 'a very cool gun and a spare pistol and a spare pair of shoes and a very cool hat and sunglasses and real lipstick you can put on her'. Barbie, of whom I disapprove, is a recurrent theme, along with jewellery and make-up and clothes and tea-sets.

This gendered focus is redressed in later years by revelations also archived in The Special Box, by my daughter's conclusion in a primary school essay that she does not aspire to be superwoman because she likes herself the way she is; her reflection in high school that her early dreams of being a princess or dancer or archaeologist, 'while possible, might only last for me until the shine wears off. I have to try and work out my weaknesses and strengths before I can go anywhere in life'; the email she sends from Montreal when she is 17 and on a gap year informing me that 'I have decided to become the third generation of our family to climb Mt Kilimanjaro'.

My son, at five, asks for 'a big Jeep for kids that you can drive and that has a radio that works, and a real hot air balloon and real false teeth'.

Although he possesses his own set of teeth, this peculiar request will reappear in subsequent Christmas lists, and his wish will finally be granted when he is 15 and I place beneath the tree a set of wind-up teeth I have found in a novelty store. He receives this gift with a wry smile, and, just like that, a decade of waiting melts away.

When a new baby arrives, my two older children make proxy requests on her behalf: 'Please can you give my sister a doll that can cry, with a set of clothes,' writes my daughter, aged six, explicitly naming the recipient lest Father Christmas confuse her with some other baby out there in the world.

'And a teddy bear for Cheeks,' adds my four-year-old son, referring to his baby sister by the nickname he has given her, which arises from the juicy baby-cheeks on which he cannot help but plant a profusion of kisses each time he passes her by.

This baby's own lists, when she is old enough to write them, are computerised; she uses an efficient numbering system and places smiley faces alongside the must-have items. At six she longs for a map of the world and butterfly eggs, stick insects and sea monkeys; at seven, a toy dog — 'PS If it can walk that would be great :)' — and 'a never-ending supply of chocolate'.

The privations of childhood are writ large on these lists, in the 'two coca-cola lollipops and a bottle of coke' requested by my son; 'that teddy from the second-hand shop' and 'more privileges' sought by my older daughter; 'some hair ties and a vase of flowers', for which the youngest longs.

Most telling are the TV games routinely denied them until finally they lose faith in Father Christmas. 'Dear Granddad,' writes my son, aged nine. 'Thank you for the money you gave me for Christmas. We are saving for a Playstation.'

This relinquishing of the Christmas myth coincides neatly with my son's rejection of God. His lists are now written half-heartedly and, eventually, not at all. 'I'll be happy with whatever you give me,' he says, and then, 'there is nothing that I need'.

My daughters lose their religion, too, but they continue to submit their requests each year, lists which now read like commercial requisition forms: 'a manicure set — a big one, as you know', 'a handbag, as described' and 'no goofy books I'll never read — it's a waste of your money!'

The future is waiting, poised to snatch away my babies' childhood. This year I have received just one list, from my youngest, now almost a teenager. 'Mum, you did tell me to write this, so I am expecting to get everything I ask for, okay?' This is a rhetorical remark, an in-joke, for my children have lived through enough Christmases to know that their lists are not catalysts for fulfillment.

Rather, they are time capsules, snatches of history that will survive the hair straighteners and water guns and mobile phones. They will still be there long after

the endless supply of chocolate has finally run out.

War on terror is beyond the joke

POLITICS

Justin Glyn

Long after George W. Bush has left office, his 'war on terror' rumbles on, even if the term has been used rather less of late.

The US Congress' current proposals to allow indefinite military detention of its citizens without charge or trial, and America's ongoing use of unmanned attack aircraft ('drones') in Pakistan, Yemen and elsewhere to assassinate opponents (including at least one US citizen), highlight anew the need for clear thinking when it comes to that much abused term, 'war', and what the law of war actually allows.

Many people have commented that 'war on terror' is a nebulous term. Terry Jones, of Monty Python fame, asked, in *Terry Jones' War on the War on Terror*: 'How do you wage war on an abstract noun? ... It's well known, in philological circles, that it's very hard for abstract nouns to surrender.' Richard Jackson notes that the phrase was used to build up a good-evil duality and to desensitise us to the human rights violations which the new 'war footing' would involve.

Even if one accepts the dubious premise that there is a war on, however, war has not been law-free for a very long time. Ever since St Augustine proposed requirements for a 'just war', international law has set limits on how one may conduct hostilities.

It is true that there are fewer laws governing conflicts which do not have countries as belligerents on both sides, than there are for those that do. The bulk of the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 only apply to the former. Nevertheless, other conflicts are not 'law free'.

Even if hostilities involve non-state actors, common article 3 of the Conventions and customary law mandate certain minimum standards. Recent developments, especially the authorisation of extra-judicial killings and detentions of US citizens by American forces, suggest that states need a reminder of international law obligations owed to people found in a 'war' zone.

Firstly, international law only recognises a distinction between combatants (who carry arms openly and take part in hostilities and are therefore legitimate targets) and civilians. Importantly, one is either a combatant (even if not part of the armed forces or a regular military formation) or not. 'Unlawful enemy combatant' is a label invented by the Bush administration in an attempt (rejected by the US Supreme Court) to avoid having to apply common article 3 to people it had captured in Afghanistan.

While they may not have all the rights given to prisoners of war, common article 3 prohibits the following in respect of captured combatants or civilians:

- (a) violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel

treatment and torture;

(b) taking of hostages;

(c) outrages upon personal dignity, in particular, humiliating and degrading treatment;

(d) the passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court affording all the judicial guarantees which are recognized as indispensable by civilized peoples.

The 'new' climate of 'terrorism' (always ill-defined and not really new) scarcely seems to require a new legal architecture. Civilians involved in torture or attacks on armed forces or other civilians may be tried for such attacks (provided the trial is fair). Under laws going back centuries, treason charges can be brought against citizens who wage war against their own states.

Indefinite detention without trial is not permitted under international law.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (which the international community has tasked with acting as the 'guardian' of the Geneva Conventions) has recently reiterated the illegality of targeted assassinations where the victim is not a combatant or is outside the area of military operations.

It is true that the other side does not always play by the same rules. Nevertheless, the military itself is often most in favour of complying with international law. This is not only because it wishes to avoid generating sympathy for the insurgents but also because it recognises that captives from its own side are likely to face similar treatment.

Failure to heed these lessons may serve to inflame, rather than quell, international terrorist threats.

Giving ice-cream to strangers

NON-FICTION

Phoebe Marsh

I remember being told when I was five years old that under no circumstances should I accept sweets from strangers. Fair enough, this is common sense. But what if you are that stranger?

Recently I missed my train and was stuck on the platform for an hour. It was unseasonably warm and I had in my bag of groceries a pack of ice-creams — the kind that look like an icy pole but are in fact filled with vanilla ice-cream.

I was quickly overcome by a panic next only to that feeling you get at a buffet when you realise you're full and you haven't even started on the desserts yet. My ice-creams were almost definitely about to melt into a sad soupy mess at the bottom of my bag.

If there is one thing I can't abide it's wasted ice-cream.

Now I could have made a pretty good go at eating ten in an hour, but it wouldn't have been pretty. And since I was planning a dinner containing enough cheese to give me (and my cat) nightmares for a week I thought it wise to abstain.

But throwing away these treats was not an option. So if I couldn't eat them, then somebody else bloody well better.

I reasoned that if someone offered me an ice-cream on a hot day I would be chuffed. I'm reasonably well turned out, clean-ish and in no way resemble the child catcher in Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. Surely this could be classed as a random act of kindness? I don't want anything from anyone — I just don't want to waste food and it would be lovely if someone else could enjoy these goodies.

I looked around and spied a teenage boy in school uniform.

'These ice-creams are about to melt — would you like one?' I chirped.

He looked up from his phone, shook his head and grunted.

I tried a woman standing nearby.

'Would you like one? They'll only go to waste!'

'No thank you dear.'

'Oh. Okay then.'

By this time my face was red with embarrassment and rejection. It dawned on me that I was the weirdo on the platform offering sweets to strangers and it was not a good look. There was no going back: I'd broken the strict rules of platform-stranger etiquette. I was an outcast and a fruit loop.

It was at this point that I noticed a man in a blue National Rail uniform, name tag and standard issue hi-vis jacket. *Bingo!* What a lovely idea! I'll give them to the staff at the station, it'll be a nice thing on a hot day when they have to work, and there's plenty to go around!

I wandered up to the man, put on my most apologetic voice and said: 'Excuse me, I was wondering if you could do me a favour? I just bought these ice-creams but now I have a long wait and they're about to melt. I don't want them to go to waste ... do you think you could take them off my hands?'

The platform guard looked me up and down (to check I'm not a loony), looked at the ice-creams and said in his most hard-done-by, you-owe-me-one voice: 'Yeah, I could do that.'

He took the ice-cream and marched off quick as you like.

I stood there dumbstruck; I didn't expect that. I re-ran the scene in my head. Did I word it wrong? Was I too apologetic? Did he genuinely think he was doing me a favour by taking my ice-cream?

Contrary to the foundations of a random act of kindness I had expected something in return. In my head this man would turn around with a big grin on his face and say 'Thank you! That made my day!'

Where was my warm fuzzy feeling?

There's a bit in the bible that says 'Do not let your left hand know what your right is doing.' Which is useful in this context. I selfishly assumed that the tiny gesture would make me feel good about myself and earn heavy karma points ...

A cautionary tale perhaps.

North Korea's new season of hope

POLITICS

Binoy Kampmark

He presided over a starving nation, created a perilously unstable nuclear state (albeit largely symbolic), and terrified his neighbours. But the death of North Korean leader Kim Jong-il should cause neither terror nor concern as much as the experts would have it.

Jim Walsh of MIT's security studies programs is one such individual who is keen to emphasise the gloomy aspects. 'We're entering a period that is especially dangerous.'

Nor should Jong-il's death encourage those who have their hearts set on regime change imposed from without. The Workers Party's statement suggests the successor is the dictator's youngest son, 27-year-old Kim Jong-un, under whose leadership 'we have to turn sadness into strength and courage, and overcome today's difficulties'.

The death of the despot after a 17-year rule provides a series of possibilities, not all of which are negative. In fact, the negative aspect will only come into play if the paranoid complexes of the regime are played into.

Internally, the regime may be fractious and the dynastic succession forged by Kim Jong-il prone to unravelling. Though little is known about Kim Jong-un, the fact that he seems somewhat green might make him vulnerable to power factions in the regime. Seoul's gesture of increased alertness across the world's most heavily armed frontier is precisely the sort of gesture that should be discouraged.

Time and again, the greatest problem with the regime has been less with its immediate neighbours than with its fear of the United States, which has made little secret of its intentions. Given the invasion of Iraq, North Korea, the third component of the 'axis of evil' so proclaimed by the Bush administration, felt it necessary to bolster the state against possible intervention.

The reason North Korea is the nuclear state it is today can be attributed not just to the ruthless regime itself, but also to the failure of Washington to keep negotiations going and instead pencilling the regime in as one in urgent need of 'regime change'.

The stance of the Obama administration is not a marked improvement. Former defense secretary Robert M. Gates had adopted the position that he 'doesn't want to buy the same horse twice.'

The demonisation of North Korea's late leader as being variously sanguinary, chain-smoking and insane did nothing to deal with the delicate crisis. If anything, it did everything to paint the various parties into corners they found enormously difficult to get out of.

A series of options have come into play. The first is to bring North Korea back into the fold of negotiations within the [Six Party](#) framework of talks that were, till they collapsed, a useful forum for deliberating over matters affecting the Korean Peninsula.

Virtually all political sides in the matter believe a regional solution to North Korean intransigence rests in an agreement that involves not merely the two Koreas, but also Japan, China, Russia and the United States. An olive branch alone is insufficient.

A formal peace treaty ending hostilities between Seoul and Pyongyang would be required, in addition to such reassurances as an affirmation of non-aggression by the United States, and a promise by Seoul not to adopt a nuclear weapons option. Economic supply to North Korea would also have to be factored into the equation.

The role of China, a long-term ally of North Korea, will be indispensable to reassuring Pyongyang as it transitions to its new regime. The support of Beijing is probably going to be guaranteed, given its continued interest in extracting natural resources at low cost from the peninsula.

It is now more urgent than ever that the issue be resolved. The region has seen low-level skirmishes between the North and South that, while costly, have been contained.

The sinking of the South Korean naval vessel the *Cheonan* in March 2010 saw the death of 46 sailors. Engagements have been fought at Daecheong (10 November 2009) and Yeonpyeong (15 June 1999, 29 June 2002). As long as these continue taking place, the possibility of all-out war remains.

The only certainty now is ignorance. As a former US military commander in South Korea claimed, 'Anyone who tells you they understand what is going to happen is either lying or deceiving himself.'

Don't stoop to stupid policy over boat tragedy

POLITICS

Aloysious Mowe

Almost a year to the day when a boat sank off Christmas Island with [horrendous](#) loss of life, yet another asylum seeker tragedy, with an even higher death toll, has occurred. Up to 150 people [bound for Australia](#) may have died in the seas off East Java on Saturday.

The familiar refrains of 'Stop the boats', or more elegant variations thereof, inevitably [followed](#).

The Coalition's policy of towing boats back to Indonesia is both immoral and stupid. It puts the lives of asylum seekers at further risk and undermines the professionalism and morale of the Australian Navy. The other oft-bruited policy, off-shore processing, strikes at the heart of the asylum system.

People have a right to seek asylum, and Australia is a signatory to the Refugee Convention which clearly states that those who seek asylum and arrive in a country's territory by irregular means should not be penalised. Let us be clear: off-shore processing puts Australia in breach of its international obligations, and makes laughable the claim that Australia is a nation of laws.

Of course we want people to stop making the hazardous boat journey to Christmas Island, but tow-backs and off-shore processing are blunt instruments that avoid the complexity of the issue.

Asylum seekers who attempt the boat journey to Australia often make their way to Indonesia via Malaysia, or arrive in Indonesia directly from their countries of origin before making the decision to get on a boat. Many try to get their refugee status determined by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) offices in these countries, but the process is long drawn-out, seen to lack transparency, and has no independent review mechanism.

UNHCR is also in a bind: even if it recognises the refugee status of asylum seekers, there are not enough resettlement places for these refugees to take up. While they languish in Malaysia or Indonesia, they are unable to work legally, cannot get an education, face harassment from the authorities, and are readily exploited by unscrupulous employers who know they have few protections.

Senator Doug Cameron's cogent and insightful statement in reaction to Saturday's tragedy bears repeating:

It doesn't matter what deterrent you put in place, if they are fleeing for their lives, if they don't have a future in the country they're in, then they will take these chances. You can't place enough impediments in the way of asylum seekers who are fleeing death or torture.

This is a regional problem and requires a regional solution. Australia must engage with the countries through which pass the flows of irregular migrants, explore with them ways to increase the protection space for asylum seekers and refugees in their territories, and share in the cost, so that people are not driven by poor living conditions and lack of legal protection to make desperate journeys.

It should also engage in serious research to find out why people make onward journeys from the countries of first asylum such as Malaysia and Indonesia.

On a recent visit to Indonesia, I met many asylum seekers and refugees. For them, coming to Australia was not always an inevitability, but a solution to a problem that seemed to have no other solutions: where can they be safe, and lead normal lives?

For a young man of 16, waiting two to three years in Indonesia for the refugee status determination and resettlement process to play itself out seems like a lifetime, especially when you cannot get an education and have no other meaningful activities while you wait. Getting on a boat seems like the better option, and the young cannot weigh the risks because they feel they are indestructible.

Many have now learnt, to their cost, that this is not the case.

Missing Christopher Hitchens

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan

Christopher Hitchens died on Friday from a tumour on the oesophagus. He once wrote of the paradox: 'Nothing is more predictable and more certain than death, and nothing is less predictable and less certain.'

In one of his last interviews with his dear friend Tony Jones from the ABC he recalled the injunction of the Cuban writer Jose Marti that a man has three duties: to write a book, to plant a tree and to have a son. He was well satisfied that he had fulfilled the injunction thirty years previously:

I remember the year my first son was born was the year I published my first real full-length book. And I had a book party for it and for him, Alexander my son, and I planted a tree, a weeping willow, and felt pretty good for the age of, what, I think 32 or something.

He never made 62. His writings and media interviews survive, as do his three children, and the tree he planted.

He came from the left and from the UK. Publishing a thousand words a day on all manner of subjects, he ended up as a US citizen regarding Bill Clinton as 'a despicable figure' and George W. Bush's Iraq War as justified.

He introduced a 2004 anthology quoting an antique saying that 'a man's life is incomplete unless or until he has tasted love, poverty and war'. As a journalist and essayist he tasted love and war in spades. He experienced little by way of poverty and he regarded religion as the most toxic of foes, 'the most base and contemptible of the forms assumed by human egotism and stupidity'.

He reserved a special hatred for Mother Teresa, the contemporary religious icon for service of the poor, publishing a short book irreverently titled *The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice*, followed by a documentary entitled *Hell's Angel*. To be fair, he said the TV network that broadcast the documentary chose the title 'very much against my will'.

The Vatican even interviewed him in opposition to the canonisation of Mother Teresa. He said he had 'walked around Calcutta in her company and formed the conclusion that she was not so much a friend of the poor as a friend of poverty. She praised poverty and disease and suffering as gifts from on high, and told people to accept these gifts joyfully.'

His intellectual equal, Pierre Ryckmans retorted, 'Mother Teresa is not a philanthropist. She is a Christian. A philanthropist is a person who has a fondness for anthropoids. A Christian is a person who loves Christ.'

Mother Teresa and her sisters have probably done more for the poor slum

dwellers of the world's cities like Calcutta than Hitchens and all his disciples, and the sisters probably would not persevere in that mission but for their religious faith.

Then again religious people like Mother Teresa do well to face the searing scrutiny of one like Hitchens who was asked by the Vatican inquisitors if he thought her guilty of hypocrisy.

He observed that in the same year that Mother Teresa had intervened in the Irish referendum on divorce, she gave an interview to *Ladies' Home Journal* saying she was glad to hear that her friend Princess Diana was getting divorced, since the royal marriage was so obviously unhappy.

He told the Vatican officials, 'I hoped this was hypocrisy, since otherwise it would look like the medieval church, preaching strict morals to the poor and offering indulgences to the rich'.

He did admit to a sneaking regard for Pope John Paul II: 'He may be very conservative on doctrinal matters, but he was a real man when it came to the struggle for his native Poland, and he has almost single-handedly changed the posture of the church on the filthy practice of the death penalty.'

Having attended a US execution for reporting purposes, he later wrote, 'I don't know that I shall ever quite excuse myself, even as a reporter and writer who's supposed to scrutinise everything, for my share in the proceedings. But I am clear on one thing. Death requires no advocates. It is superfluous to volunteer for its service.'

Two years ago, I appeared on Tony Jones' Q&A with Hitchens. At the end of the program, a member of the audience asked: 'Many non-believers facing death change their minds about religion. Is that fear or comfort?' I answered simply, 'It's often both.' Hitchens said:

When Voltaire was dying the priest came and said, 'You should renounce the devil,' and he said, 'This is not time to be making enemies.' It's a religious falsification that people like myself scream for a priest at the end. David Hume very famously didn't and was witnessed by James Boswell not doing so. Most of us go to our ends with dignity. If we don't and if it is the wish for fear or comfort, then both of these things are equally delusory, as religion is itself.

On Saturday, I attended the funeral of a religious sister, aged 89, whose tumour was in the brain. When dying she told her bishop, 'I've never done this before.' At her funeral one of her religious sisters delivered a eulogy and invited us to 'the table of the Eucharist where we hold all this altogether as best we can'.

Hitchens always conceded that 'religious faith is ineradicable. It will never die out, or at least not until we get over our fear of death, and of the dark, and of the unknown, and of each other.'

He always saw a place for conscience, 'whatever it is that makes us behave well when nobody is looking'. For him, 'Ordinary conscience will do, without any heavenly wrath behind it.' Some of us do find that we can form and inform our conscience even better when we believe that a loving God is accompanying us in the lonely chambers of decision.

Some of us stand tallest when we submit and surrender to death, darkness and the other with dignity, and love, surrounded by a religious community.

Hitchens could sure write, and he was a man of deep intellectual conviction, always seeking truth. But he sure had a lifelong block about religion, especially when it came to religious folk seeking to help their fellow man, true to their religious convictions. No doubt all hostilities between him and Mother Teresa are now at an end, but how they are at an end remains a mystery.

We will all miss his searing intellectual rigour, self-deprecating humour, unpredictable political perspectives, unforgiving character evaluations of his fellow anthropoids, and iconoclastic appetite for scrutiny and transparency — even those of us appalled by his vicious and discriminatory anti-religious bigotry.

Feast of the fantastic

POETRY

Peter Gebhardt

Your heart

The doors open wide to a feast of the fantastic,
And the host, in his generosity, opens his hands, fingers dance.
An invitation to come, to join the table,
Which is wide and long, spread with the breads of hope.
Sometimes the music is modern, sometimes ancient,
But it is strong and regular, keeps good time.
This place is bigger than any kingdom,
It opens out, boundary-less, to everyone everywhere.
No sweatshop here. It doesn't matter how many come,
Or will come, and the skateboarders will always get a seat
At the banquet, where they will taste the wine and food
Learn to sing with the host and rejoice in his good.
It is a heart that has the history for art,
And so the ceilings will be skies of songs.

Your hands

If you couldn't speak, your fingers would,
Irresistible, I have seen them make a poem,
As they led the children to the centre,
When we were all betwitched and enlarged,
Dilated with the delicacy of the dance of the senses,
They are petitioners of grace and gravity, of beauty.
It takes fine-tuning to fiddle with the dial's antic,
To hear the muse and the crescendo to music,
To engraft the one that owns a body of oneness.
We watch in wonder at the way we gain access
Through the clarity, the charity into the realm that flows,

Where feeling flourishes and love just grows.
They dance with ten-point rhythm, they open skies,
And the songs that cascade are so wise.

Your eyes

Every time I see your tears,
I see the hurt of fears, the forgotten years,
But, I also see the colours of a jewel
That sparkles despite the power of the cruel.
Then, with the swelling, I feel the deep,
A deep, so deep, that calls us all to weep.
For we, like it or not, are bound one to one.
And, if not, there is but none.
As the globes of salt trickle down your cheek
The glow of your skin rises to its peak.
Suddenly, it is as if a weight
Had been lifted to an even greater height.
When we embrace and consecrate the glory
Then we can celebrate the dreaming in the story.

Your feet

And so we come to the extremities
Which are, in fact, a sure source of sensibilities,
Those feet that can walk on the hot sand,
In the rivers of ice and the snows in the high land.
It's the feet that leave the fact of grip,
The toe-binding footprints on the strip.
The earth-wit of footfall is the signpost to the way
Where we should follow day by day.
Footfall makes for footprints, small headstones
Of memory, of history, of ancestry, of time,
All now bursting with life in the present

With the poetry of sand-depth and soul-surety.
If only we determined to walk in those signs,
They would give us strength and love for the times,
But, and it is true toe to toe, we are too soft
To follow where the passion leads, to the cock-toft-loft.
What is so good, in the end, is that your feet
Are strong and sensitive, tough and sweet.

Witnessing Washi's wrath and aftermath

ENVIRONMENT

Fatima Measham

The cruel paradox in disasters caused by flash floods is that water is the first thing that becomes scarce. In the Philippine city of Cagayan de Oro, mortuaries could not even wash the mud off dead children so they could be quickly identified by parents.

Mud and water. In many areas throughout northwest Mindanao, they are all that remain after tropical storm Washi (local name Sendong) dumped a month's worth of rain in 12 hours. Cagayan and neighbouring Iligan were the hardest hit in the region.

But it was the flash floods that stole through people's homes in the dark hours of Saturday morning that proved fatal. It was astonishingly efficient. In many cases mere minutes spared lives.

Bodies were recovered as the day broke. Many, far too many, were children and elderly. A pall fell over the city as people sensed, even before the toll steeply rose, that the aftermath would be unprecedented.

The effects were impossible to miss. As we drove downtown on Saturday afternoon, we saw people huddling on street corners, covered in mud and looking for shelter. Photos and videos surfaced on social media, revealing riverine and montane landscapes with muddy welts, choked with debris. Water shortages and power cuts further disrupted this city of half a million.

No one was left untouched, even those who had somehow missed the worst.

Cagayan and Iligan are university towns, where school and kinship form the fabric of the community. With more than 35,000 displaced, over 700 confirmed deaths, and nearly 500 unaccounted for, everyone knows someone, or several, who lost their home, their life, or their loved ones.

One of my sister's colleagues drowned. A childhood friend told me one of her sixth grade students is missing. In our wider network, families who somehow kept their houses are struggling to regain normality without clean water.

Cagayanons are reeling. As residents of a port city bisected by the mighty Cagayan River, they had lived mostly peaceably with its waterways. The typhoons that regularly sweep over the Philippine archipelago wreak havoc much further north. Storm tails often break over Macajalar Bay or against the Bukidnon highlands.

Until Saturday, floods could be incredibly inconvenient but not calamitous. The last inundation of comparable scale is on the edge of collective memory, having occurred in 1929.

But then, Cagayan is a vastly different city to what it was in 1929. It is a different city even from the one I grew up in, back in the '80s and '90s.

Forested slopes that used to absorb water and hold the soil together have given way to housing and commercial developments. Illegal logging and mining took care of the rest. Rain thus falls unfettered down the hills to the river. The river banks burst and swallow up houses flimsily built along its length.

Public infrastructure, such as drainage and rubbish disposal, have not been corrected and expanded to meet the pressures of population increase. City and suburban streets do not drain efficiently or at all. Rain runs freely over concrete gutters, eventually finding its way into doorways. When creeks and water basins are already overflowing, it has nowhere else to go.

With Washi, everything that could go wrong, did. Residents in high-risk areas had not evacuated. Flash floods, coinciding with high tide, swept lives and homes away in darkness. The natural and man-made systems that could have mitigated the volume of water were quickly overwhelmed.

Thus, even as relief operations were rapidly mobilised by Xavier University, the Philippine Red Cross, and the government's social welfare department, Cagayanons were trying to make sense of how it had come to this. They have never faced this scale of death and destruction.

Heartsick as they are, resilient as they will undoubtedly prove to be, they are asking hard questions.

Bill Gates shows us how to give

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

According to the great seasonal cliché, Christmas is a time of giving.

The main characteristic of giving is that it is an act of free will that comes from the heart. Yet gift-giving can be the product of the need we feel to conform to expectations. We give presents to family members, friends and colleagues, partly to buy their continued acceptance of us in their lives.

If this applies to us and we feel we have no choice in the matter, gift-giving is not about free will at all, but captivity.

We may in fact feel gracious towards people because they have been there for us during the year. But the exercise of gift-giving is not an expression of that graciousness if it's something we feel we have to do. We are not giving, we are paying, and we know that if we don't pay, there will be consequences. In effect, it is a kind of private taxation.

It is not necessarily a bad thing to give a present that is a requirement of etiquette rather than an expression of love. But it's important that we are able to identify the particular act of giving as such, in the way that we know very well what we are doing when we pay our taxes to the Australian Tax Office.

Our feelings when we pay taxes are usually not positive. That is a pity, because what we are doing is contributing to society's common good. But if it's something we've got to do, there is no heart felt sharing of self that is the characteristic of true giving. This is true of Christmas presents, too.

It does not have to be that way. Bill Gates' presence in Australia during this holiday period reminds us that contributing to the common good can be a very satisfying exercise of free will.

Gates [chose](#) to give away more than a third of his wealth to causes such as education and global health and development, even though this cost him his 'world's richest man' title. He chose not to conform to the expectation that he would hold on to his wealth.

Questions surround latest asylum seeker boat disaster

POLITICS

Tony Kevin

Reports started coming in on Sunday about another major boat disaster en route to Christmas Island. Questions surround this latest tragedy, ten years after *SIEV X* and one year after the [SIEV 221 shipwreck](#) .

BBC News Asia [reported](#) the sinking location as about 90km out to sea. ABC News [gave](#) the same location. BBC reported at least 250 people were on board. Some reports put the number as high as 380.

The vessel appeared to have been carrying more than twice its capacity. It 'sank Saturday evening and the national search and rescue team [BASARNAS] has already moved out to sea to start the search', rescue team member Brian Gauthier told Indonesian news agency Antara. Gauthier's position is unstated: he may be an Australian Maritime Safety Authority secondment to BASARNAS (AMSA has extensive rescue at sea training-type cooperation underway).

Extreme weather caused reduced visibility. An Afghan survivor told Antara the ship rocked violently, triggering panic among the tightly packed passengers. This made the boat even more unstable and it sank. He and others clung to wreckage and were rescued by local fishermen. He estimated more than 40 children were on the boat.

This account recalls the details of [SIEV X](#): a grossly overloaded, top-heavy boat capsizes after rocking violently in extreme weather; a few survivors are later rescued by local fishermen.

ABC News and Antara sources [offer](#) more detail as to the location of these events. Gauthier told Antara some of the rescued are in Prigi in eastern Java, around 30km from where the boat sank. Some survivors are in Trenggalek, a town about 20km further inland. Both places are around 200km east of Yogyakarta, in the Java southern coastal region (and about 350km east of Cilicap, where another sinking took place a few weeks ago).

Antara says the sinking location was estimated to be 'within 20-30 miles from the boundary waters Prigi Coast'. This would seem to locate the sinking in international waters outside the Indonesian contiguous zone, about 30km or more south of Prigi Beach.

Christmas Island — about 700km away in a WSW direction — was the most likely destination from this area. But this is an unusually long route, about twice as long as the direct route south from the Sunda Strait/Panaitan Island area. If the boat started from east of Prigi, its route towards Christmas Island would be diagonal to the coast — which could indeed put its sinking location about 30km from the coast after 90km travelling.

There are more parallels here with *SIEV X*: a circuitous route from a long way off, yet a sinking location finally not far outside Indonesian contiguous waters, far from Australian waters, and in the Indonesian search and rescue zone; and plausibly accessible to Indonesian fishing boat rescue.

The circumstances raise similar intelligence-related questions as those raised by *SIEV X*. How did fishing boats find survivors? How did anyone know where the boat was? Were there tracking devices on board? Were there intercepted distress messages from passengers using GPS-reading satellite phones, to relatives, to Indonesia, or to 000 in Australia? Did AFP inform AMSA of any distress message and location? Did AMSA inform BASARNAS?

This overloaded boat must have been at sea at least 15 hours to have got 90km from its embarkation point. Were there any monitored pre-embarkation phonecalls by passengers to family members (as there usually are these days)? Would the Australian border protection intelligence system have picked up such messages? What did they do with them, and when?

The events have a similar smell to them as *SIEV X*: of a possible Indonesian police (INP) illegal disruption operation, from a remote location, highly profitable and sending a terrible deterrent message to others.

As former AFP Commissioner Mick Keelty [testified](#) in the Senate CMI inquiry in 2002, though the AFP would never ask the INP to do anything illegal, once it has asked the INP to do anything to disrupt the movement of people smugglers, the AFP has to leave it in the INP's hands as to how they do it.

Recent Senate Estimates Committee testimony by Customs suggest nothing much has changed.

As with *SIEV X*, the Australian border protection system is far from the scene. And with all intelligence information being withheld on national security grounds, we may never know how this latest tragedy happened — as with *SIEV X*, *SIEV 221* and the [lost boats](#) in 2009 and 2010.

Australian politicians and officials will blame the easy target we have been taught to hate: people smugglers. The tragedy will be exploited by both sides of politics. Gillard will use it to pressure Abbott to pass her legislation to enable Malaysian offshore processing. Abbott will use it to pressure her for Navy towback of boats, and for Nauru — as *SIEV X* was exploited by Howard to force Indonesia to accede to Australian towbacks.

It is an indictment of Australia's border protection system, including its secret intelligence-based parts, that such disasters go on happening, and that the Australian system continues to avoid admitting any degree of knowledge or accountability.

I will continue to research these issues, asking fact-based questions that the Australian Government would prefer not be asked. I do this because deaths of

people at sea in these numbers are intolerable in any decent society that claims to conduct intelligence gathering on people smugglers, and people smuggling disruption operations in cooperation with the INP, by lawful means.

Shocking scenes from a teen pregnancy

PARENTING

Madeleine Hamilton

For a significant portion of the 20th century, the Sisters of St Joseph operated a home for unmarried mothers in Grattan Street in the inner Melbourne suburb of Carlton.

Located opposite the old Royal Women's Hospital, it admitted young pregnant girls (often sent from small country towns by their ashamed families), looked after them for the duration of the 'lying in' period, then hastily arranged the adoption of the girls' babies by infertile Catholic married couples.

Only since the 1980s has the calamitous impact this process had on the relinquishing mothers (and often the lives of their children) been recognised. Those involved in the separation of babies and mothers were also haunted by their role. One elderly nun I interviewed ten years ago was stricken by the trauma she had inflicted at the home between the 1940s and 1960s.

Once the single mothers pension was introduced by the Whitlam Government in 1973, the adoption rate plummeted and the function of such institutions as the St Joseph's home became obsolete.

But societal attitudes towards young mothers are, if anything, hardening. Given the liberalisation of abortion laws, pregnant teens are accused of deliberately ruining their own lives, being emotionally and mentally unstable, and ripping off the public purse if they choose to continue their pregnancies.

A friend had her first baby at the same time I had mine. She was 18 and I was 30. The comments and looks she received throughout her pregnancy were shocking. Her neighbour asked her if there was not an easier way she could earn \$5000 than by becoming eligible for the baby bonus.

My friend is about to complete a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in psychology, and has received high distinctions throughout. Contrary to the unfair stereotype of the incapable teen mother, she is kicking goals in all aspects of her life. Also, she is still with the father of her child.

Which leads me to the curious response by writer [Kerri Sackville](#) on Twitter to a recent episode of the SBS television series [One Born Every Minute](#), which follows the hospital birthing journey of two or three couples each episode. I am usually amused by Sackville's Twitter stream but was a little shocked by the comments she made about one expecting couple: the woman was 18 and the man 33.

Both were open about his past heroin addiction and daily methadone requirements. Sackville tweeted 'she's a child and he is a disaster. If she was older and wiser she'd run a mile' and 'that poor little 18 year old with her loser partner'.

When your confidence is already sapped by sneering, sideways glances and unhelpful observations of your youthfulness, such proclamations would be very unhelpful, indeed.

I was, conversely, impressed by the non-judgemental attitude of the hospital midwives to this couple, which departed significantly from the treatment meted out to young unmarried residents of St Joseph's when they were giving birth. If you had no wedding ring, you were treated like trash.

For many of these teenage girls, giving birth was the loneliest experience of their lives. And if they were single, they didn't even have the shoulder of a partner to weep on when their babies were summarily removed from their care.

The man in the *OBEM* episode exhibited a great level of attention and love to his young partner — and she to him. He was able to communicate with great sensitivity to the midwives the source of his partner's anxiety when she became upset throughout labour, and he was attentive and encouraging during the subsequent caesarean section.

He wasn't a 'loser' but a bloke who had stuck with his girl, was doing the utmost to change his life, and sought to give his daughter a childhood different from his own underprivileged one. He may have had to have his bus fare doled out by his highly organised young 'Mrs', but he was present and supportive throughout her complicated four-day labour.

Who's to say they would not both continue to be excellent parents to the scrumptious daughter they produced? And, if they in fact do separate, that they won't handle the experience any worse than their older, educated, financially 'secure' counterparts?

I don't want to preach from the PC soapbox, but young mothers — single or otherwise — should not be automatically judged according to stereotypes. Nor should the fathers. A more nuanced, sensitive approach to individual cases is required. Only then will we have truly moved on from the bad old days when young mothers were habitually separated from their babies.

Life lessons on the Thai-Burma border

COMMUNITY

Duncan Maclaren

Jimmy (not his real name) was among the quietest of the Burmese refugee students we taught. His English was the most hesitant but at the interview and during the entrance exam his sharp intelligence shone through. He was accepted into the diploma in liberal studies program for Burmese refugees and migrants on the Thai-Burma border.

The course is one of the world's most successful programs in bringing internationally accredited higher education to refugees.

It is reckoned that less than 1 per cent of refugees have access to higher education globally. This is partially because being exiled in a refugee camp was regarded as a temporary phenomenon.

In fact, over the last decade, the number of protracted refugee situations (described by UNHCR as 'being in exile for five years or more') has shot up from 45 per cent to 90 per cent and the average length of stay has gone from nine years in 1993 to 17 years today.

Many of the refugees, including some of our students, who live in nine camps strewn along the Thai side of the border with Burma, were born in the bamboo shelters that leak sieve-like in the long rainy season while the dirt tracks turn into quagmires. They all fled persecution in Burma following wars between ethnic groups and the Tatmadaw (the generals' army).

Those wars continue, causing massive dislocation within the various regions. In Kachin State bordering China, over 30,000 villagers have had to flee their homes because of clashes between the Kachin Independence Army and the Burmese army since June this year. Many, if they can, will make their way to the camps in Thailand.

But back to Jimmy. He is from one of the ethnic groups and saw his parents shot in front of him in a raid on his village by the Burmese military when he was a young adolescent. He and his brother fled into the jungle and made their way to relatives in Yangon. They put him through secondary school where he excelled, especially in music.

He studied Japanese and won a scholarship to a Japanese university, but the government refused him a passport. He then made his way to Thailand where he heard about the diploma course. He graduated in 2010.

Most graduates have been able to find jobs with NGOs or community-based organisations caring for refugees and migrants. Others who sought resettlement in the US, Canada or Australia succeeded in gaining entry to universities on the basis of the qualification earned through the diploma course. One graduated in a

bachelor of commerce in Melbourne earlier this year.

Jimmy decided to stay on the border and is now a leader with a 'backpack' medical organisation whose members take medicines into the areas where 'internally displaced persons' are found. This involves crossing the Moei River from Thailand into the forests of Burma and traversing mountains with heavy loads on his back to 'serve his own people', which was a kind of mantra for our students.

Jimmy's course taught him about leadership skills and critical thinking and he is now using those faculties to help his own people. He also risks his own life every day since the jungle is awash with Burmese soldiers. He embraces the attributes of demonstrating respect for the dignity of each individual and responsibility for the common good.

During my last visit to the area, he told me how the course had taught him not just to think but to re-evaluate his attitude to the war. He had moved from supporting the armed struggle for justice to using peaceful, political negotiation.

Recently in Burma, we have witnessed the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and her reappearance on the political stage, the loosening of some anti-human rights laws and even attempts to sit down and parley peace with the ethnic insurgents. It will either come to nothing or kindle embers of real hope for change in Burma.

Either way, Jimmy, with his new perspective on life, struggle, solidarity and peace, will continue to contribute to his people's wellbeing. Now there's a Christmas story.

Julian Assange's clear and present danger

MEDIA

Tony Kevin

The 2011 Walkley Awards included a surprising 'Most Outstanding Contribution to Journalism', to Julian Assange's website WikiLeaks.

According to the [citation](#) , 'by designing and constructing a means to encourage whistleblowers, WikiLeaks and its editor-in-chief Julian Assange took a brave, determined and independent stand for freedom of speech and transparency that has empowered people all over the world.

In June, Assange also won in Britain the [Martha Gellhorn Prize](#) for 'journalism at the cutting edge ... that challenges secrecy and mendacity in public affairs ... and raises 'forgotten' issues of public importance, without fear or favour, working against the grain of government spin'.

These two awards commending WikiLeaks as publicly empowering journalism may yet prove to be vital to Assange.

If he is soon extradited from UK to Sweden, as now seems likely, he faces the danger of early 'temporary surrender' from there to the US, under a Swedish-US arrangement for transferring people charged with crimes in both countries. This enables the two governments to avoid procedural requirements and opportunities for appeal that exist under normal extradition arrangements.

Assange could then face very serious charges in the US. Cables recently obtained by the Sydney Morning Herald under Freedom of Information from the Australian Embassy in Washington [confirm](#) that since 2010 the US Justice Department has conducted an 'active and vigorous inquiry into whether Assange can be charged under US law, most likely the 1917 Espionage Act'.

This investigation is 'unprecedented both in its scale and nature'. Media reports that a secret grand jury has been convened in Virginia are 'likely true'. The embassy reports that 'a central theme has been the question of whether WikiLeaks is a media organisation ... the history of these cases has never seen a media outlet convicted for publication of leaked documents'.

The embassy notes that the US Justice Department was investigating alleged technical assistance provided by WikiLeaks to Private Bradley Manning who is under arrest and facing treason charges, and that 'evidence of such a conspiracy could assist prosecutors rebut claims that WikiLeaks was acting merely as a media organisation' in accepting for publication secret cables from Manning.

Assange thus faces risks of a long prison sentence if sent to the US. For who knows what Manning's testimony might say, after his months of cruel and unusual confinement? At worst, Assange could face real risk of assassination in the US, where there have been many death threats against him.

Assange has waged a year-long legal struggle against extradition from Britain to Sweden, to face questioning by a Swedish prosecutor on [alleged rape charges](#) . His lawyer says the allegations stem from a 'dispute over consensual but unprotected sex'. The reported circumstances are quite strange.

The ominous international political background has seemingly not been taken into account by British judges hearing the matter.

Assange now confronts the last possible legal opportunity to challenge his extradition to Sweden. He awaits a UK Supreme Court ruling, reported by some media as expected [before Christmas Day](#) , on a point of law considered by the final lower court to be 'of general public importance': whether a (Swedish) public prosecutor is a 'judicial authority' as required by the 2003 Extradition Act.

The issue revolves around the notion that there must be a separation between the executive and the judiciary when depriving a person of their liberty; in this case when the person concerned has not been charged and the device used to deprive their liberty is extradition to another state.

If I were Assange, I would not feel safe going to Sweden now. Though Assange has not been charged in Sweden, the Swedish public prosecutor has declined many offers over the past year that she question him in the UK. This raises questions of good faith.

Also, it is not clear how Sweden might respond to any US request for his temporary surrender to the US, if American charges were laid against him on arrival in Sweden. The present conservative Swedish Government has a history of acceding to all US rendition requests during the War on Terror.

Also, Karl Rove is an [adviser](#) to the Swedish Prime Minister. Rove had a notorious public history as a ruthless senior White House official. For example he was allegedly implicated in the Bush White House's career destruction of 'outed' CIA agent [Valerie Plame](#) and her diplomat husband Joe Wilson.

What has the Australian Government done to protect Assange these past months? [Almost nothing](#) . Kevin Rudd — who earlier took some interest in Assange's rights to consular protection as an Australian at risk overseas — now [resorts](#) to delaying tactics and formalistic responses.

Greens Senator Scott Ludlam [tried to question](#) the Prime Minister about Assange before Parliament rose for the summer break, but was blocked by an opposition censure motion.

Assange's mother [appeals](#) to Australians of good will to help defend her son from his clear and present danger: '[Get informed](#) . Inform a friend. Call talkback radio. Go and see your local Federal Member ... and tell them you expect them to stick up for an Australian citizen ...'

I do not claim impartiality here. I think this is an important cause, and commend it to *Eureka Street* readers. Bad things happen when good people do nothing.

Savaging sex and religion

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

This week we take a look back at Eureka Street assistant editor and film reviewer Tim Kroenert's top five most memorable films of 2011.

1. Red State (R) – Not previously reviewed

This is not the first time filmmaker Kevin Smith has had a go at religion. A Catholic uncomfortable with some Church teaching and practice, Smith's 1999 Catholic comedy *Dogma* was irreverent, but ultimately championed humanity and independent thought over dogma and 'blind faith'.

If *Dogma* had hints of the contemporary parable about it, *Red State* embraces the form. It divides its characters into three camps — Sex, Religion and Politics — and pits them against each other in a violent showdown. Billed as a 'horror' film, its message and morals are murkier than *Dogma's*.

Three teenage boys are lured into the midst of a cult waging a brutal crusade against society's sexual profligacy; the 'God Hates Fags' Westboro Baptists re-imagined as violent extremists. The boys are caught in the crossfire when trigger-happy government agents corner the cult into a Waco-style siege.

There are no good guys in this savage satire. All are corrupted by short-sightedness or self-interest. Smith's characters are faced with redemptive opportunities to discover empathy and self-sacrifice, but reject them out of spite or stupidity. *Red State* is not a hopeful portrait, but a cautionary tale.

This profane parable repeatedly finds new ways to surprise and unsettle the viewer. It also showcases a compelling performance by 70-year-old character actor Michael Parks as the cult leader whose charm, charisma and menace allow him to manipulate the minds of his impressionable charges.

2. Incendies (MA) – [Reviewed 20 April 2011](#)

Residents of a Christian orphanage have their heads shaved by Muslim militants. One small boy stares into the camera with an expression of fierce defiance. 'Don't forget about me', the stare says. It's both a clue for the audience and a threat to any who oppress him.

Nawal, disgraced and exiled from her Christian village for an affair with a Muslim man, conceals her crucifix necklace and hitches a ride with a busload of Muslims. Shortly, the bus is halted by Christian militants. What ensues is one of *Incendies'* most powerful sequences.

Nawal's harrowing life story is marred by the bullets and blood of interreligious conflict. The roots of her personal formation and the origins of her now adult children Jeanne and Simon can each be discovered among the ruins of this fraught

history.

3. *Tree of Life* (PG) – [Reviewed 29 June 2011](#)

American Jesuit James Martin describes watching *Tree of Life* as like 'living inside a prayer'; this is apt, for it contains, in place of voiceover narration, the whispered, questioning prayers of its characters.

These tumble across the film's mundane, 1950s American suburban setting, and follow us also into space and into the far reaches of history; to the very corners of the universe and of time, in gripping visual sequences that set the characters' tiny lives in the context of a vast continuum of existence.

The film's metaphysical elements divide audiences, yet its vision of humanity is profound. It contains one of the most authentic portrayals of childhood brotherly love that I have seen on screen.

4. *Snowtown* (R) – [Reviewed 11 May 2011](#)

The phrase 'torture porn' will be used by some to dismiss *Snowtown* and its sordid content. But this does no justice to the remarkable, if gruelling, achievement that is director Justin Kurzel's bleakly atmospheric retelling of Adelaide's Snowtown murders.

Kurzel followed the lead of last year's superb crime drama *Animal Kingdom* by taking as his focus the corruption of an adolescent by amoral adults. It is a gift to the audience that we have this central tragedy to sustain our sympathies.

It is unfortunate though that more time is not spent on building sympathy for the murderers' victims. In this, *Snowtown* skids dangerously close to sadistic voyeurism. That said, at all times it regards the taking of human life as a fundamentally immoral horror. It is right that we be shocked.

5. *In A Better World* (MA) – [Reviewed 30 March 2011](#)

This Oscar winner (Best Foreign Language Film) reflects upon the various human responses to violence, in a world where both justice and morality can be difficult to either define or obtain.

Shortly after the death of his mother, Christian starts at a new school. There he meets social outcast Elias, who is a victim of bullying. Together the boys learn a dangerous lesson: that violence can sometimes be defeated by more extreme violence.

Their experiences are contrasted with those of Elias' father Anton, a doctor working in a refugee camp in Africa. Anton is faced with the prospect of providing care to a militant who has committed atrocious crimes. This tests his pacifistic principles, with those around him baying for the man's blood.

The truth about China the climate scapegoat

ENVIRONMENT

Sean McDonagh



For a number of years the US and other countries such as Canada, Russia and more recently Japan have said they are unwilling to sign any binding treaty to significantly reduce their greenhouse gas emissions unless China does the same.

They point to the fact that China is now the number one emitter of greenhouse gases in the world. In 2005, its emissions reached 7232 megatonnes.

This argument overlooks important data that undermine its validity and uphold the position of the UN Framework Convention for Climate Change: that countries have common but differentiate responsibilities in solving climate change. Any equitable approach to lowering global emissions must first examine the historical pattern of greenhouse gas releases into the atmosphere.

In a recent paper, Martin Khor, executive director of policy think tank for the developing world [The South Centre](#), calculated that, in the period between 1850 and 2009, about 1214 gigatons of CO₂ was released into the atmosphere. Of this amount, Annex 1 countries (rich countries many of which signed the Kyoto Protocol in 1997) were responsible for 878 gigatons.

If one set out to determine what would be a fair share of the right to emit greenhouse gases during that period, based on their population as a percentage of the global population, it would amount to 336 gigatons (28 per cent of the total). In fact Annex 1 countries have overshot this by 568 gigatons.

The scientific consensus is that, if we wish to keep the average global temperature below 2 degrees celsius, we can only emit 750 gigatons of carbon (or equivalent) between now and 2050. In light of the historic carbon debt, how should these allocations be made?

Annex 1 countries comprise 16 per cent of the world's population, so the equitable allocation for these countries would be 120 gigatons. However since there is a debt overhang of 568 gigatons, their fair share ought to be a negative budget of 448 gigatons.

According to Khor, 'developed countries will have to go into the territory of 'negative emissions', in order that developing countries will have a decent level of 'development space' sufficient to cushion their path to low-emissions growth'.

A second consideration is that during the past three decades, China has become the workshop of the world, manufacturing many of the consumer goods which benefit people in Europe, the US and elsewhere. The computer I am using to write this article, and the memory stick I am using to save it, were manufactured in

China.

Should China be saddled with accounting for the greenhouse emissions involved in manufacturing these goods? Or should the burden be shared by those who benefit from the low cost manufacturing?

At a meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation in Bali in November, Barack Obama told the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao that China had 'grown up' and must accept its international obligations. Among these would be China's willingness to sign up to binding commitments similar to those which would be undertaken by the US, Europe or Japan.

Khor has argued convincingly that China is still a developing country and should not be bullied into joining a new category that does not square with the facts.

The question is, are we comparing like with like? China's economy the second biggest on the planet and growing, and its foreign reserves stand at US\$3 trillion. Those headline figures might seem to put it into the category of a developed country. But that would be deceptive.

As Khor points out, the International Monetary Fund in its latest World Economic Outlook classifies China as a developing country with a per capita GDP of US\$4,382. It comes in at number 91 out of the 184 countries surveyed. Six African countries — Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Botswana, Mauritius, South Africa and Namibia — have higher GDP per capita levels than China.

The next measure used by Khor is the 'gross purchasing power' per capita. The cost of living in some countries is lower than in others and that this has a knock-on affect on living standards. Here again China comes in at number 95 — lower than Ecuador.

The UN publishes a Human Development Report each year which assesses the quality of life in broader terms than simply GDP, which include income, schooling, life expectancy etc. In the Human Development Report for 2011, China is ranked 110 out of 187 countries.

People who visit China are amazed at what has been achieved in a relatively short period of time. Tens of millions have benefitted from the double digit economic growth of the past three decades and a significant number have become millionaires or even billionaires.

But 700 million of China's 1.3 billion live in villages far removed from the more prosperous cities. Many of these people live in grinding poverty. Khor quotes a UN study which estimates that there are 150 million people in China living on less than US\$1 per day.

As Khor argues, China is a mid-level developing country with similar socio-economic and ecological problems faced by most developing countries. He

concludes that 'if China is pressurised to take on the duties of a developed country and to forgo its status and benefits of a developing country, then many other developing countries that are ahead of China ... may soon be asked to do the same'.

Confronting the beggar dilemma

NON-FICTION

Gillian Bouras

When I was a sweet and protected young thing in 1960s Australia, beggars were the stuff of legend. As I walked sedately to my lectures, an old chap would stop me every now and then and ask me for a bob. That was my sole experience, and my father was disgusted. *You know what that's all about, don't you? A bottle of metho to go with the boot polish.*

I learned a hard and hasty lesson when I came to Greece to live, as beggars were everywhere. They still are, and in endless variety: the aged, especially widows, mothers with babies, amputees, the deaf and dumb, people who have been horribly burned or crippled, gypsies.

Yet to some people they are invisible: once I stood and stared as a well-padded monk and matching priest came billowing along the main street of Kalamata, totally ignoring a bent and black-clad old woman who had her hand outstretched. They ignored her, I realised, because they hadn't even seen her. I suppose that's what custom does.

But the scenes were all so raw to me that I used to walk up that same street, scattering small change in all directions, much to the disapproval of Alexander, my youngest son.

'They're all collecting rents from the blocks of flats they own in Athens.'

'You can't know that, and anyway, I have to give them the benefit of the doubt. You never know, I might be out there, cap in hand, myself one day.'

At which point he and his *filotimo* were outraged: how could I think that any Greek son would or could allow his mother to sink so low?

Some of my friends have worked the whole difficulty out: they refuse to give money to anybody. Me, I now divide beggars into categories, mainly because it is impossible to give to everyone. And there are aggressive beggars, and passive ones: another problem.

I give to amputees, but one day an 'amputee' got up and revealed himself to have two legs: his trick was like the one actor Edward Fox pulls in *The Day of the Jackal*. I don't always give to the apparently able-bodied. Mothers with babies pluck at my heart strings, although a cynical friend assures me many babies are borrowed.

The aged are in my in-group, usually, and so are gypsy children, although I invariably get irritable and ask them why they are not at school. And I swim against the friend-current again, but I hear so many stories of such children being beaten if they do not bring home the required amount, whatever that might be,

that my battered old heart softens once again.

Another problem is my motivation. Am I anxious to take the high moral ground? I hope not. Am I playing a game of Look at Me (and my generosity)? Again I hope not. And mostly I'm racked with guilt because I give so little and because I make choices.

I rather think my motivation is connected with my mother's voice, which I still hear, though she is long dead. *There but for the Grace of God ...* And that sentiment, I rather think, is yet another difficulty, and one that I prefer not to explore. At least not now.

In this season I give up, and simply listen to my mother's voice again:

Christmas is coming, the goose is getting fat

Please to put a penny in the old man's hat.

And so I do.

Learning to walk and to dance

POETRY

Various

Dance steps: For Reuben

Life, for you, is from the ground up. As, perhaps,
it should be for us.

For some months now you have felt free
to walk, confident in your balance, your legs,
your father's ready arms.

When I last saw you, still horizontal, interrogating
the floor, you'd begun reversing Kafka —
undertaking a slow transformation
from beetle to vertical human.

Powered by a new locomotion, you steer
yourself towards the stereo, put into practice
what you've practised back home:

CD into tray, a button to close it — a push
to help it along — and a button to make it play;
a laser, not a blunting needle, working
its magic for you. A magic alive & well:
music erupts into your world, is taken
entirely for granted.

You make me remember a boy — older, then,
to be sure — hanging on every fabulous note
from a wind-up gramophone, hardly believing
his luck. Transfixed by the music and its source,
I may not even have moved my body, though
there would have been no one to see me
in my blissful version of trance.

Now I hear you mimicking a song, following

a blueprint, improvising a dance —
your head translating time, your feet
jackhammering the carpet, a floor
you don't know is spinning.

Michael Sariban

Aqua

Eating a mango
over the sink, her skin is this gold
because it's summer.
Inside a coat pocket, two cigarettes
are crushed halfway.
A clock's tick inside her wrist
& the day is slow.
Bathwater dried in book pages,
the kettle singing by itself.
Beneath the table's shade circle, the small white dog
sleeps deeply, sides stuffed out
with breakfast.
On the street where magnolias flower indecently,
children are drawing a hopscotch map
in pink & aqua chalk.
Their voices carry inside,
like the neighbour's telephone ringing.
Its stutter of bells, just once.

Jo Langdon

the long ago

in the slow cat's bowl
soaking days
wild bird seed
on the porch

you wipe down a kitchen
where you are now finally dominant
heavy days ordering joy
in wild bird flight
& a cat too well fed
to chase, & a son
at one end of the table
how tomatoes tasted
in the long ago
from a mother's garden
Rory Harris

Fraser and Whitlam's fruitful rivalry

POLITICS

John Menadue

Fred Daly, the irrepressible ALP Member for Grayndler whose first campaign slogan was 'Give us this day our Daly Fred', once said that today's political enemies may turn out to be friends tomorrow. Who would have thought in 1975 that that could be true of Gough Whitlam and Malcolm Fraser in 2011.



Whitlam has said he hasn't had a significant disagreement with Fraser for 30 years. There are outward signs that the bad blood of the past has been purged. At 95, Whitlam has already written (and probably pre-recorded, just in case) the introduction he will give when Fraser presents the Whitlam Oration on 6 June next year.

Bitter rivals though they were, Fraser and Whitlam in fact displayed unity on many issues. The fraught events of November 1975 notwithstanding, it is pertinent to consider how these political enemies contributed, not perhaps jointly, but separately to a much better society than we had in 1972.

Both were supporters of the US alliance, but sceptical of a lot of US policies. They were cautious about any US resolve to protect Australia when US relations with regional countries such as Indonesia were involved. Both were certain Australia's future depended less on North Atlantic protection and more on developing close relations within our region.

Following Whitlam's breakthrough in establishing diplomatic relations in 1972, Fraser's first overseas visit as prime minister was to China and then to Japan, where he continued the negotiation of a Treaty of Friendship that Whitlam had initiated.

Both sought to reduce sectarianism in Australian public life. Through state aid, for Catholic and other private schools, Whitlam turned the tide on sectarianism in Australia. Fraser was always critical of Billy Hughes for playing the sectarian card against Irish Catholics in Australia in WWI.

Both were concerned about Indigenous rights. The implementing bill on land rights was awaiting introduction in the Senate on the day of Whitlam's dismissal. In the first year of the Fraser Government, Parliament passed the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act, 1976.

But the most effective unity ticket was race relations — ending the White Australia policy and cooperating in the settlement of Indochinese refugees.

Whitlam, Don Dunstan and others campaigned successfully to remove the White Australia plank from the ALP platform. The Whitlam Government removed racial discrimination from the statute book. But the new policy was never put to the test.

The immigration intake under Whitlam was minimal — the lowest for 30 years and, excluding the Depression and war years, the lowest for 70 years.

In accepting 150,000 refugees from Indochina and with the 90,000 family reunions that followed, Malcolm Fraser broke the back of White Australia. We are now proud of what he and we did together — although it must be said that race relations and refugees remain difficult issues, with populists always ready and willing to exploit fear of the foreigner and the 'other'.

The Whitlam Government was cautious about taking evacuees after the fall of Saigon, limiting the intake chiefly to persons associated with Australia and to orphans. The Fraser Government faced a larger outflow from 1976 onwards, with many Vietnamese forced into harsh 're-education camps'.

Whitlam in Opposition and later Bill Hayden supported Fraser in his leadership on the Indochina intake; because of our commitment to troops in Vietnam we felt we had a particular moral obligation to act decently and generously. And we did. We are now proud of what we did at a difficult time.

The successful Indochina resettlement in Australia could not have occurred without the cooperation of regional countries. They provided temporary asylum for 1.4 million who fled Indochina.

Our dependence on those countries back then provides a lesson that we still have to learn today. Just imagine how Australia would have responded during the Fraser years if 50,000 to 100,000 boat people from Indochina had arrived directly on our coast — which they likely would have, if not for the intervention of countries such as Malaysia.

As Australians, we are still self-righteous in our attitudes to countries such as Malaysia who carry a much higher burden of asylum seekers than we do. Malaysia is making great progress in human rights protection, particularly when it comes to protecting vulnerable people fleeing Burma.

The betterment of society is always a work in progress. The fruitful rivalry between Whitlam and Fraser provides a salient contrast to the more destructive negativism that seems to be the hallmark of the Julia Gillard/Tony Abbott contest. They could learn much from these elder statesmen.

The dark heart of a European Christmas

POLITICS

Bronwyn Lay



The etymological root of the word Europe is the Phoenician *ereb*, the darkness after the sun has gone down. Here in France light leaves us early and the darkest time of the year is before Christmas.

The landscape out my window looks dirty. Northern skies are grey, any sun that dares come through the clouds is weak and the place seems tired out by summer frivolity and autumn trauma.

The economic woes of the continent reflect on my window where naked trees wait for a giant white dump from the skies to cover everything in sight.

Nietzsche said only money could unite Europe and in 2010 Angela Merkel stated, 'If the euro fails, so will the idea of the European Union.'

Europe is the home of universalism. It's also known for imperialism, nationalism and utopian projects. It's the land on the hunt for transcendental light. The European obsession with universalism justified its colonial ambition, wrought havoc across the globe, and established Europe's wealth.

The EU was a panacea for Europe's nationalist and imperial history. Europe's universalist tendencies were vested in the experiment with an internationalist supra-national body, and all hope was pinned on the common currency as the saviour able to transcend internal differences within the continent.

The 'idea' of Europe has baffled philosophers and commentators for centuries and the question wasn't going to vanish because global markets ordered it to. The emphasis on the euro as the forerunner in the race towards EU unity was at the cost of the hard work of governance and grappling with difference — the real work of politics. Now the grand visions and optimism about the EU lie in debt fragments and the same question returns to haunt — What is Europe?

The idea that economic unity, without difficult political engagement, can magically create equality and community has served to reveal, not only the racism that persists against immigrants from outside Europe, but also the hold France and Germany have upon the 'peripheral' EU nations.

Perhaps Europe, following neo-liberal fashions, ran too hard towards fiscal unity and neglected its divided history. Underlying this is a suspicion that some elements of European thought contain a constant temptation towards hubris that requires an 'other' to support its superiority complex — the imperial tendencies haven't magically vanished but are manifest within Europe's borders.

Roberto Dainotto argued in 2007 that 'the idea of the defective Europeanness of the south has shaped the policies of a two-tiered Europe' and that the

Eurocentrism of nations like France and Germany occurred within the margins of Europe itself. Attempts to homogenise Europe would never succeed unless the balance between north and south was structurally and culturally addressed.

From the beginning of the EU the southern nations have been known as PIGS: Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain. Dainotto argues that the inability of their northern cousins to integrate the 'peripheral' nations into the 'idea of Europe' meant the southern nations persisted as European in theory only.

In 2011 this divide manifests fiscally and the north points the blame at the south, very easy to do with men like Berlusconi, and in neo-liberal economic terms this accusation makes sense, but denies larger, more haunting questions.

The problem of the impending failure of the eurozone is that the unspoken hierarchy, where the 'hot', 'passionate' and 'irresponsible' south is culturally inferior to the 'cool', 'reasonable' and 'restrained' north, might have been entrenched in EU governance structures. No common currency could eradicate this systemic bias without the support of a more inclusive notion of EU citizenship and slower fiscal policies.

Now some commentators and politicians have called for the formalisation of a two-tiered EU, saying it is necessary to save the 'whole' continent, as well as the 'idea' of Europe. The EU is a grand experiment in a new kind of citizenship as well as an attempt at economic unity. Citizenship and economics are not synonyms. Economics might try to run ahead but the slow questioning citizen, regardless of origin, is the true barometer of unity.

As Christmas approaches, the air in France feels fragile. Winter will be frugal. Europe is a complicated place and the threat of death and disintegration are constantly on the European mind. Not natural optimists, they cling to grand projects in order not to fall backwards into a bloody nationalist history.

Face to face with failure, nations like France and Germany will be tested as to whether their commitment to universalism and visionary projects transcends neo-liberal economics.

It's the darkest time of the year and by afternoon our windows are black. The trickle-down unification fails with the light, but when the snow falls everything seems equal. Landscape covered in white creates the illusion of unity.

Speaking as an Antipodean, snow might look pretty, but it's a trick. Living with it requires sheer hard work performed by a slow and humble shovel.

The good journalist and the assassins

EDITORIAL

Andrew Hamilton

The media has copped a bucketing over the last few months, particularly the extensive section of the press controlled by News International.

In England the revelations that led to the closing of *The News of the World*, and the evidence given to the Leveson inquiry, have shown that self-regulation of the tabloids was a lame duck and is now a lost cause. In Australia the Bolt judgment and the clinical dissection of what is good and what is bad in *The Australian* by Robert Manne, together with the responses made to these events and the Ricketson inquiry, were less sensational. Although the emperor may have been without clothes, at least he was not running rampantly naked as in England.



But the discussion has called into question the claims of the media to be guardians of free speech and of transparent public life. The educated response to those pretensions now is, *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*

The greatest threat to the right to free speech now comes from the lameness of the appeal to it made by representatives of the press when defending the indefensible. At its worst, it was encapsulated in the aphorism conjured by former *News of the World* journalist, Paul McMullen, 'Privacy is for paedos'. That nihilistic view would be shared by few.

But it points to the lack of grasp why speech should be free, and what kind of speech deserves that freedom. Arguments for freedom must be built around values.

Alexander Minkin, a distinguished Russian journalist recently visiting Australia, showed a way forward. He did so less by what he said than by what he represented.

Minkin came to journalism in Brezhnev's time, and like other independent journalists had to smuggle material abroad, to make critical points by indirection, and faced the constant threat of exile. After glasnost the press was free, but any investigation into political corruption or of the business oligarchy became increasingly dangerous. Over 200 journalists have been killed in Russia in recent years, including Minkin's colleague, Maria Politkovskaya.

The cost of freedom of speech can be seen in Minkin's description of an attempt to kill him. He giggles as he recalls how he was saved by the tiny dimensions of his apartment. His would-be murderers slipped over the rubbish tin, knocked over and fell under the book case, and got their iron bars stuck in the ceiling.

His humour masks his courage. But it is impossible not to ask what drives him

to keep seeking what is hidden, bringing court cases before corrupted judges and hoping against hope for a better society.

The answer lies in the way in which he speaks about freedom and in the passion with which he excoriates its counterfeits. For him freedom is a sacred word. It does not simply refer to freedom from constraint but embodies a vision of humanity that links him to Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Gorky, Mandel'stam, Akhmatova and Solzhenitsyn.

For him, to be a journalist is a calling to live up to the name of man. Freedom of speech exists for a larger freedom impossible when public communications are debased to further the financial interests of proprietors or the political will of rulers.

One coming from such a rich and exigent tradition into the Australian debate about free speech and regulation must wonder if he has landed on Mars. Here free speech is understood almost exclusively as freedom from legal constraint.

Those who defended free speech in the context of the Bolt case rarely reflected on what values speech serves and what kind of freedom is appropriate. There was no moral world into which it belonged, no sense of a wider cultural and intellectual tradition in which speech and freedom were related. Free speech was defended for commercial reasons.

At about the same time the judges in the High Court Malaysia solution case were criticised for not bowing to the desires of the executive. The interests represented in these responses were precisely the adversaries of the freedom defended by Minsky and others.

In such a world closer regulation of the media, like the regulation of banks and finance, however undesirable, is almost inevitable. In the absence of moral values regulation is necessary to limit the damage caused by wanton words, and to provide redress when reputations are wilfully damaged.

But the example of Alexander Minkin and his brave colleagues shows that a nobler concept of journalism and a higher commitment to freedom are possible. But they are costly.

Teachers' uprising

BY THE WAY

Brian Matthews

Two things happened to me recently that became bound together in my imagination. One was that I drove along Victoria's Great Ocean Road and visited, for the first time in years, the Twelve Apostles, those extraordinary, towering rock stacks left after 20 million years of battering by the Southern Ocean separated them from the original limestone cliffs and smashed their surrounding structures.

The other was a meeting I had with some student teachers. Their final exams were finished, the practical teaching rounds were all done and they were waiting on news of their appointment to some urban, suburban, rural or remote school where they would start their professional careers.

Their infectious anticipation, mixed with some apprehension and even, deep down, a certain dread, reminded me vividly of my own experience of that volatile, nervous time when, qualified at last, you had to leave the cloisters and face the world.

You'll be pleased to know I refrained from reminiscing but simply wished them luck and success. No such restraint, however, will prevent me from recalling those distant, testing days for the interest or despair of *Eureka Street* readers already stunned by the sudden swift arrival of yet another Christmas.

Having completed a degree and a diploma of education, my mate and I put in identical applications: on top of our lists were high schools in Wangaratta, Yarrawonga, Shepparton and other Victorian north-eastern towns. At the bottom were the most remote eastern and western schools in the state. I was appointed to Shepparton Technical School; he got Orbost High.

As we had developed during our diploma year a sturdy reputation for recalcitrance, we immediately suspected conspiracy and a deliberate policy to put us as far apart as geography allowed, though one of our more cynical colleagues suggested that the Education Department could not have mustered the administrative acumen to achieve such a sophisticated result and it was probably just bad luck.

After a couple of years we both returned to Melbourne. It was 1960. My new headmaster at a sprawling suburban high school was a large, loud, somewhat pompous bloke. At our first meeting, having wrongly assumed that my two years at Shepparton Tech must have been 'a baptism of fire', he told me he had two 'absolute buffoons' on his staff.

I resisted the temptation to say, 'Well, now you have three', and so our professional relationship got under way.

In my first week I arrived one morning at ten to nine, signed the time book for

8.30, as was the custom, and began to walk down the corridor to the staff room. The time book was outside the head's office and he emerged as I passed.

'Matthews!' he called. I kept walking. 'Matthews,' he boomed again. I walked on and was now a fair distance away. 'Mister Matthews!' He positively exploded. I stopped, turned and said, 'Yes?'

'Did you not hear me?' His heavily jowled features were rubicund, his round, waist-coated barrel chest heaving with effort and annoyance.

'I answer to Brian or Mister Matthews,' I said, as my father had taught me, 'nothing in between.'

It was a tense moment and a very 1960s encounter. Though neither of us realised it, we were enacting our minuscule part in a process that would grow through the decade — the erosion of taken-for-granted authorities, postures, assumptions and hierarchies.

Within months, the time book that had been the mute observer of our clash had been thrown out — in some schools actually burnt — as unprofessional. Secondary teachers went on strike for the first time in their history, not for extra pay, but for the kind of professional recognition accorded as a matter of course to their medical and legal colleagues.

I don't know if the moon was in the seventh house or whether Jupiter was aligned with Mars, but it was the dawning of the Age of Aquarius. A vast restlessness ran like a ripple through society's youth, an agitation exacerbated by reports from America and Europe and by the growing questioning militancy of popular music.

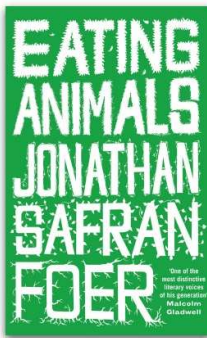
Along with thousands of my contemporaries, I left my job at the end of that year and travelled to Europe. It is now folk lore that, in the decade that followed, the world was convulsed with change: after the Pill, the Berlin Wall, the Eichmann trial, the Kennedy assassination and any number of other heterogeneous events and controversial people, nothing would ever be the same again.

Those wind-blasted Twelve Apostles that started this train of thought were 20 million years in the making, but the same forces that shaped them are destroying them. They retain their name, but there aren't 12 any more and gradually the others will succumb. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la meme chose* is a catchy and persuasive aphorism, but sometimes things change forever.

Save the world with salad

ENVIRONMENT

Ruby Hamad



This week, scientists at the Global Carbon Project [announced](#) that 2010 saw global carbon emissions rise by 5.9 per cent. That means that, as delegates enter the 17th year of the UN's climate conference in Durban, South Africa, some 14 years after the Kyoto Protocol, we have just had the [worst](#) year of greenhouse gas emissions ever.

Among those with the [highest](#) increases were the booming economies of China and India, up by 10.4 and 9.4 per cent respectively.

That's not to say that only developing countries are to blame. Overall global emissions increased because emissions from developed countries did not decrease, despite the West's perceived role as leaders in the fight against climate change. The US led the charge with a four per cent increase from 2009, with emissions from all developed nations increasing by 3.4 per cent.

While the fruits of the Labor Government's carbon price are yet to materialise, they are unlikely, given the rising emissions elsewhere, to do much to stall, let alone reverse global levels.

This is not least because the government exempted some of the worst offenders from the carbon-pricing scheme — [animal agriculturist](#) s — choosing instead to spend \$1.9 billion helping farmers reduce their emissions. Australia is not alone in this arrangement, with other developed nations also sparing the industry from burdens to reduce carbon.

This has to change. Intensive farming is the single biggest contributor to rising carbon levels. Conservative estimates put animal agriculture as [responsible](#) for 15–25 per cent of all emissions. This is more than all the world's planes, trains and automobiles combined.

For years we've had advertisements imploring us to [reduce](#) our own emissions by switching the power off at the wall, not leaving appliances on standby, taking two minute showers and not driving to work.

Yet the truth is that the best thing each of us can do to stall climate change is to decrease our consumption of meat and other animal products.

Indeed, last year, the United Nations released a report [warning](#) that a gradual shift to a vegetarian or vegan diet is essential if we are to combat the worst effects of climate change. Yet the global demand for meat continues to rise.

It's no surprise that China and India's emissions rose so drastically. In recent

years, these countries, with their burgeoning middle classes, have seen demand for meat skyrocket. Both of these countries have adopted the intensive 'factory' farming systems used in the west.

Currently, there are approximately 56 billion animals slaughtered for food every year. By the year 2050, that number is projected to [double](#) . With such high demand, 'sustainable' meat production methods are simply not viable. According to the UN, 'A substantial reduction of impacts would only be possible with a substantial worldwide diet change, away from animal products.'

How much longer can meat consumption be kept out of the mainstream debate when it comes to tackling climate change? As a subject that inflames passion on both sides of the debate, meat eating is right up there with abortion and the existence of God.

Even Al Gore did not include animal agriculture in his global warming doco [An Inconvenient Truth](#), although the film did, ironically, spend a lot of time romanticising his background as a cattle rancher.

In 2009 Gore conceded that 'the growing meat intensity of diets around the world is one of the issues connected to this global crisis', due both to the CO2 produced and to the amount of water consumed. While not a vegetarian, Gore did reduce his meat consumption, and [urged](#) others to do likewise.

No doubt this article will have many readers decrying my attack on their right to eat whatever they like. They will invoke arguments about dietary preferences, evolutionary processes and individual liberties. They may even bring up the bible.

But this isn't about people's 'right' to consume animals. It isn't a 'vegan fetish' as some writers have derisively [claimed](#) . It isn't about our canine teeth, the length of our intestines, or how we evolved eating meat. It isn't about humanity's dominion over the earth and its inhabitants. It isn't even about animal cruelty, although factory farming is indisputably cruel.

This is about the future of our planet and our long-term survival. Our window of opportunity is closing.

Towards the end of *Eating Animals*, his book on the nature and effects of animal agriculture, US author Jonathan Safran Foer asks a question we can no longer afford to ignore:

We cannot plead ignorance, only indifference. Those alive today are the generation that came to know better. We have the burden and the opportunity of living in the moment when the critique of factory farming broke into the popular consciousness. We are the generation of whom it will fairly be asked, What did you do when you found out the truth about eating animals?

Why I don't preach on abortion

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

Preaching is not a highly esteemed activity. When people are accused of preaching they are held to be boring, moralising and bullying. Those qualities presumably were found earlier in sermons preached in church. They may also perhaps be discerned in articles on preaching.

But the questions to which preachers are asked to respond usually have more to do with the subject matter of their sermons than of their style. I am often asked, for example, if I preach on abortion and, if not, why not. The questioners sometimes kindly supply me with the answer. If I do not preach on abortion, it is surely because I am afraid of alienating my liberal friends.

Such questions and imputed answers are quite helpful. They remind us preachers that preaching is not a solitary sin but one in which other people are complicit. They also make us reflect on which topics we choose and avoid, and on why we do so.

The questions put to preachers reflect the fact that sermons are an asymmetrical form of communication. Preachers stand in a hierarchy. They must be licensed by their churches to preach and stand in a position of power over their hearers. During the sermon preachers speak, the people listen and rarely speak back.

So people have a right to expect that the preacher will speak on what matters to them as Christians. If they notice that important matters are never mentioned they are entitled to ask why.

The answer, however, is unlikely to be as simple as that preachers are sucking up to opinionated friends. Most preachers are aware of the feelings that drive them to speak or to be silent. The desire to please or the fear of displeasing one's friends are always evident and can be set aside. As can the desire to placate one's critics. The really insidious temptations are more subtle than that.

For most preachers the choice of topic is guided by the texts of the day and by Augustine's striking throwaway line, 'After all, we would not speak to others unless it were to make them better.' In different contexts 'better' can mean better informed, better diverted, in better spirits, or living a better life. But whatever form of betterment is envisaged, in Augustine's view, conversation and sermons are to be judged by how they affect the audience, and not by the intentions of the speaker.

In sermons to people who are drawn together by faith, the betterment will normally consist in their exploring their faith more deeply, recognising unseen possibilities in it, or finding encouragement in living it. That is normally done by

reflecting on the deeper meanings and implications for contemporary life of the scriptural texts set for the day.

As we listen to a sermon we might hope to see the love and power of God at work in the messiness of our lives, and to find courage to live generously in the face of our discontents and the claims made on us by our world.

I find it hard to remember any occasion when a congregation might have been made better by hearing me preach on abortion. Almost all those who attend Catholic services know the teaching of the church on abortion. Most are now too old to have to choose between aborting or bearing a child.

Many women in most congregations, too, would be uncomfortable when hearing a celibate man hold forth on a predicament and pain of which he can have no personal knowledge.

That is not to say that people will not be made better by other forms of conversation about abortion. In a society like ours which holds together such contradictory attitudes to the unborn child, conversation that includes listening to opposed positions is desperately needed.

In church congregations some members may have had abortions, or accompanied one of their children in a decision whether to carry a pregnancy to term. These experiences can be full of pain and inner conflict, shame and guilt. They are better addressed in personal conversation than in sermons.

But even if not directly mentioned such experiences are the straw from which good sermons are formed. They are the stuff of life and the abandoned places that the Gospel needs to touch. The heart of the Christian Good News is that nothing, including the things of which we are most ashamed, broken and guilt-ridden, can in fact separate us from God's love for us.

Any sermon that brings that home would make all of us better.

Pope on the run

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***We Have A Pope (M)*. Director: Nanni Moretti. Starring: Michel Piccoli, Jerzy Stuhr. 104 minutes**

The opening scenes of *We Have A Pope* depict a procession of cardinals who have convened for the papal conclave. As we gaze upon this solemn parade we are struck that beneath the ceremonial garb and holy demeanour, these are old men — a fact that speaks of both experience and weariness.

Once confined within the Sistine Chapel, we watch as each cardinal deliberates excruciatingly over his ballot paper. The election of a pope requires a decision made with gravitas and discernment. Roman filmmaker Moretti's characters clearly take this charge seriously.

Up until this moment, Moretti's portrayal of the papal conclave has emphasised piety and ritual. Yet now, as the cardinals chew over the momentous decision, their unspoken prayers begin to clamour, in voiceover. Each man is praying a variation of the same words: 'Not me. Please, not me.'

Humanity is clearly at the heart of Moretti's film. The cardinals' prayers echo the biblical account of Jesus pleading with the Father to unburden him of his fate. They remind us that piety does not preclude ordinary human fear and self-doubt.

Unexpectedly, soft-spoken Cardinal Melville (Piccoli) emerges as the unexpected winner of the papal race. For him, this honour bestowed by his peers and by God is overbearing. Before he can be presented to the multitudinous faithful who throng outside, he suffers a panic attack.

The conclave rules require the cardinals to remain isolated until the pope has been announced. So Vatican spokesman Rajski (Stuhr) seeks a swift resolution. He secrets Melville, *incognito*, to see a therapist in the city. Melville, plagued by doubt and depression, gives him the slip, and disappears.

Humanity remains front and centre. Melville's recalcitrance is not put down to weakness. He is a fallible human being who, we learn, gave up his 'ordinary' dreams in order to pursue his religious vocation. The film focuses on his genuine efforts to reorder his emotional, mental and spiritual state.

It interposes his existential struggle with the other cardinals' long and anxious wait, and with Rajski's often humourous attempts to protect them from the truth — that he has 'lost' the pope.

The cardinals are portrayed somewhat irreverently, as they bicker over card games, pop pills to help them sleep, and play a clumsy game of volleyball to pass the time. The portrayal is not unkind, however, and contains much pathos. We are

aware throughout of the devastating implications for these faithful cardinals should Melville's human foibles subvert the most revered conclave process.

Moretti himself appears as a psychoanalyst, Professor Brezzi, who is initially brought in to try to assist the new pope, but whose efforts are frustrated by the cardinals; he cannot, in knowledge of the pope's identity, be allowed to ask him the kinds of questions psychoanalysts need to ask.

Subsequently 'locked in' with the cardinals after Melville disappears, Brezzi personifies the 'outsider' inside the closed world of the conclave (a perspective that we, the audience, share). Again, Moretti favours warmth over cynicism: as Brezzi, he encourages the cardinals in their collegiality, while also offering a few pinpricks to their piety.

The Catholic Church has more than a billion members worldwide. To lead it is an immense responsibility. Irreverence notwithstanding, *We Have A Pope* stands as a gracious gesture, free of Church politics, to those who accept that responsibility. Surely, none would do so blithely.

The best teacher I ever knew

EDUCATION

Frank O'Shea

Albert was 12 when he went to the juniorate, a boarding school where the boys were encouraged to think about becoming religious brothers. He was a good mixer, good at games and at his studies. After his Leaving Cert, he duly went to the novitiate where they put a robe on him and gave him a different name and he took a vow of obedience.

His teacher training was an intensive four-month period where he learned the skills that fitted him much better than the university courses of today. He was sent to different schools where he taught a full day and took cricket and football teams and did units for his degree whenever he could.

Teaching brothers don't have trade unions to fight their corner and in his final posting he was given dormitory duty in a boys home in addition to his high school classes, sport, class preparation, marking and various religious duties.

He lasted two years before he woke up one morning and couldn't remember where he was or what he was supposed to be doing. He was put in the St John of God hospital where, he told me, many of his fellow patients were nuns.

This was the 1960s. When his progress was slow they gave him ECT treatment; several hits, full strength, right out of *Cuckoo's Nest*.

Somehow he survived and his Provincial suggested he take a year away from schools and from the disciplines of the Order. They helped him get various jobs — storeman, taxi driver, others he couldn't remember — and eventually he left the brothers.

He met and married Nola and after some years, felt he was strong enough to go back to teaching. One of Sydney's most prestigious schools offered him a position which he turned down when he learned it would involve taking scripture in chapel. It was not a sectarian decision, but one based on a disability that would remain with him for the rest of his life.

He was about to take up an offer of a job in another private school when he was contacted by the Order he had left. He jumped at the chance and was back in an environment he knew well, but now without a vow of obedience.

He taught mathematics and completed his degree and was year master and maths master and assistant principal and spent his January composing the timetable on a large white board with different coloured shapes.

Computers passed him by and he had little patience for the new vocabularies — mission statements, objectives, outcomes, benchmarks, goals and paradigms. He just wanted to be in the classroom.

When you teach in the next room, you get to know how your colleague is doing. Albert was the best teacher I ever knew. Top classes or remedial ones, nerds or footballers, were all the same to him — he was first a teacher of boys and then a teacher of maths. They loved him for his ease with them and the banter that was always respectful on both sides.

And every year of his teaching career, he took an RE class.

I mentioned a disability. Albert had a pathological fear of addressing a group of adults. He enrolled in a Masters and did all the units until the final one which required that he write and present a paper. The audience would be the dozen or so in the class and some members of faculty, people he knew, friends; he found some excuse to pull out and never finished the course.

He was once asked to speak on classroom management to new teachers or those like me who just wanted to know how he did it. He sat us in a classroom, serried rows, and convinced himself we were a year ten class. He gave a full lesson with variety and interaction and even homework.

I was there once when he taught an entire year group an introductory lesson on trigonometry. Not lectured or harangued, but taught: a proper class with questions, quiet work, interaction, exposition on a mobile whiteboard, a full 50 minutes. He could handle 220 year nines but not a dozen adults.

There is no punchline to this story. Albert retired just over ten years ago only to develop one serious illness after another. Who said life is fair? He played golf when he could but saw his once single-figure handicap balloon. In his many hospital stays, his former pupils were his most faithful visitors.

Albert died this year. His eulogist, a former colleague, punctuated his words with the sentence, 'He made a difference.'

Gay marriage debate has a long way to go

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan

On the weekend the ALP party conference voted to amend the party platform on same sex marriage. The platform now states: 'Labor will amend the Marriage Act to ensure equal access to marriage under statute for all adult couples irrespective of sex who have a mutual commitment to a shared life.'



Churches and religious organisations will retain the freedom to perform marriage ceremonies only for a man and a woman eligible for marriage under the rules of the church or organisation.

The conference voted by 208 to 184 to allow Labor MPs a conscience vote on the issue. Tony Abbott continues to insist that Liberal MPs will not be granted a conscience vote. This will change. If it doesn't, several Liberals, including Malcolm Turnbull, will cross the floor. It could even become a leadership issue in the party.

Within the life of the present parliament, our elected leaders will probably be voting on the issue, and in all likelihood the members of all major parties will have a conscience vote.

How should the conscientious Catholic member of parliament vote? If I were a member of parliament, I would support a law for the recognition of civil unions similar to the present United Kingdom law, and I would vote against any bill extending the definition of marriage to include the union of two men or two women.

I would do so because I think the State should not discriminate against couples who have a mutual commitment to a shared life (whatever their sexual orientation), while affirming that the bearing and nurturing of the children of the union is a constitutive good of marriage (even though not all marriages produce children).

Sadly in Australia, there is not much interest in a national approach for the recognition of civil unions. It is a winner takes all approach: either same sex marriage or no national symbolic, legal recognition of same sex unions. Just as states and territories can legislate with their own variations for de facto partnerships, they could also legislate for civil unions — as Queensland has just done.

Speaking from Rome on the weekend, Cardinal George Pell, Archbishop of Sydney, said: 'Marriage is about man, woman and children, as it has always been. Any Australia-wide political party which repudiates this does not want to govern, and rejects both tradition and the working class.'

We need to distinguish between moral teaching and pastoral advice offered our

co-religionists, and reasoned advocacy for laws and public policy applicable to all persons.

On the issue of civil recognition of same-sex unions it is not appropriate in the public square simply to agitate about the Catholic view of the sacramentality of marriage. Even the Catechism of the Catholic Church states: 'The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination ... constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided.'

How then could the law best express this respect, compassion, sensitivity, and non-discrimination for all persons including same sex attracted persons who commit themselves to loving, faithful relationships?

There is room even in the community of faith for a diversity of views. I have been greatly assisted by the line of Archbishop Vincent Nichols, elected president of the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales by unanimous acclamation in 2009, who last month after their Bishops Conference said, 'We were very nuanced. We did not oppose gay civil partnerships. We recognised that in English law there might be a case for those.'

Archbishop Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster, was also in Rome last weekend, and speaking about civil unions and same sex marriage. He said: 'Clearly, respect must be shown to those who in the situation in England use a civil partnership to bring stability to a relationship. Equality is very important and there should be no unjust discrimination. (However) commitment plus equality do not equal marriage.'

I concede that some Catholic commentators might argue for limits on non-discrimination and compassion on the basis that the very recognition of a same sex relationship is contrary to the natural law. For example, the Catechism states: 'The natural law, the Creator's very good work, provides the solid foundation on which man can build the structure of moral rules to guide his choices.

'It also provides the indispensable moral foundation for building the human community. Finally, it provides the necessary basis for the civil law with which it is connected, whether by a reflection that draws conclusions from its principles, or by additions of a positive and juridical nature.'

But these commentators would then need to establish that the extension of non-discrimination and compassion to same sex couples would undermine the indispensable moral foundation for building the human community.

Even if the Australian Parliament does legislate to expand the definition of marriage beyond its traditional meaning in the Marriage Act, there will undoubtedly be a constitutional challenge in the High Court given that the

Parliament does not have the power to expand its legislative competence beyond the wording of the Constitution. Under the Constitution, the Parliament has power 'to make laws with respect to marriage'.

In 1991, Justice Dawson on the High Court observed that the Commonwealth power to legislate with respect to marriage 'is predicated upon the existence of marriage as a recognisable (although not immutable) institution'. He then said, 'Just how far any attempt to define or redefine, in an abstract way, the rights and obligations of the parties to a marriage may involve a departure from that recognisable institution, and hence travel outside constitutional power, is a question of no small dimension.'

So this debate has a long way to go. It would be a pity if those of us trying to contribute the strength of the Catholic tradition to the debate were simply characterised as homophobic naysayers. And it would be helpful if some of the nuances of the experienced UK bishops could get some airplay here from our own bishops who also wrestle with the pastoral and moral dimensions of this question.

Reinventing the Aboriginal sports icon

SPORT

Michael Visontay

Arthur Beetson was by no means the first Aboriginal rugby league player to pop up on the radar. There were several renowned Indigenous players before him. But through his unique combination of talent, application and leadership, Beetson redefined the Aboriginal sports figure as a complex, sophisticated character who became a team leader.

Before Beetson, the status of iconic Indigenous sport person was held by Lionel Rose: a boy who used his fists to become world boxing champion in the 1960s. But Rose, for all his achievements, was an old-style icon: a loner who didn't talk much, had one particular physical talent and shone only briefly under the spotlight.

Beetson raised the bar: he fused athletic prowess with brains, and transformed from the awkward outsider into a national leader.

Beetson, who died of a heart attack on the Gold Coast last week aged 62, was a burly front-row forward who moved to Sydney from Queensland in the 1960s to join the Balmain club. He arrived with the reputation as that rare breed of forward: a creative ball player who could attack as well defend.

But he soon found himself battling fitness problems. He earned the nicknames Half a Game Arty and Meat Pie Arty, in reference to his weight and lack of fitness.

In the early 1970s Beetson moved to the Eastern Suburbs Roosters, which had been languishing at the bottom of the competition but was now under a new coach, Jack Gibson. Beetson responded to Gibson's mentoring and fulfilled his early promise by revolutionising the role of front-row forwards.

Up to that point, front-rowers were valued purely for their size, strength and aggression. Beetson, surprisingly agile, was endowed with an almost magical capacity to offload the ball while being tackled, to free his arms from the often two defenders it took to stop him, and get the ball away to a fast-running second-rower or half-back who would convert the half-opening into a yawning gap.

On a personal level, he was candid yet laconic, and developed a charisma that endeared him to everyone. Gibson appointed Beetson captain and he led the Roosters to two premierships, in 1974 and 1975. The 1975 team was considered one of the best in rugby league history and the images of Beetson being chaired off after the grand final victory are among the most famous in the game.

He became widely acknowledged as the best forward in the game, was chosen in the Australian team and appointed captain.

His legacy is comprised of three elements. Firstly, he was a forward who combined strength with skill, and brawn with brains, an unusual mixture.

Secondly, his resurrection as a player for Easts gave lie to the existing stereotype of Aboriginal league footballers as gifted but inconsistent, and unable to overcome adversity. Beetson transformed himself from an overweight, ill-disciplined youngster into a role model of the highest standard.

Thirdly, Beetson was a leader. Between his ball skills, his victory over fitness problems, and his straight talking, he emerged as a natural leader for the Roosters, then Australia, and finally his home state of Queensland in the very first State of Origin match in 1980.

His performance in that match, when he led the unfancied Queenslanders to victory over their clubmates from NSW, defined the new ethos of Origin: 'mate against mate', and installed the interstate rivalry as one of Australia's most intense sporting match-ups. Indeed, the State of Origin series has now superseded international matches as the ultimate rugby league contest.

Beetson's imprint in that very first match, his leadership and his candour, created a new model of rugby league footballer.

Moreover, by showing the wider Australian community that an Aboriginal footballer could be smart as well as strong, and good enough to captain his country, Beetson set an enduring example to all Indigenous people about what they could aspire to, on and off the field.

Lesson for heretics

POETRY

Various

Gelassenheit

Waiting, something opens
without our willing it,
without force.

Calm, in half-light, the horizon
crosses our sight,
the opening
of a dawn, a memory,
half-hoped for
your metaphors coming home
familiar ghosts, dreamed of
as they cross through the loved fields
and dry gullies,

bringing with them unspoken conversation,
new thought suspended
without knowing,
awaited, but unattended.

A vastness of silent notes
accompanies us, a symphony
we have longed to hear
of belief far beyond
our interpretations, open
to the swinging movement, and the resting
between here and any horizon
you have ever dreamed, seeing
the other side
of this surrounding openness

coming to meet us,
this spaciousness which is halted and held,
where everything merges
immeasurable in its own resting.

Lyn McCredden

Deity

Apostasy
A decree for heroism
Your fatal lesson for heretics
Even the Kubla Khan,
Its dome decree
Because reality was an enemy
Surely enmity is yours
When young hands fumble at adulthood
It smells of invasion
As if a holy alliance
Between someone else's territory
And your epitaph
Prophets of air and text
All the more sanctimonious
When no one is there to undo it.
Yet small hands joined
Becomes an unbreakable crowd
The burning can melt shrapnel
They bring you down
And call it worship a legacy
Others call it truncated
Kerry Ridgway

What I must cling to
sight's transaction with light

throb and swerve of voices
rain's scent on hot pavement
tiny spider's web art
morning mist hanging cool
moist odour of mown hay
freefalling in love's shock
stars shooting a scoured sky
forest breakfast's echoes
waterfall's silver plunge
quick pulse of silken skin
baby's chuckling wet kiss
strange train journey through snow
dawn in a great city
gleeful flea market finds
stark abbey's moon shadows
ache of harbour foghorns
thunder's warLord fanfare
estuary boats tide-beached
distant wildflowers haze
heavy silence of leaves
white house with blue shutters
winter hearth's lambent blaze
creaking of this old floor
Ian C. Smith

Making friends with the landmine capital of the world

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

A few years ago, western leaders welcomed the about face of Libya's Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. Their enemy, long regarded as an international pariah, had become their friend. Obviously that ended badly, and it serves as a cautionary tale for the West regarding the signs of hope that the Burmese regime is open to change.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's tone was rightfully tentative when she visited Burma last week. She [told](#) President Thein Sein that the United States 'is prepared to walk the path of reform with you if you choose to keep moving in that direction'.

Clinton's speeches dwelt on the positives. Follow-up contacts will need to specify international expectations of change in many areas, such as the use of antipersonnel landmines. A new report issued last month by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines depicts Burma as the landmine capital of the world.

Landmines, which are notorious for their record of killing and maiming civilians, were removed from most countries' arsenals after the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty. Landmines are now used in only a small number of conflicts, although uncleared landmines continue to pose a significant threat to civilians, especially children.

The US has not used landmines since 1991 although it refuses to sign the Mine Ban Treaty.

As well as being one of only a handful of countries continuing to lay fresh landmines, Burma has one of the highest civilian casualty rates in the world, and the figure is increasing. Zetty Brake of Burma Campaign Australia says the new government 'is continuing the old regime's policy of producing and laying landmines, in a manner that deliberately targets civilians ... There are also extensive reports from groups like Human Rights Watch that prisoners are being used as human minesweepers by the Burmese army.'

Coinciding with Clinton's visit to Burma was the beginning of an important anti-landmines meeting in nearby Cambodia. It was the Eleventh Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty, known as [11MSP](#). It is reviewing a range of treaty compliance issues, including the threat posed to the emerging norm by [new](#) landmine use in countries including Israel, Libya, and Burma.

In a sign of progress, Burma has sent a delegation to the 11MSP meeting, and campaigners are reading this as a sign that the country's leaders are ready for dialogue. In its speech, the delegation [defended](#) the use of landmines but said the issue deserved 'careful consideration'.

The anti-government Democratic Voice of Burma website says the start of talks

last week between several armed groups and Burmese state authorities is a welcome development, and the anti-mines campaigners will lobby for a ban on landmines to be included in any ceasefire agreement.

Burma Campaign Australia is calling on the Australian Government to publicly condemn the continued use and production of landmines in Burma. It is important that international opinion does not rescind Burma's [pariah](#) nation status until its leaders have abandoned the use of landmines.

Afghan terror past and present

POLITICS

Jan Forrester



In Afghanistan, anthropologist Thomas Barfield has [observed](#) , centuries can merge as decades do in other countries — the past isn't even the past yet there. The history of contemporary Afghanistan is complicated, yet the last 150 years bear directly on why civil society in Afghanistan is in the same perilous state as its maternal and child health.

The British fought two wars against the Afghans in the 19th century, in an attempt to block the expansion of Czarist Russia's sphere of influence towards British India, the jewel in the crown. The Afghans won, but were then bankrolled by British India. This is a centuries old weakness of the Afghan state: its dependence on outside aid to ensure financial stability.

The arrival of Western powers in Central Asia began to change Afghan political dynamics. During the Anglo-Afghan wars elites engaged rural militias in rebellions against the British, but refused to share power with them after the British were defeated.

Over subsequent decades the refusal of the ruling elites to even consider that ordinary people should have a say in how their country was run, and the brutal suppression of numerous revolts by the new emir, Abdur Rahman, eventually undermined his successors and led to a civil war in 1929.

The establishment of a parliamentary system in 1964 ostensibly widened political participation. However, Zahir Shah, the last king of Afghanistan, refused to give up any executive authority. His cousin, Daud, ousted him in a republican coup in 1973. Five years later Daud was killed in a communist coup — ending 230 years of dynastic rule.

But the question of what was to replace the dynasty, who had the right to rule and on what basis, was unresolved even when the Russians withdrew in 1989 and its local regime fell in 1992.

The West supported the mujahideen's resistance to the Russians but victory quickly deteriorated into a civil war which destroyed the state structure and engulfed a huge number of ordinary Afghans in political battles from which they had previously been separate.

Enter the Taliban. Within half a lifetime Afghans had experienced ideological extremes in government. And the country was broke.

The so-called war on terror drew the US and the West into Afghanistan — now the US is leaving. At the first hint of serious negotiations with the Taliban this year US lobbyists and some Afghan women asked: what will happen to women if the

Taliban return?

Things are already dire for women and it is fanciful to believe the old Tajik or Uzbek mujahideen leadership did not share the same views of women's place as old Pashtun leaders. Many in government have simply learned to moderate their public expressions.

Australian media last week followed the story of a young Afghan woman behind bars for having been raped by a cousin's husband. She has a choice: marry him or spend 12 years in jail with the child she gave birth to following the rape.

A Ministry of Women's Affairs official told a recent United Nations workshop that half of the country's 476 female prisoners were in jail for 'moral crimes'. These include running away from home, refusing to marry, and marrying without family consent.

However horrific these crimes against women are, the culture that allows them may be slow to change. The protection of women's 'virtue' is fundamental to a family's reputation. Thirty five years of conflict have put a premium on that 'virtue'.

Some Afghans still express exasperation at how ex-mujihadeen warLords implicated in mass killings during the civil war are able to sit in the parliament. The West accepted the deals done to balance competing ethnic and regional interests and to deal with their arguable fear of state disintegration, while simultaneously rolling out Western-style democracy.

Pragmatists argue that Afghanistan would have been a less stable place if these interests had not been accommodated in the revised political order. However, old warLords die and it is unclear whether a recent spate of political assassinations, including that of former President Rabbani, were really perpetrated by the Afghan Taliban or by other political players.

In the meantime various groups are quietly re-arming ahead of the US withdrawal in 2014.

Will there be a civil war when the Americans leave? Some foreigners believe Afghans are weary *and* wary of more war. Others are convinced further conflict is on the cards, or at least more insecurity. Pakistan is clearly crucial to Afghanistan's future security. Pakistan's anxiety about being surrounded by enemies, particularly India, means it will always try to institute a compliant government in Kabul.

The short window of foreign donor aid has also put a premium on quick grabs for the benefits. And it starts near the top, with President Karzai's recently assassinated half-brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai.

There are now legendary stories of money grabs from the Kabul Bank which were then invested in Dubai properties, just before the last financial crisis sent

prices south. The money 'lent' has disappeared, as has the bank's former governor, Abdul Qadir Fitrat, who is now in the US. Like many moneyed Afghans he had ensured his US permanent resident status well in advance of any trouble.

Corruption, otherwise known as administrative fees, is endemic in most areas of ordinary Afghan life, to the distress of many Afghans.