

Lifting lay leaders <i>Peter Kirkwood</i> . . . . .	<a href="#">1</a>
The fall and fall of Queensland Labor <i>Scott Prasser</i> . . . . .	<a href="#">2</a>
Memories of two kings of Tonga <i>Alan Gill</i> . . . . .	<a href="#">4</a>
Investment bankers and other monsters <i>Tim Kroenert</i> . . . . .	<a href="#">7</a>
Conversations with Rowan Williams <i>Andrew McGowan</i> . . . . .	<a href="#">9</a>
Stynes a living breach of the rules <i>Andrew Hamilton</i> . . . . .	<a href="#">11</a>
Jose Ramos-Horta's Ian Thorpe moment <i>Pat Walsh</i> . . . . .	<a href="#">13</a>
Prodigal son's shoeless stroll <i>Mark Austin</i> . . . . .	<a href="#">15</a>
Banning Dante's Divine Comedy is a human tragedy <i>Benedict Coleridge</i> . . . . .	<a href="#">18</a>
Big media takes a leaf out of big tobacco <i>Michael Mullins</i> . . . . .	<a href="#">21</a>
Social justice arguments against dismissal regulation <i>Paul Oslington</i> . . . . .	<a href="#">23</a>
Better results from a classless education system <i>Michael Furtado</i> . . . . .	<a href="#">25</a>
Iraq's sexual cleansing <i>Ellena Savage</i> . . . . .	<a href="#">29</a>
Eureka Street comes of age <i>Andrew Hamilton</i> . . . . .	<a href="#">31</a>
Showing love to child offenders <i>Tim Kroenert</i> . . . . .	<a href="#">33</a>
Miners dig Tony Abbott <i>Fiona Katauskas</i> . . . . .	<a href="#">35</a>
The two St Patricks <i>Frank O'Shea</i> . . . . .	<a href="#">36</a>
How Google is narrowing our minds <i>Edwina Byrne</i> . . . . .	<a href="#">38</a>
Love with an open hand <i>Various</i> . . . . .	<a href="#">41</a>
More asylum seeker blood on Australia's hands <i>Susan Metcalfe</i> . . . . .	<a href="#">45</a>
Zero tolerance for ritual humiliation <i>Michael Mullins</i> . . . . .	<a href="#">48</a>
Kony collared by the sound of a million Tweets <i>Michael McVeigh</i> . . . . .	<a href="#">50</a>



---

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

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

PO Box 553  
Richmond  
VIC 3121  
Australia

Responsibility for editorial content is accepted by the publisher.

Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned.

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

©2012 EurekaStreet.com.au

©2012 EurekaStreet.com.au

## Lifting lay leaders

VIDEO

*Peter Kirkwood*

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. In the previous interview on Eureka Street TV, the prominent lay Catholic leader Robert Fitzgerald [reflected](#) on changes in the role of the laity promised by the Council. The woman featured in this week's interview shares this pet subject area.

As a respected lay theologian, Zeni Fox embodies the vast changes in the role of the laity that have occurred since Vatican II. She has spent her working life studying, fostering, teaching, talking and writing about lay leadership in the Catholic Church.

The interview was recorded late last year at a Sydney conference where she delivered the keynote address, 'Lay leaders of Catholic institutions: serving the Church and the world'.

Fox is a professor of pastoral theology at Immaculate Conception Seminary, [Seton Hall University](#) near Newark in New Jersey, USA. She previously worked for 15 years in the area of religious education in Catholic parishes.

She gained her Masters degree in religious education and PhD in theology from the Jesuit run [Fordham University](#) in New York. Her doctoral thesis was entitled 'Lay ministries: a critical three-dimensional study'.

For over 15 years she has been an advisor to the US Bishops' Committee on the Laity and its subcommittee on lay ministry. In this capacity she has participated in many consultations with a wide range of Church representatives including bishops and clergy, lay leaders and theologians from the US and abroad.

She has sat on the boards of a number of important Catholic institutions in the US, including chairing the governance committee of the prestigious publication, the [National Catholic Reporter](#).

In recent years Fox has been closely involved in the [New Energies](#) process in the Archdiocese of Newark which has sought to rationalise and modernise parish structures through mergers and linkages between parishes.

She has received many awards for scholarship and service to the community and church, including honorary doctorates from Christ the King Seminary, Buffalo, and Georgian Court University, Lakewood.

She has written scores of articles, and written or edited a number of books including *New Ecclesial Ministry: Lay Professionals Serving the Church, Called and Chosen: Toward a Spirituality for Lay Leaders* (co-editor) and *Lay Ecclesial Ministry: Pathways Toward the Future* (editor).

## The fall and fall of Queensland Labor

### POLITICS

*Scott Prasser*



This Saturday, 24 March, the Labor Party will be swept from office in Queensland. It will mark the end of over 20 years of almost continuous Labor rule in the Sunshine state.

It has been an unusual election. Liberal leader Campbell Newman, former Lord Mayor of Brisbane does not hold a seat. He has to win the safe Labor inner city seat of Ashgrove to become premier. Issues about the government's breaking of caretaker conventions have surfaced. The leaders have dominated. The debate has been limited, the policy releases orchestrated and choreographed to perfection.

The Labor campaign has been appalling in terms of its personal allegations against Newman and his family. Labor's aim has been to undermine Newman's integrity and create enough doubt in voters' minds so as to prevent Newman from winning Ashgrove — a sort of consolation prize as Labor has long know it is going to lose.

The Premier made outrageous claims about Newman during the special recall of parliament. According to Bligh the FBI would be investigating Newman's family business interests and Newman could end up in jail! Perhaps Bligh should talk to coal magnate Clive Palmer about USA secret service plots.

Anyway it has all come to nought. Queensland's anti-corruption body, the Crime and Misconduct Commission cleared Newman last Friday, though some issues remain under review. The CMC's dismissal has largely destroyed the ALP election strategy.

The latest reputable opinion polls had the two-party preferred vote at 60 per cent for the LNP and 40 per cent for Labor. On these figures Labor could be reduced to 12 seats in Queensland's 89 seat unicameral parliament.

And these disasters showed in the leaders' debate last Monday. The Premier gave a solid if slightly flat performance and Campbell Newman held his own and was confident. Nevertheless, it was a colourless affair and disappointing. Few real policy punches were thrown and few landed. There should also have been debates between other ministers and their opposition counterparts. There were none.

Now in the last days of the campaign Labor's tactics have changed to stress that such an expected LNP landslide might be too big and so there is a need to vote Labor to maintain balance. What an admittance of defeat!

On reflection Labor's impending resounding election defeat is not easy to explain. While there have been many policy debacles and scandals under Labor including some very recent ones, the Queensland government has not resembled

the shame of its New South Wales counterpart prior to its defeat last year.

The real turning point for the Bligh Government seems to have been after the 2009 election when it announced major privatisation that had not been mentioned during the election campaign. And Labor's long term in office seems to have been the other tipping point.

This election will be a watershed in both Queensland and national politics.

It means the amalgamated LNP experiment has worked. There will be pressure for amalgamation of the National and Liberal parties across Australia. A long held dream of a single non-Labor party might at last be fulfilled.

If Newman wins Ashgrove, then the idea of having a leader recruited from outside the parliamentary wing could be used elsewhere. Incumbent opposition leaders should watch out!

It is also a watershed for Labor in Queensland which has been in power so long that government has become just an extension of the party machine for positions to be given and perks allocated. How that machine is now going to be fed will have major repercussions within Labor ranks.

And for the Gillard Government it means another non-Labor state government, one with a fresh electoral mandate, with which it has to deal. This spells trouble for an already troubled government.

And for the Greens — they will not do as well as in other state elections. Senator Brown take note.

And lastly, the Katter Australian Party (KAP) will not make any great breakthroughs. If lucky it may win three seats — in a parliament dominated by 60 plus LNP members. KAP will not break out into other states.

## Memories of two kings of Tonga

### POLITICS

*Alan Gill*

2 June 1953. Coronation Day. Two schoolboys, making the most of our day off from classes, joined the thousands lining the processional route hoping to get a glimpse of Queen Elizabeth II on her way to Westminster Abbey.



We waved our Union Jacks like windmills and were proud when an elegant carriage stopped briefly near where we were standing. Inside was a queen — not *the* Queen — but a head of state nevertheless.

The occupants were Queen Salote of Tonga, a lady of compassion and matching girth, and a slightly built, tail coated man, whom the BBC commentator, unable to identify, described as 'Queen Salote's breakfast'. There was a shower of rain. The diminutive man (subsequently revealed as the Portuguese Ambassador) wanted the roof closed; Queen Salote wanted it open. She won. I decided then and there that I would like to visit Tonga.

Salote's grandson, the King of Tonga, Taufa'ahau Tupou V, died on 18 March 18, during a visit to Hong Kong. It is expected that his brother, Tououto'a Lavaka, will succeed him.

Obituaries have depicted the deceased as an eccentric though likeable person, more interested in discussing 17th century European wars than the political and economic needs of his people.

True to my childhood wish I've been twice to Tonga, for a full five days each time, during which I sipped morning tea with the King (actually two kings), met church leaders, exposed miles of good old-fashioned Kodachrome and did my best to learn as much as possible about the 'Friendly Isles'.

My first visit in the 1970s was in the reign of Salote's son, Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, whose links with Australia included having been educated at Newington College, Sydney, the Methodist alma mater, and Sydney University, where — he proudly pointed out — a song was composed about his being the first Tongan to gain a degree.

There are many interesting things about Tonga, not least of which is its status not just as a kingdom, with a lineage claimed to be older than that of Queen Elizabeth, but as a Methodist kingdom to boot. For some generations the Tongans have been a Christian people whose church-going habits are renowned.

There are no buses and limited motor traffic on Sundays. Tourism of any kind is discouraged over a weekend for fear the visitors may set a bad example in Sabbath observance.

In the morning a walk past any or all of the churches is to have the spirit galvanised by melodious hymns wafting from every open doorway. In the afternoon young women in their prettiest dresses, some with matching parasols, form a passing parade worthy of a painting by Renoir.

Methodists form the largest religious group, but the earliest history of Methodism in Tonga was not free from acute friction and even schism. For financial and other reasons the Wesleyans of Tonga eventually seceded from their parent organisation, the Australian Conference, to form an autonomous body of their own.

Today the monarch's role in relation to the Methodist Church in Tonga is remarkably similar to that of the British monarch in regard to the Church of England. There is also similarity in the coronation oath: the King, placing his hand upon the Bible, swears that he will 'rule according to the constitution of Tonga, maintain the kingdom of Tonga in the Protestant Reformed religion and preserve unto the ministers and the churches committed to their charge, all such rites and privileges as do appertain to them'.

During my initial conversation with Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, he said he did not see Methodism as the 'state religion', rather it was the denomination of the majority of his subjects. He said he had a 'caring role' towards Catholics, Anglicans, indeed all 'who love the Lord Jesus'.

On an initial walk through the capital I was struck by an extraordinary sight — three wheeled taxis, a cross between a tricycle and a large motor mower, chugging along the street, carrying passengers on their way home from local shops and a street market. Tongans are large by nature, and the required woven straw outer garment (the ubiquitous ta'ovala) makes them positively huge. Unlike similar vehicles in Asian countries, the driver of the Tongan tri-car sits at the back. How he sees his way is a miracle.

King Taufa claimed to be the inventor of this carriage. I thought it wiser not to question him on the point.

My second visit to Tonga, some 20 years later, coincided with a general election. There was then a mixed legislature with about half the candidates elected by popular choice. Voting is a colourful procedure and takes on almost the atmosphere of a carnival. Candidates adopt novel methods to seek attention. I saw one man who was dressed from head to toe in political posters advocating his own candidature. He grinned through narrow eye slits as I took his picture.

Until a recent bout of rioting there was very little crime in Tonga, but the explanation hardly lies in the fear of punishment as a deterrent. The local gaol was nicknamed the 'government college', an indication of the benign treatment meted out to offenders. Prisoners tend the palace gardens, and have been seen playing happily on the swings built by the late Salote for her grandchildren. Prisoners also carry out public road and maintenance work. A group I came across was resting

under a tree while their warder seemed to be doing all the work.

My own first visit to the palace was indeed eventful. Before my arrival in Tonga I'd enquired about the possibility of a royal audience. I did not get any definite answer so assumed my request was unlikely to be granted. To my surprise I was told on landing in Nuku'alofa that not only was my request granted but the audience was set for only about 90 minutes later. It was customary for people meeting the king to wear a dark suit, collar and tie, whereas I had arrived carrying clothing more suited to tramping the countryside.

Thanks to the good offices of the local Anglican bishop, I somehow presented myself at the royal palace — in a borrowed suit about two sizes too small — on time.

I was shown into the audience chamber, a magnificently furnished room, at one end of which, with the sun blind immediately behind him, sat the king. The 'throne' — a three-seater settee — was just big enough to support the king plus two cushions supporting either arm. While I nervously introduced myself a uniformed attendant came with coffee on a silver tray. He went out backwards, leaving me to wonder if this was also required of me.

I do not remember much of my attempted interview except that at one stage I dropped my pencil and was terrified of splitting my trousers when I bent to pick it up.

I thought I would melt the ice by asking about his time in Sydney. There is a story that the king, having learned surfing at Bondi, introduced the sport to Tonga. I therefore asked him if he was ever fearful of sharks.

Tongans have difficulty pronouncing the 'sh' sounds which emerges as 's'. 'Sarks, sarks,' he said. 'There is nothing to fear from sarks. Look them straight in the eye like this!' At which he squared his shoulders in a demonstration of regal might which I shall never forget.



## Investment bankers and other monsters

### FILMS

*Tim Kroenert*

***Margin Call* (MA). Director: J. C. Chandor. Starring: Zachary Quinto, Stanley Tucci, Kevin Spacey, Jeremy Irons, Penn Badgley, Paul Bettany, Demi Moore. 107 minutes**

In one pertinent scene, Eric Dale (Tucci), the middle-aged former head of risk management on one of the trading floors of a major investment bank, recalls an achievement from a past career as an engineer. He remembers a bridge that he once helped to build, which had significantly improved routes used by urban commuters.

With intimidating ease he mentally calculates the number of hours that the bridge had saved, based on the number of people who use it, the average reduction in their commute, the number of commutes per week and extrapolated across the lifetime of the bridge. The number is massive.

'Time' here is not an abstract; Dale sees the bridge as giving people back pieces of their lives, which otherwise would have been wasted in traffic. The implication is not lost on trading desk head Will Emerson (Bettany), to whom Dale tells the story. A bridge is tangible. Building one has real benefits for everyday people. This stands in contrast with their roles on Wall Street, where fortunes have been made buying and selling the *idea* of money.

Elsewhere in the film another character puts it more succinctly. If he dug ditches for a living, at least there'd be a ditch to show for it.

*Margin Call* is full of such ethical and moral conversations about the kinds of behaviour that led to the Global Financial Crisis. Writer-director Chandor's Oscar nomination for Best Screenplay testifies to the film's efficiency and poignancy in exploring these ideas. The film is set in 2008 on the eve of the GFC itself and stands more as a kind of philosophical horror story than a cautionary tale about the destructive power of human greed.

The setting is an investment bank loosely modelled on Lehman Bros, notorious for its part in sparking the crisis. Dale has just been laid off, but not before he had stumbled onto something big. His figures are incomplete however, so before he leaves he passes them on to young risk analyst Peter Sullivan (Quinto). Sullivan finishes the calculations that night, and in so doing he uncovers the likelihood of the bank's imminent collapse.

This triggers a series of late-night meetings with increasingly senior executives, who test the veracity of the figures (the film is quite neat and user-friendly in its explanations of these complex mathematical matters) and try to determine the right course of action. Of course what's right for the bank or for individuals is a

different equation to what's right for Wall Street as a whole or the wider community (let alone the global economy).

The players include Emerson's immediate superior Sam Rogers (Spacey), division head Jared Cohen (Baker), chief risk officer Sarah Robertson (Moore), and CEO John Tuld (Irons).

It would be tempting to view these characters simply as villains. Yet only Tuld is readily despicable. Like Daniel Day Lewis' oil baron in *There Will Be Blood*, Irons portrays Tuld as a kind of sinewy bishop to capitalism, not gluttoned on greed (an Orwellian pig) but gaunt and vicious as if physically corrupted by his devotion to the market. He preaches economics and excuses the crisis as a glitch in the economic cycle of life.

Most of the other characters are humanised to some extent. Sullivan and his young colleague Seth Bregman (Badgely) witness the unfolding crisis with boyish awe (although Bregman remains unhealthily preoccupied with salary sizes). The first time we meet Rogers he is weeping for a sick pet; Spacey portrays him with some warmth and he is, along with Dale, the closest thing that *Margin Call* has to a moral centre.

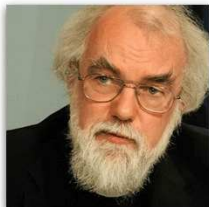
Yet humanity makes the characters and the situation all the more frightening. Tuld is a monster and Cohen is cold and calculating, yet even the most principled characters are shown to compromise to varying degrees in the name of self-interest. And self-interest was the problem in the first place, not only on the part of Wall Street's investment bankers but also for anyone who benefited from the nebulous wealth they generated.

If only they had built bridges instead.

## **Conversations with Rowan Williams**

### RELIGION

*Andrew McGowan*



Anglicans have a way of doing their internal wrangling rather publicly. Globally this reflects a loose-knit structure — the Churches of the Anglican Communion are all independent, constituted as national entities like the mother Church of England. Yet this frank and messy penchant for debate also reflects a culture and history closely connected with that of English-speaking democracy.

Rowan Williams became Archbishop of Canterbury in February 2003. When appointed, he brought with him the hopes of liberal Anglicans, and the scrutiny of conservatives. One of the most widely-respected theologians of any tradition in our time, his positions on a range of issues, notably human sexuality, made him appear likely to lead the Church of England and the global Anglican Communion further towards acceptance of progressive views.

For Anglicans, conversation and persuasion are the tools of communion, and orthodoxy is determined not by decree but by concrete participation in a Church where the historic creeds, sacraments, and scripture itself are likely to generate debate at the same time as being touchstones of unity. The strengths of transparency and diversity, as well as the weaknesses of incoherence and disharmony, come from the same source. Williams' success or failure would have to be about conversation, not about decree.

In June the same year Gene Robinson was elected to the less-storied bishopric of New Hampshire. A rift within Anglicanism had been under way for some years prior, with Asian and African dioceses conducting strange pastoral raids into American suburbia at the behest of western conservatives. Yet Robinson's ascent symbolised a new stage of inner-Anglican conflict, which has dominated Williams' time as head of an uneasy alliance.

Williams has been castigated or merely dismissed by critics at both ends of this tenuous continuum. For some, he has failed in his promise as a prophetic leader and accommodated conservative bullies. In turn the self-professed orthodox see him as having lacked the conviction to confront a drift to liberalism.

Williams' erudition has been sneered at by a predictable anti-intellectual group, and his appointment as Master of Magdalene College is now seen by some as a retreat into a rarefied academia to which he is better suited.

He is indeed a theologian, but Williams' tenure as Archbishop was itself an embodied exercise by an extraordinary mind, one which has produced storied works on areas from the fourth century Arian controversy to Dostoyevsky, in yet another branch of theology. As Archbishop of Canterbury, Williams has composed

an incomplete work on the doctrine of the Church itself.

His most profound difference from detractors of either kind has not been their views on scripture or sex, but on the Church itself. This is what 'communion' entails for Williams; not agreement based on liberal or conservative confessions, but a unity in Christ characterised by diversity, but also by conversation.

What few of his detractors have recognised was that he took the partners in the difficult Anglican conversation seriously precisely as members of the Church, and could not or would not reduce the value of their participation to the content of their arguments.

Williams had himself engaged more profoundly than most liberals with making positive theological sense of same-sex attraction in his remarkable essay [The Body's Grace](#). Immersed in the faith and thought of the Fathers of the Church, he also knew orthodoxy better than his conservative critics. Yet he has refused to see either group as dispensable for the conversation.

There have certainly been notable failures even by this measure; excluding Robinson from the central conversation of the 2008 Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops was one, but Williams judged the alternative might have been the greater failure of wholesale absenteeism from others.

It is too early to know how history will judge Williams' time on the chair of St Augustine. He himself might hope his work would be judged not by positions taken, but by conversations sustained.

One likely basis for eventual judgment hangs now in the balance; the 'Anglican Covenant' presently being considered by national Churches offers the Communion a structure, either to channel or control the conversation, depending on whom you ask. Uninspiring in tone and likely ineffective in practice, the Covenant is a rather prosaic document by which to assess Williams' own achievement.

Yet it would ill-suit Williams' own theology for an episcopate, or a document, to look as though it aspired to what belongs only to God. Christian life, he himself has argued, involves scepticism about claims to success in one's own life and discourse. Williams' incomplete work will leave itself open to misunderstanding by its very nature, as he would be among the first to say.

## **Stynes a living breach of the rules**

### EULOGY

*Andrew Hamilton*

For football followers, March is a month of beginnings and endings. The regular games of the soccer A-League season draw to a close. Both rugby codes and the AFL begin their premiershp seasons.

With the football season comes football news. Much of it is about transgressions: new dangerous tackles, failed expectations, bad behaviour, careless speech.

And in football, transgressions are followed by judgment and punishment: suspensions, sackings and retirements. Each event is followed by reflection on such topics as footballers as role models, football as a business and racism in football.

This March there has brought sadder news. Just days after the feast of St Patrick, Irish born Jim Stynes died from the cancer with which he had lived courageously and publicly for some years.

The first time I saw Stynes was in a final at VFL Park. On that warm and sunny day he became a notorious transgressor. He ran across the mark and the subsequent penalty probably cost Melbourne the game. It was his first season of Australian Rules football. For a while it appeared that he might forever be remembered by that single transgression.

But during his subsequent life in Australia he had different and better stories to tell about both football and transgression. In his football career he was a model of reliability and faithfulness in a club that was generally mediocre.

He played almost 250 games without interruption, carrying injuries in order to do so. In his public appearances he was generous, modest and assured. Because his world was manifestly wider than football, he was a good role model for young men and for footballers in particular.

After he finished football his activities addressed some of the questions raised by the everyday football stories: how to handle the relative wealth and celebrity that comes to gifted footballers, and how to deal in a human way with transgression.

He used his status as a footballer and his energies to work with young people lacking in direction. Through the Reach Foundation that he began he showed a better way of dealing with transgression than by judgment and punishment. He commended the way of encouragement and awakening a sense of possibility.

He recognised the importance of role models, or heroes as he preferred to call them, and became one himself. He did not treat his celebrity and freedom of

access to the wealthy and powerful as bling to be displayed but as a resource for benefiting the community.

In the face of illness, Stynes also gave his name, time and energy to raise the Melbourne Football Club from a perilous situation. On the field the team remained mediocre but as president of the club he improved the morale and the stability of the club.

His contribution was another measure of the importance he placed on returning to the community what he had been given. It was also significant that in an environment where lack of success breeds fractious relationships he remained on good terms with everyone.

The last years of Stynes' life were a sustained transgression. In his life sickness and death constantly ran across the mark that society and football considered sacrosanct. His cancer transgressed the expectations that footballers should be and look healthy, and that football legends were immortals who lived happily on into old age.

Stynes was a living breach of the rules. He looked ill, acknowledged his cancer and did not tiptoe behind the mark where he would not be seen.

Terminal sickness has its own code. It is normally handled and propitiated by silence. For public figures whose illness is of public interest, it is something to be fought against. Their bravery in this, the last and hardest game, is saluted.

Stynes seemed to do it a different way. He did not fight his cancer as an enemy. He lived with it, lived through it and used all available medical resources to deal with it. But this was a way of living fully, not fighting a battle that defined his life. From outside it seemed that to him death was not fearsome but a part of life.

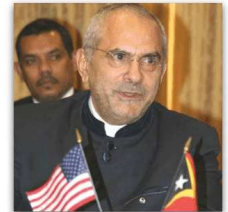
Ultimately the life and dying of Jim Stynes was not a football story. It was a better story, one about the possibilities of being human.

## Jose Ramos-Horta's Ian Thorpe moment

### POLITICS

*Pat Walsh*

It has been clear for some time that 2012 would be a watershed year for East Timor. In addition to marking 500 years since the arrival of the Portuguese and 100 years since the fabled Dom Boaventura led a robust revolt against them in 1912, 2012 also marks ten years since full independence and will see two elections.



The first of these was held last Saturday and involved 12 candidates competing for the presidency. The poll results indicate that the Timorese spirit of independence, exemplified by Dom Boaventura and more recently by the Resistance, has been rediscovered and is alive and kicking. Cashed up with revenue from the petroleum fields in the Timor Sea, proud that it has put the crippling crisis of 2006 behind it, and chafing in harness with the UN, East Timor has decided to go it more alone even to the point of living dangerously.

The UN and international military contingent led by Australia have been asked to leave later this year. It is as though the East Timorese have heard the ghost of Borja da Costa, East Timor's most famous poet, executed in 1975 by the Indonesian military, whispering to them again: 'Why, Timor, do your children doze like chickens ... Awake, take the reins of your own horse.'

The poll count is virtually complete and none of the four leading presidential candidates has won a simple majority. This means there will be a run-off second round on 21 April between the top two vote getters: Francisco Lu'Olo Guterres, president of Fretilin (28 per cent) and Jose Maria Vasconcelos, better known by his Timorese *nom de guerre* Taur Matan Ruak (TMR), head of the Timorese military until he resigned last year (25 per cent).

Both men exemplify East Timor's tough, independent streak, having fought as guerrillas throughout the 24-year war with Indonesia. The runners-up, who each received about 18 per cent, were Fernando La Sama Araujo, speaker of Timor's parliament, and Jose Ramos-Horta, the incumbent president, who has conceded defeat.

It is the electorate's dumping of Ramos-Horta that is the big surprise. Their rejection of his offer to serve for a further five years is breathtaking and, in my view, living far too dangerously.

Ramos-Horta is a national treasure. His contribution to East Timor's liberation is legendary and as a non-partisan president since 2007 he has worked tirelessly to offset Timor's image as a near failed state by rebuilding unity, rebranding East Timor as a peaceful country and serving as a critical part of its checks and balances.

He is open to criticism including that he has contributed to a culture of impunity and has sometimes exceeded his powers and interfered in issues that are properly the business of government, not the presidency.

But to reject someone of his capacity, authority and track record is the political equivalent of East Timor abandoning its campaign for the gas pipeline from the Timor Sea. How this came to pass will require more research. The short answer seems to be that the electorate got the impression Ramos-Horta, unlike his hungrier opponents, had lost his appetite for the job, and when Xanana Gusmao abandoned him they followed suit.

The choice facing the electorate now is, in my view, straightforward. Although the second round candidates have similar political and military pedigrees, Guterres is better qualified to be president. Since independence he has occupied significant national leadership roles, including heading the country's largest political party and serving as speaker of the parliament for many years. He has recently completed a law degree and can also take some credit for the responsible role played by Fretilin during its recent years in opposition.

TMR is not ready. He has virtually no experience outside the military, which he was in charge of when the 2006 crisis began in its ranks. Many are rightly uncomfortable with the prospect of a recently retired general, Indonesian style, becoming head of a fragile state in which the military already plays an internal security role.

Ramos-Horta is now having an Ian Thorpe moment, contemplating whether he will continue in public life in some way or retire and perhaps live abroad like his fellow-Nobel laureate, Bishop Belo. My hunch, and hope, is that some way will be found by East Timor to utilise his vast experience as an elder statesman.

He has said that he will not endorse either candidate in the second round, but this does not rule out a role in the parliamentary elections which will be held in June after he leaves the presidency in May. The deposed king might turn out to be the kingmaker that Xanana Gusmao was for him in 2007.



## **Prodigal son's shoeless stroll**

POETRY

*Mark Austin*

### **Tree trunk flight**

*'Give yourself to the air, that which we cannot hold.'* Rilke

It was a joy to return midflight,  
Eye to eye,  
And see the remembrance of our travel so far,  
A journey forward,  
Unmasking the past,  
You sitting there,  
With Mary Jane,  
In shorts and singlet,  
The woollen collar and leather jacket,  
Still meander around surrounding paddocks,  
Your hands toying many dials,  
And a custom made joystick,  
Lifted up by the imagination,  
Of distant sky stories,  
Surveilling lives in turbulence,  
The fear was that it would become forgotten,  
Nestled memories of the world,  
Packaged in one.  
Sharing Sky, amongst tree trunks & seed songs,  
Grants the air, that which holds us.

### **Sunday stroll**

On a hill between Church and lake,  
I took off my shoes.  
I see you kangaroo.  
But you knew me before I knew you existed.

My fenced in feet, prevented me from immersion,  
I was leaving marks in tracks instead of the other way around.  
So I took off my shoes,  
And felt the damp and cold shooting up.  
A drink from the sole is more refreshing than any bottled river.  
I felt the cushion of grass.  
It did not exclude, but wrapped its spines around me,  
Tickled my dying ankles to rattle,  
Greasing the bearings of my toes,  
I hoped I tickled the earth too, made it smile.  
A son, no matter how prodigal, should always love his mother.

### **Itchy foot**

Hover over bother,  
I feel it all over,  
So diving into the grassy tangle,  
Of recreation I lay in star formation,  
Crackling of ribs, the frigid sun,  
Shows its unseeable face,  
Expanding the plastic roof,  
The spine of this house stretched,  
I still hover restless, distracting my mind of things that will go unrecorded,  
  
My timing is off, the beat is in medical need,  
Chest Press this country's heart, instead of fidgeting with capillaries!  
Little eyes in sockets of a young nation,  
Clinging to youth's freedom,  
All you know is what you see, so off abroad you go to believe.  
It does work, and a journey I recommend,  
But dear little island, your history is where you'll end,  
Face it with eyes, ready for the test,

Take all bouncers, full tossers, swingers and the rest,  
Over this you'll eventually see,  
The real nakedness shared in you and me.

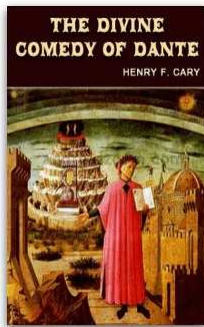
**The cutting board**

The knife will bleed ink,  
And like the horizon highway,  
My board is marked with straight lines,  
Open the pantry of thoughts,  
Lighting the universe,  
Feed the sounds,  
Dice guilt,  
Chop frustration,  
Slice up inspiration,  
Throw in rough cut riches and chiffonnade rags,  
Remember to keep your bleeding blade sharp,  
With the grindings of your mind,  
Don't waste much,  
Because cutting boards handle anything,  
In a world hungry anyway,  
The cooking will come,  
Time in wait can be filled with distillation or fermentation,  
Let it now be just you,  
And the cutting board.

## Banning Dante's Divine Comedy is a human tragedy

ARTS

*Benedict Coleridge*



The Italian human rights advocacy group [Gherush 92](#) recently called for the removal of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* from school curricula and university reading lists, [arguing](#) that it is Islamophobic, anti-semitic and anti-homosexual and so should have no place in the classroom or lecture theatre.

Gherush 92 has an ideological approach that lends itself to this kind of campaign. For example, it argued in 2009 against Benedict XVI's planned visit to the Great Synagogue of Rome, stating that the Pope intended to manipulate the Jewish people 'so as to squash them and isolate them in their memory'. Benedict's visit was, in their terms, an [insult](#) not only to Jews but also to Roma gypsies, to gay people, to women and to all who were massacred in the Shoah and during the course of the centuries of Christianity'.

Even if we pass by their conflating of the Holocaust with the entire history of Christianity, it's obvious Gherush 92 has a distinctively anti-Christian and, in the Italian context, anti-Catholic agenda. Christianity, according to them, is responsible for everybody's suffering, past and present, an historical consciousness reflected in the organisation's name, which recalls the treatment of Jews in 15th century Spain.

Nevertheless, there are important questions raised by its call for *The Divine Comedy* to be banned. The debate provides an opportunity to reflect on how people in a modern pluralistic society can value and understand works of art, elements of which clash with contemporary moral and cultural preferences.

In the 1950s the Oxford philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe argued that, with the decline of belief in God, the moral concepts and language derived from belief in a divine will were no longer sustainable. The arguments made by Gherush 92 fulfill Anscombe's thesis. They imply that the ideas expressed in works such as *The Divine Comedy* are mere cultural preferences, rather than a grasping after truth, and that, as cultural preferences, they are unacceptable.

In effect, any art, symbolism, stories or language that doesn't correspond with Gherush 92's conception of 'modernity' should be jettisoned from our cultural canon. Unfortunately, if we were to be thorough about this, it would mean depriving ourselves of Dostoevsky, Balzac, Shakespeare, Hobbes, the *Iliad* and most of our literary and philosophical resources penned prior to the later 20th century.

Fortunately, following Anscombe, there is no obligation to accept the Gerush 92 vision in order for us to protect pluralism or cultural diversity.

So how do we answer Gherush 92? Is it true that art that expresses ideas incompatible with modern western cultural preferences can no longer offer wisdom and lasting insight? Is there an unnavigable gulf between modernity and the cultural and religious world of the past?

The answers to these questions are very important; after all, if we appropriate Anscombe's reasoning, if 'modernity' is disconnected from its foundational moral concepts and language, then is modernity, including pluralism and respect for diversity, still possible? If we can no longer understand, appreciate and draw wisdom from our cultural and religious history, then isn't 'modernity' hollowed out, and our moral and social concepts just flimsy expressions of contemporary cultural preference?

For the sake of real pluralism it's important we are willing and able to enter different cultural worlds, in order to see the universe in different ways.

A visit to an ancient church, for example, is an invitation to do this. Often in churches in Italy and France one can look up and see a night sky painted on the ceiling above the altar. Small silver stars are set against a deep blue background. The night sky evokes a sense of awe at the vastness of space and time. When the congregations of the 14th and 15th centuries looked up at a night sky, what did they imagine they saw? In a culture steeped in Christian narrative and teaching, many would have seen the heavens arrayed above them, the cosmos ordered by divine mystery.

Dante's *Comedy* paints a cosmic vision of life, death and life beyond death. It expresses this mystery of the late medieval Christian universe in its stories and images. Some of these images, like that of the Prophet Mohammed enduring painful torture, or the derogatory description of Jews, don't fit with a modern orientation toward pluralism, respect for other faiths and inter-faith dialogue.

Of course we cannot condone this imagery today. If it were included in a contemporary literary work it would be disrespectful and wrong. But historical texts should be read with understanding.

Take for example *The Book of Travels* by the 17th century Ottoman traveller Evliya Celebi in which he refers to Christians he encounters as 'pigs' or 'swine' snuffling around for food, ready for slaughter. Celebi's literary work is nevertheless a wonderful, vivid experience — it depicts a beautifully imagined world open to those Christian readers who can forgive their forebears being compared to bacon.

Rather than being 'saved' from these works, children in schools and students at universities should be taught to enter into their historical visions of life, visions that are also religiously shaped. The exercise of the imagination is the first step towards appreciating the complexity of history, of art and, indeed, of our contemporary cultural condition.

Against the selective and reductive reading proffered by Gherush 92, Dante's

*Comedy* acts as an entry point for students to think about how religion pervaded the world of the Italian Renaissance, how people's vision of the universe was bound up with biblical imagery.

It also conveys the complexity of religious culture in this period — it is none other than the poet Virgil who leads Dante through the circles of hell. Here one can see the blending of classical and Christian themes that characterised Christian art and philosophy of the day. Only look at the façade of Siena Cathedral and you can see the figures of Aristotle and Plato alongside those of Solomon and Moses.

When the Russian poet Osip Mandelstam was banished by Stalin from St Petersburg to Voronezh, he took with him a copy of *The Divine Comedy*. As Seamus Heaney has written, by the time Mandelstam 'came to dwell with the *Commedia*, his powers as a lyric poet had been tested and fulfilled, and his destiny as a moral being ... was tragically embraced'.

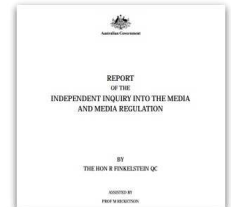
Mandelstam found in *The Divine Comedy* a lyric beauty and a powerful message of humanity's moral state, and future redemption. While one can call to mind Gherush 92 staffers in their offices scouring Dante, checking the juicy bits, I prefer to think of Mandelstam in the midst of his despair, reading *The Divine Comedy* expansively, hopefully — just as students today might be taught to read it.

## Big media takes a leaf out of big tobacco

EDITORIAL

*Michael Mullins*

Media bosses are doing its best to discredit the [Finkelstein Report](#) and to convince ordinary Australians that the protections it seeks are not in their best interest. The main recommendation of the Federal Government's Independent Inquiry into the Media and Media Regulation is for a publicly-funded regulatory authority to replace the Press Council, which is operated by the media companies themselves.



Fairfax's *Australian Financial Review* had media industry heavyweights speak at its Future Forum on Thursday. It asserted in its [editorial](#) the next day that the 'old-school' view of the media held by the Finkelstein inquiry 'no longer exists'.

In this new world, [Austar pay TV chief John] Porter's warning resonates: Australia should 'stop believing that paternalistic government can keep up with changes in technology and the market'.

It could be that the media bosses *do* have a better understanding of new technology than bureaucrats employed by the government. But if that is the case, it does not follow that they can be trusted to make and police their own rules.

The commercial media bosses' main responsibility is to build revenue for shareholders, not to protect consumers from harm. We would not let big tobacco specify the size of health warnings on cigarette packs, so why should we allow media bosses to decide on the media that is best for us?

An [editorial](#) published in the *Weekend Australian* earlier this month went much further in its attempt to damn the report. The writer depicted Justice Ray Finkelstein as the victim of a left-wing ideological 'conspiracy'. This was perpetrated by academics who are 'unsuccessful' media practitioners engaged in the 'pseudo-discipline of media studies'.

Mr Finkelstein's reliance on academics to gauge the performance of the media contaminates his report with error ... The empirical failings of these poachers-turned-gamekeepers do not appear to trouble Mr Finkelstein, who quotes at length from their submissions and 'research' to claim that the press is so biased and malevolent that it should be controlled by a government-funded body.

Dr Anne Dunn is Associate Professor in media and communications at the University of Sydney and President of the Journalism Education Association of Australia. She [responds](#) to the editorial's assertion that the claim of media studies to be vocational 'amounts to fraud'. Her explanation is that the courses are primarily designed to provide a broad education rather than practical instruction.

A university level degree with a major in journalism or media production will

seldom 'claim to be vocational' ... because a university degree is widely understood to offer something more.

Among other qualities, Dunn argues that a university education fosters the ability to conduct research, use evidence and construct arguments. These, she suggests, are not evident in the *Weekend Australian's* editorial and other media attacks on the Finkelstein Report.

Moreover there is an essential link between study of the humanities and a humane view of the world that is represented in the Finkelstein Report but missing from the media bosses' cries for self-regulation. These 'old-school' values are more relevant to determining the rights and wrongs of media practice than merely an understanding of new technology and markets.



## Social justice arguments against dismissal regulation

### POLITICS

Paul Oslington



Unfair dismissal regulation is in the news again, running strongly in *The Australian*, the *Australian Financial Review* and other media outlets. The ratio of heat to light is pretty high in many of the contributions to the debate.

Removing Federal protection against unfair dismissals for small business employees was the centrepiece of the Howard Government's 2006 WorkChoices reforms. Although there were always common law remedies for unfair dismissal, and state protection, federal protection began in 1996 with Labor's Workplace Relations Act.

As well as protecting employees against dismissal on unlawful grounds (e.g. pregnancy) the legislation provided remedies for 'harsh, unjust or unreasonable' dismissal. Such dismissals were distinguished from redundancies, where the job itself disappears for economic reasons unrelated to the performance of the employees, with specified redundancy payments to employees.

The central issue in 2006 was the employment effects of dismissal regulation. The Howard Government claimed 50,000 jobs would be created by the removal of protection; research by Benoit Freyens and I (published in the journal of the Economic Society of Australia, *Economic Record*, in 2007, based on a three year Australian Research Council funded project) estimated the upper bound to be about 6000 jobs. Now under FairWork the central issue seems to be the effect on productivity.

It is worth briefly reviewing the economics of dismissal regulation. Regulation raises the cost of employing labour because there is a probability that any worker hired will be dismissed at some stage, and may lodge a claim, leading to administrative and legal costs and perhaps a compensation payment. Dismissal regulation also increases the bargaining power of incumbent workers, which can be exploited depending on the work environment as higher wages or reduced effort.

A subtle effect of dismissal regulation is to penalise workers who are risky for employers, such as those returning to the labour force after a break to rear children, or those with a disability, or from particular racial groups. If the employer is choosing between a safe worker, and a more risky worker then dismissal regulation will reduce the capacity for the employer to undertake post hiring sorting, and tip the employment decision towards the safe worker.

Both the effect of the regulations on incumbent wages and the subtle discrimination against risky workers induced by dismissal regulation mean that the 'social justice' arguments are not all on the side of those advocating stronger

employment protection. Regulation can hurt some of the most vulnerable in the Australian labour market.

Productivity effects of dismissal regulation are less well understood. Regulation reduces the capacity of businesses to get rid of workers who reveal themselves after hiring to be less productive, reducing the average productivity of labour. Freyens is working on formal models of the effect of dismissal regulation on productivity through reduced turnover and poorer quality matches of workers to firms.

Earlier this week the *Australian Financial Review* reported on new research Freyens and I are undertaking which compares the operation of the Workplace Relations Act, WorkChoices and FairWork unfair dismissal regulations.

We have constructed a database of all unfair dismissal cases arbitrated by Fair Work Australia and its predecessor bodies from 2000 to late 2010 which are coded by the size of the business, industry, occupation, worker tenure and wages, reasons for the dismissal, representation of both sides, and the outcome including any compensation or value of reinstatement.

All researchers have been hampered by incomplete and opaque data releases by Fair Work Australia (they are required to report on the operation of the system under the Fair Work Act) so independent survey work is the only way of getting an accurate and comprehensive picture of the effects.

The number of unfair dismissal claims lodged under the Fair Work Act has risen to about 17,000 per year, an increase roughly in line with the Act's increased coverage of workers. If one believes regulation of dismissals is justified to protect workers then surely the extension to those previously covered by state Acts and employees of small business is a good thing. If regulation is not justified it should be abolished for all.

Our main findings are claimant success rates have increased from 33 per cent under Work Choices to 51 per cent under the Fair Work Act, mainly we think because of the extension to small business, the tighter Fair Work definition of a redundancy, and the possibility of pursuing claims under the new adverse action provisions of the Fair Work Act. Compensation payments to workers found to be unfairly dismissed have not changed much under the three regimes, averaging around 12 weeks pay.

These findings are by no means an answer to the question of whether regulation is justified. We need more empirical work on the employment effects, the productivity effects, and the distributional effects on the most vulnerable in the labour market.

## Better results from a classless education system

### EDUCATION

*Michael Furtado*

The Gonski Review isn't just a new way of 'doing' school funding. It opens up new ways of linking school funding with improved life chances, a key factor in school reform. With more parents sending their children to non-government schools, the government must address the implications of this for all Australia's school-children.



It would have been easy simply to deregulate funding and invest it to reflect trends in school enrolment. However, the school results picture isn't simple.

While some government schools don't achieve good results, others do. Similarly, when equivalent school results from the public and private sectors, broken down by socio-economic status, are compared, some state and Catholic schools do exceedingly well.

Finally, the socio-economic profile of non-government school students is generally higher than that for state school students, so poverty and disadvantage are inescapable factors in Gonski's attempt to reconfigure school funding for the next 50 years.

What the figures additionally show is a long 'tail' of poor achieving students at one end, while Australia's top performers do not do as well as top performers in other countries. The reasons for this are complex: Australia has the largest non-government school sector in the world, whereas Finland, Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore have almost no private schools, while Canada's Catholic schools do exceedingly well, but unlike Australia, and similar to New Zealand's, are public schools.

Indeed, every single Catholic school in New Zealand, such as Baradene — a sister school to Sydney's Kincoppal-Rose Bay, which charges \$23,514 p.a. — is part of the fully-integrated, fee-free public education system. There are no private Catholic schools in New Zealand and a handful of unfunded independent Catholic schools in other countries. Australia's Catholic school model is a distortion from the norm, insofar as fee-requirements are conditional on enrolling in them.

Also, Asian countries at the top of the table have selective secondary schools, whereas Australian differences are defined by wealth exclusion and class (i.e. socio-economic) differentiation. Even among predominantly Western countries there are vast cultural differences: Finland has a culture in which teachers are regarded as being on a par with doctors, whereas Australian teachers feature lower down the scale in salary terms, being about the equivalent of social workers in socio-economic status.

The political ramifications of any funding policy linked with an anti-poverty program are therefore far-reaching and deeply controversial if they are to be effective. It has ramifications for enrolment patterns, accountability, student entitlement and teaching methods. It is in these four areas that Catholic schools will be called to make the greatest changes and have the most effective impact.

While Gonski has said no school will lose funding, elite schools, most of them independent and some of them state-based and selective, will get a smaller proportion of total funding, while schools that are lagging behind will get more. In addition, the Commonwealth has flagged its preference to amalgamate the dual system, whereby it is responsible for funding mainly private schools and the states responsible for state schools, to a uniform funding model across the entire range of schools.

Gonski's framework is based on acknowledging student and school needs in all schools, regardless of sector, and funds an aspirational outcome, rather than just costs. Such a principle is totally consistent with Catholic school provision, which is need-based. To this end, Gonski recommends that funding come in two parts. The first would be a standard amount per student. The second would consist of added loadings, intended to address disadvantage of various kinds.

Smaller and remote schools would attract extra funding, as would Indigenous students, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and students with limited proficiency in English, or a disability. While big-city elite schools would get less in relative terms, because they have fewer poor, black and disabled students, most state and Catholic schools would benefit according to this model. Wealthier state and independent schools could not hide behind the false binary of public versus private schools.

Gonski also recommends that government schools, special schools and disability loadings should be fully funded, while other non-government sector payments should be based on the anticipated level of a school's private contribution. This would create the opportunity for fully-funding non-government schools that are prepared to educate student demographics similar to that of state schools. Catholic schools should welcome this opportunity to proclaim their mission to serve the poor before all others.

What is striking in the research Gonski cites is the correlation between the performance of a child and the average socio-economic status (SES) of all the students that attend such schools. In other countries, including 'high equity' countries like Canada and Finland, where the social mix is less pronounced than in Australia, such an effect would not be evident. In Australia it is quite pronounced.

The figures show that the movement of a bright child from a low SES school to a higher SES school in Australia undermines the quality of the remaining student body in the low SES school. The gain to the child who moves is offset by a loss to his or her fellow students who stay behind, reinforcing the process of social

stratification. And, for all Australia's claims to nurturing an equitable society, home address is a key marker of school enrolment and a predictor of results and student life chances.

In other words, the Australian system encourages a ghettoisation of schools; the more privileged parents withdraw their students from the public system, leaving behind a concentration of kids whose need for school support services is high.

This reflects not only on elite private schools and on Catholic schools, but also on state selective schools in some states like NSW. Australian schooling is marked for its social differentiation. No other developed country tolerates this. It counters the rationale for equitable school provision.

Compared with other nations — particularly those whose performance is at the top of the table — Australia has a higher concentration of disadvantaged kids in disadvantaged schools, and a lower proportion than in other countries of kids who attend schools where there is a mixture of social and economic backgrounds.

For instance, 60 per cent of the most disadvantaged Australian students are in schools whose SES ranking is below the national average. This is higher than in all similar OECD countries, and the OECD average. Moreover, Australia's performance in mathematics and reading has declined since 2000. Australia was one of only four OECD countries to have experienced such a decline.

Worse, scores usually improve as countries become wealthier, yet Australia's decline comes against a backdrop of rapid economic growth. Clearly the private-versus-public divide along social-class lines hides a much more complex reality.

The report charts the drift: more children of well-off, well-educated family backgrounds attend independent schools; more 'average' kids go to Catholic schools to replace the bright ones who've moved to the independent sector; and disadvantage gets concentrated in the public sector.

However, the highest SES Catholics now attend state and independent schools and the proportion of non-Catholics in Catholic schools has increased inexorably, thereby contradicting the impression that Catholic schools educate Catholic children.

Statistical projections suggest high-aspirant students from well-off backgrounds would do as well at state schools. Indeed when Gonski's survey controlled for students' background, there was no significant difference between the educational value-added effects of state and private schools.

Given that Catholic and independent schools tend to produce better results than government schools, one would expect to be able to demonstrate that the non-government sector adds more value to a student's education.

In other words, taking a student from a government school with a mediocre record of performance and putting them into an independent school, you would expect to see better results after controlling for the effect of the student belonging to a higher socio-economic cohort. Bourdieu's research, on the cultural capital private and state-selective schools are thought to invest, argues that this makes a difference to the student's education outcomes. However, the evidence does not bear this out.

At the other end of the SES spectrum, where the education ethic is not as strong, and where more resources might make a greater difference, such resources are lacking.

What happens when there is greater equity in a school system? The report produces some arresting evidence. It poses the question: is it possible to have school systems that are both highly equitable and high performing? The answer is that the best performing school systems in the world, as well as the fastest-improving, also are marked by higher levels of equity.

The Coalition accuses the Commonwealth of waging class warfare between the public and private sectors. This kind of absurd rhetoric would return Australia to the Catholic Bishops' Joint Pastoral of 1879, which condemned modern education as founded on 'immorality, infidelity and lawlessness' and precipitated the fierce sectarian conflicts that helped abolish state aid, instead of seeking to accommodate it, as Whitlam did a century later.

Now is the time to build on the achievements of the past.

## **Iraq's sexual cleansing**

### HUMAN RIGHTS

*Ellena Savage*

When I was in middle school, my taste for fashion was — to say the least — interesting. I would hack my hair into asymmetrical experiments, dye it impossible colours, and layer myself with kitsch garments found in northern suburbs op-shops. I would have liked to have been caught reading Camus in public, and for people to ask what made me such a complex personality.

In other words, I was another precocious teenager who wore her emerging individuality on the outside. I've toned down on the black nail polish, but I still cut my own hair (with varied results).

Right now in Iraq, teenagers just like I was are afraid for their lives. The media have dubbed the phenomenon 'Emo Deaths': young men who dress in emo fashion — skinny jeans, black t-shirts, piercings — are being targeted as homosexuals.

According to officials and human rights monitors, between 58—100 young men have been abducted, tortured, and beaten to death with cinder blocks since February.

Human rights groups have identified the leaders of the death squads as Badr and Sadr, the armed wings of the two major Shi'a parties that govern Iraq. Morality police and religious courts are complicit in the murders, despite homosexuality remaining legal in Iraq.

A statement issued by the Iraqi government reads:

The Emo phenomenon or devil worshipping is being followed by the Moral Police who have the approval to eliminate [the phenomenon] as soon as possible since it's detrimentally affecting the society and becoming a danger.

They wear strange, tight clothes that have pictures on them such as skulls and use stationary that are shaped as skulls. They also wear rings on their noses and tongues, and do other strange activities.

As a former strangely-dressed teenager, I can assure you it had nothing to do with Satanic pens and pencils.

Even more concerning is that in 2005, the Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani — one of the most influential leaders in post-conflict Iraq — issued a fatwa calling for the execution of homosexuals, giving divine ordinance to the mundane affair of a hate-crime.

Ali Hili, an activist representing [Iraqi LGBT](#), said, 'What is happening today in Iraq is one of the most organised and systematic sexual cleansings in the history of the world.'

At least 16 of the murders have occurred in Sadr City, one of the poorest neighbourhoods in outer Baghdad. During the war, the Shi'a area was heavily militarised, and subject to a four-year blockade. The city was attacked by the allied forces, Al-Qa'eda, and smaller sectarian militias. Thousands died.

The link between poverty, protracted conflict, and the homophobic pogrom in Baghdad's poor neighbourhoods is clear. Without even sufficient resources to live healthily, how is a society expected to emerge from a conflict as bloody as Iraq? And why would we expect any better when invasion created the conditions for war-Lords, and the self-appointed Mujahadeen, to legitimise their authority?

In Bougainville where I am staying, people who work with women and families have observed a sharp increase in family and gender-based violence since the conflict that spanned the '90s; violence in the aftermath of war is very common.

It was between 2006—2012 — the latter phase of the Iraq war and the beginning of peacetime — that an estimated 750 Iraqi homosexuals were murdered because of their sexuality.

Some voices in the media have used the murders to incriminate religion. Misogyny and homophobia can, rightly or wrongly, be read into almost any religion, and such attitudes flourish while war wounds are fresh. But in the absence of religion, they would emerge from any other cultural outlet. They are, after all, patriarchal attitudes. People are constantly blaming religion for the damages of patriarchy.

It's very easy to describe human rights abuses in the middle east as the inevitable offspring of Islam. Less easy to attempt to understand the extent of social damage that turns people like us into people who hunt and bludgeon innocent teenagers.

'Peace is inextricably linked to equality between women and men,' reads a UN Security Council International Women's Day statement from 2000. I would include sexual minorities in the balance.

Australian weapons contributed to Iraq's abjection. Even if we legally recognise the rights of women, sexual minorities and obnoxious teenagers inside our own borders, our contribution to their persecution in other places should make us all a little uncomfortable.



## Eureka Street comes of age

MEDIA

*Michael Mullins*



This month marks the 21st birthday of *Eureka Street*. Our comparative longevity is a matter for celebration, but not for self-congratulation. As with most small magazines, the celebration of anniversaries allows us to acknowledge the financial subvention that our survival has depended upon. In our case this comes largely from the Australian Jesuits.

Anniversaries also lead us to reflect on the broader context of which we are part. The last 21 years have been tumultuous for print media. The computer transformed the processes of publication. Then the internet fragmented the ways in which people access news and reflection, and reduced revenue from circulation and advertising. All this has affected the quality and authority of print magazines and newspapers.

It is a happy coincidence that our anniversary occurs at a time when the recommendations of the [Finkelstein](#) inquiry have just been made public, and when the Leveson inquiry is revealing in close detail the practices, alliances and ethics of sections of the print media in England.

These inquiries have further undermined the authority of print media and have weakened the strength of their protagonists' argument for self-regulation.

In this turbulent lake *Eureka Street* is a small fish. But it too has had to adjust to its environment. It began and has continued as a magazine of politics, religion and culture, directed to a public audience from a Catholic moral centre. It sought and seeks articles that are well argued and graciously written.

But it has changed under the thrall of the internet. In the face of an ageing and slightly declining audience, the magazine was taken online six years ago. Our subscribers reminded us then of what would be lost, including the beauty, portability and permanence of the [print edition](#) as well as the fastidious quality of much of its writing.

They were right in their assertions. But something was also gained: a wider and more lively public conversation that allowed immediate reflection on matters of public interest and immediate response to it through postings. It also faced the editorial staff with the constant need to negotiate the conflicting demands of topicality and of depth.

These have been our domestic concerns. But also they reflect the larger questions faced by the print media. Decline in revenue means newspapers have less resources to pursue investigations in depth and that their fewer journalists are under pressure to take short-cuts in producing more.

Online magazines are also affected. You can write much more reflectively when you have a month to ponder and revise what you want to say, and a couple of thousand words to say it in. To respond to this afternoon's news by writing a 700 word piece for publication tomorrow necessarily allows less time for research and reflection and encourages less grounded opinion.

This is fine as long as you recognise that what you have written complements but is no substitute for writing of greater substance.

The proliferation of opinion might also contribute to the polarisation so evident in public conversation. The aggressive character of much comment certainly tempts journalists to become players in political life. Certainly what they write will influence people, and to that extent is a political intervention. It is an easy shift from recognising this fact to trying to control the political agenda.

A particular challenge *Eureka Street* has had to negotiate is the polarisation of attitudes within the Catholic Church.

Our commitment to write in a public language for a public audience has been helpful in this respect. It enables us to exclude articles that are written for an exclusively Catholic audience in a language accessible only to Catholics.

But as a magazine with Catholic sponsorship we are always at risk of becoming players in disputes between Catholics, whether by being silent about abuses in the Catholic Church and by defending a party line, or by lambasting the Church for its failures and becoming protagonists for reform. A cool approach that seeks understanding has proved more helpful in promoting public conversation.

The great temptation of all writers and all magazines of opinion is to enjoy the sound of their own voice and to ascend to public recognition trailing clouds of pomposity. In our case the temptation is to identify the humane and reasoned values that we uphold with our own personal values. That could lead to a culture in which we represent in the magazine only the views of people like us.

In this, as in the other challenges that *Eureka Street* shares with other players in the media, large and small, we trust that you our readers will keep us honest.

**ANNOUNCEMENT: Eureka Street Classic: The Print Years** — *To mark the 21st birthday of Eureka Street, we are throwing open the vault and for the first time ever making the entire archive of print editions (1991–2006) available online. The first ten years are [here](#) . The rest will appear during the days to come. It's just one way for us to celebrate, and to say thank you to all our loyal readers.*

## Showing love to child offenders

### FILMS

*Tim Kroenert*

***The Kid with a Bike (M)*. Directors: Jean-Pierre Dardenne and Luc Dardenne. Starring: Thomas Doret, Cécile De France, Jérémie Renier. 88 minutes**

Once one of the boys, Marcus\*, slapped my face. He did it with a grin that quickly toppled into a nervous chortle. I was startled. It wasn't painful, and I recognised it as an act of ill-judged jest. But I worried what wrath might be rained on him by the staff on my behalf.

A few minutes later, I was called into a room adjacent to the one where we'd been jawing with the other boys. One of the workers, Joe, sat with Marcus. They'd been talking about what just happened. 'Sorry I hit you,' said Marcus. No arm-twisting or threats from Joe\*. Just a simple and sincere apology.

Ken had that effect on the boys. Aged ten to 14, they were detained for deeds ranging from drug and theft charges to violent crimes. As a weekly volunteer I'd seen the confronting behaviour they were sometimes capable of. Joe, with his burly heart of gold, saw their better nature and brought it out.

Troubled children will respond to kindness that is sincere, consistent, and uncorrupted by self-interest. That was what I saw with Joe. It's also a central theme of the new Belgian film *The Kid with a Bike*.

Eleven-year-old Cyril (Doret) lives in a boarding home. He's struggling to accept that his adored dad has moved on, without telling him or leaving a forwarding address. His refusal to think ill of his father crystallises around one main article of faith: he would not leave without first bringing him his bike.

Cyril flees the home in search of his dad and his bike, pursued by a worker who is well-meaning but obviously weary of Cyril's brooding and his erratic antics.

By chance, he latches on to a stranger, hairdresser Samantha (De France), as the worker tries to restrain him. Unaware of the circumstances but seeing simply a child who is distressed, her compassion is automatically directed to Cyril: 'You can hold onto me, just not so tight,' she tells him.

Samantha locates and returns Cyril's bike, then agrees to 'foster' him on weekends. She also finds Cyril's father, Guy (Renier), and accompanies the boy for a reunion. Guy, however, is passive and uninterested; his cool rejection is a black mirror to Samantha's instinctive warmth and kindness.

The shattering of Cyril's illusions, which he has lied to others and to himself to preserve, is devastating. The film considers a series of hard social and moral tests that Cyril, strong-willed but impressionable, must face in the wake of this

rejection. It's a formative period, for better and worse.

This period tests Samantha's kindness, too, and strains their relationship. As *The Kid with a Bike* traverses the dark places of a child's psyche, it becomes increasingly clear that only the unshaded lamps of love and compassion can light the way back.

One of the boys I met at the remand centre had been charged with murder. The details of his alleged deed revealed a process of systematic humiliation and cruelty towards the victim. It was extremely difficult to reconcile this when looking into the face of a 14-year-old boy.

'What are you in for?' one of the boys asked. 'Stealing a car,' he replied, eyes on his shoes. 'Nah,' said the other knowingly. 'You killed that guy.' The eyes stayed on the shoes, but they were misty. He'd done a terrible thing. But he was still a boy. They all were.

Ken could see that. And so he loved them. It's the kind of light they need.

*\*Names have been changed.*

## Miners dig Tony Abbott

CARTOON

*Fiona Katauskas*



## The two St Patricks

NON-FICTION

*Frank O'Shea*

In 1940, Irish Prime Minister Eamon de Valera set up the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies. Based on the more famous foundation in Princeton New Jersey, it had two schools, corresponding to Dev's major academic interests: Celtic studies and mathematics.

The institute still exists, now with an added school, of astrophysics.

The first director of the school of mathematical physics was the Austrian genius Erwin Schrodinger. He had won the Nobel Prize in 1933 and was regarded as occupying the same lofty plane as Bohr, Heisenberg and Einstein. He was also unconventional, managing what Newt Gingrich failed to pull off, an open marriage: he turned up in Dublin in 1940 with his wife and his mistress and his mistress's daughter.

He was given a house in Clontarf where the older two were introduced as his wife and his housekeeper, thereby pre-empting any upset to the chaste sleep of the neighbourhood.

One of the results to which the Austrian has given his name is the thought experiment known as Schrodinger's cat, a scenario in quantum dynamics which allows for a cat to be alive and dead at the same time. Schrodinger was an agnostic and saw no place in mathematics for any kind of deity; a cat that was simultaneously alive and dead was okay, but no God.

The school of Celtic studies was led by Professor O'Rahilly, who was known at the time for his theory that the person we know as St Patrick is an amalgam of a number of holy men who lived more or less contemporaneously. This caused consternation in some quarters and considerable amusement in others.

One who saw the funny side was the writer Flann O'Brien. Wearing his hat as Myles na gCopaleen, he took a dim view of anything associated with his longwinded and obtuse prime minister. Given a free kick at the newly established institute he wrote in his *Irish Times* column that it was a great success, having so far proved that there was no God and two St Patricks.

(O'Rahilly was not pleased and the Institute took the newspaper to court for libel; they won the case and were awarded damages of £20, only half of which was ever paid.)

The two St Patricks theory is now regarded as respectably mainstream. The idea that Patrick came to pagan Ireland and changed it to an island of saints and scholars is an attractive one, however shaky that conversion has often seemed.

We know that there were Christian communities in the country when he arrived

— St Ciaran in the midlands, St Declan in the south-east, to mention two. (The Saint part of those names was removed by Rome some years ago, but the Irish paid no heed.) We know too that Palladius was sent to the country at least a year earlier than Patrick, so it is likely that the Christian message was not completely new.

In those times, all that a missionary needed to do was to convert the king or the chieftain; if he was converted, all his subjects followed or were assumed to have followed. The story of the Paschal fire of Patrick used to be known to every Irish school child:

On Tara's hill the daylight dies,  
On Tara's plain 'tis dead.  
'Til Baal's enkindled fires shall rise  
No fire must flame instead.

In prayer on the nearby hill of Slane, Patrick lit his Easter paschal fire and was summoned to the king to explain his defiance.

From here, the natural tendency of the Irish to make a story out of everything means that there are different versions of what may have happened: the king's daughter accepted the message but the king didn't; Patrick did a number of tricks involving snakes; one of the nobles saluted Patrick and was converted and raised to the episcopate.

More than likely, none of those is correct.

St Patrick holds the Irish in a powerful emotional thrall. As schoolchildren we were told that he refused to come down from a bleak mountain in County Mayo which still bears his name, until the Almighty promised him that the Irish would always be faithful to his message.

Whatever about the theology in that, it is admirable propaganda, providing an explanation for Ireland's adherence to Rome through centuries of persecution while warning the modern generation of a sacred trust. It is a matter of regret that this trust is no longer taken seriously.

## How Google is narrowing our minds

MEDIA

*Edwina Byrne*



The internet — once hoped to infinitely expand our mental horizons and our exposure to challenging ideas — now seems more likely to confine us to our prejudices.

When you search in your web browser today, for any given term, your search engine (Google, for the overwhelming majority of Australians) retrieves pages that it thinks you will be most inclined to take an interest in, based on your personal search and browsing history.

Day by day, with each moment of online interaction, search engines are etching a more detailed portrait of our interests, and filtering out the world beyond those interests.

Personalised search means that when two people type an identical term into google, the results displayed could be quite different. It means, on the plus side, that Google's results are ranked by specific and contextual relevance rather than just by what other people have clicked on.

Meaning, for example, that typing in 'I like' no longer autocompletes to 'I like to tape my thumbs to my hands to see what it would be like to be a dinosaur'.

On the other hand, it could mean that your web history influences your web present.

Personalised searches are not a deliberate attempt to censor information, although search engines have occasionally been found to engage in such practices (see, for example, Siri's suggestions for [abortion clinics](#)). Your search is personalised with the best intentions of filtering out the masses of irrelevant information and presenting you with the pages most relevant to you.

And indeed, the results that your search engine provides you with are dependent mostly on your tastes: the pages you have visited, the search terms you use, and links you have clicked.

More recently, Google also incorporates information from your social network (only Google+ at this stage) including links, photos and comments. Google cookies diligently squirrel this information away every time you use the web in an effort to bring you more relevant results next time you search.

Not only your searches are filtered in this way. On Facebook, posts from friends whose viewpoints you share or whose updates you dwell on are privileged to the exclusion of posts that do not interest you.

For me, this means I receive proportionally more content from a younger friend



whose posts are so misspelled and grammatically confused that I spend minutes with my cursor hovering above the letters, attempting to make sense of her thoughts. I no longer see posts from conservative or devout friends, or those who constantly post about their children, because Facebook knows I don't care.

In fact, almost my entire news feed is populated with the latest polls, articles in trade journals, and features from *Eureka Street*.

The hard-working algorithms of the net are not trying to limit us. They are mirroring our behaviour and preferences, and encouraging us in our specific interests. The problem is that in having our tastes reflected back at us, we become more and more narrowly defined and cut off from the diversity of interests available to us, and the great potential of the web for sharing perspectives is lost.

I've contributed to the state of my news feed through my own actions: following political groups and journalists and clicking their links. But it's bad enough that I let my work get in the way of taking an interest in my friends and family — I don't need Facebook to do it for me.

Moreover, the state of public discourse — online or offline — is already fractured, with opinion and commentary substituting for journalism in most of our news media. The increasing personalisation of web content may sound the final death knell for news reported objectively to meet the needs of the broad population, as news can be segmented by target audience to maximise click rates.

In this environment, commentary reigns: one person's Annabel Crabb is another's Andrew Bolt. Google's role in this is minimal: it merely wipes Andrew Bolt from my news feed, deeming his opinion irrelevant to my interests. While for that I am forever thankful, the wider implications are disturbing.

When I digest information written in alignment with my own views and you with yours, we both lose the opportunity to have our views broadened, challenged or changed. Worse, exposed predominantly or exclusively to my own views and the views of those like me, my position is reinforced and perhaps tends to the extreme, and I become unsympathetic to alternative perspectives.

That is bad enough for a rather uninfluential private citizen such as myself. Consider now that Annabel Crabb recently wrote a blog noting that her research is likewise constrained by Google's [interpretation](#) of her interests.

At present, the effect of Google's personalised filters is not dramatic, and the option of disabling personalised search is available in both [Google](#) and [Facebook](#) .

But as the algorithms for tailoring personalised content become more sophisticated, as mobile devices become more pervasive and as content becomes more plentiful and specific, there is potential for the isolating effect of our own preferences to become greater.

A web advertising expert recently told me of efforts underway to develop

retinally-projected digital media. Advertisements, targeted to your location and purchase history, will be projected directly to you, invisible to others, from the personal device through which you view your world.

How much of our concern for a shared society will we lose when we no longer share even a sensory experience of the world around us?

## Love with an open hand

POETRY

*Various*

### **Yesterday a raven, a dragonfly today**

Yesterday a one-eyed raven  
Receiving bread from an older friend's wiry, practised hand.  
No abrasion where its second eye should have been.  
Only shiniest sheen, slightly sunken.  
Hunched on her fence.  
Tweaking its bluish blade hither and thither.  
Downy chest ruffling in January's gentle northerly.  
Venturing closer, sinuous clamps shifting, shuffling on the fence line.  
Unexpected contour in coat-tail debonair.

On first sight from an armchair by the window, my words middlebrow:

'that is one ominous bird.'  
'yes ...' she only gazed across the room.  
'he has his place in nature, just the same.'  
Watching his eye watching nothing long,  
I realised I had watched nothing for long, lately.

~~

A dragonfly caught my eye,  
Brought to rest on shore.  
In a wing, delicate geometry.  
In a wing, travels in time.  
Refracted in wet sun.  
Never to be duplicated.  
Drowned in everlasting sleep.  
A sentimental burial beckoned from dunes behind us.  
I scooped the gritty, wet bronze beneath the body.

Fizzing on wings afresh it curved away over wild ocean.

*James Hughes*

**Flight of the Falling**

I am trying to love with an open hand,  
trying to understand  
how kisses can land on my palm  
only to fly away.  
When I'm with you,  
I take off my rings,  
unlatch my watch  
and untie my hair.  
And it's so quiet, so so quiet,  
like a film without a soundtrack.  
I can't tell if it's a love story or a tragedy,  
because no one's composed the music yet.  
We're in the space before knowing,  
where falling and flying are the same thing.  
I've got bruises under lily skin  
from our lovemaking,  
thumbprints from being gripped  
in so many soft places,  
making blood flow  
under the surface in bursts  
like little fireworks.  
My love for you  
wing-clipped in my chest,  
as we chatter in circles  
and touch knees under tablecloths  
so well-draped

no one could ever see  
the flutter you provoke in me.  
A mute canary chained so tight,  
its rib-rattling song will never take flight  
to set the room abuzz;  
there will be no words of love.  
All grief carries the weight  
of those losses that have come before  
and those we know are coming.  
We sense their meandering passage over our skin.  
*Bronwyn Lovell*

### **Climbing**

He scrabbles bark for a foothold  
fledgling muscles limber as a possum's  
They've cut school to snatch  
eggs, the possibilities  
of prize, of schoolyard aerodynamics,  
the swoop and pecking bravado  
Swings up in sunlight, grapples  
shadowed maze,  
white on bruise-blue on white eclipses  
  
his skin, kaleidoscopic  
as the sought cargo's  
speckled colours  
He's higher now,  
medicine scent waters sight,  
twigs make a nest of his crown,  
scratch tiny forks across

cheeks arms legs bared  
hairy with effort  
He looks down  
at the gang fisting his flight  
like a chorus *nearly there nearly there*

hears the sea-leaves,  
inches out, belly  
strapped to beanpole  
the only division between  
mortality and fall *nesting eggs ellipses*  
each slow minute reaching Open  
pouch mouth to house  
the booty like stones, precious as  
petals on his mother's cheeks earlier  
this morning in frost,  
waving them into the day's  
learning He's swaying, now,  
dizzy from height — floating on empty  
there's only  
the weight of return

*Tru Dowling*

*The above poems are the three finalists from the [2011 Poetica Christi Poetry Competition](#) .*

## More asylum seeker blood on Australia's hands

### POLITICS

*Susan Metcalfe*

The Australian Government and the Coalition must accept some responsibility for the death of a 28-year-old Afghan asylum seeker, identified in news reports as Taqi Nekoyee, inside an Indonesian detention centre last month.



The details are still unfolding but so far we have been told that on 26 February six men escaped from the immigration detention centre in Pontianak (Kalimantan). The men were quickly recaptured and returned to the centre. One man is now dead and UNHCR reports that three others have been hospitalised, two with serious injuries — one is only 17 years old.

The examining doctor found evidence that Naroye had been beaten to death with a blunt object. Reports also note the discovery of wounds resembling cigarette burns and marks on the man's wrists where he had been bound.

Indonesian Detective Puji claimed Nekoyee and two others 'had their mouths sealed with thick tape, were beaten with a piece of wood, whipped with an electrical cord and given electric shocks'. The head of the detention centre, Ageng Pribadi, says the guards 'abused the victim until he died'.

Puji has also noted the involvement of Indonesian immigration department training officers and their cadets in the beatings.

Other incidents have been reported over many years in these centres and Amnesty International has urged Indonesia to enact a new Criminal Code that 'complies with international human rights law and standards and includes provisions explicitly prohibiting and punishing acts of torture'.

Although the attacks happened outside Australia, we are not innocent bystanders. Australian money is involved in funding Indonesian detention centres and both Labor and Coalition governments have supported the incarceration of asylum seekers there to prevent their travel by boat to Australia.

Back in 2001, in the month before the arrival of the Tampa refugees, then-Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock crowed about a stabilisation in the number of boats arriving to Australia.

The actual number of people arriving had reduced by only 34 that year (from 4175 down to 4141) but Ruddock claimed this as proof that his government's deterrence policies 'both in Australia and overseas' were working — including Indonesia's capture and detention of more than a thousand Australia bound asylum seekers. More than 10 years later, little has changed.

Labor governments have continued to prioritise deterrence measures over the

development of better support and protection for asylum seekers and refugees in the region. And if the Coalition returns to power, Tony Abbott claims he will bring back the policy of forcing asylum seekers back to Indonesia.

The Coalition should look carefully to Europe before heading down that path. The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg concluded recently that in 2009 Italy violated the European Convention of Human Rights by returning a group of Somalis and Eritreans to Libya. It found that the applicants were exposed to the risk of ill-treatment in Libya and of being repatriated to Somalia and Eritrea.

The potential risk of injury or death for any asylum seeker forcibly returned to Indonesia — both during the push back process and inside an Indonesian detention centre — is now well documented.

It is also worth remembering the Howard Government's failed attempt to return a boat carrying 83 Sri Lankan Tamils to Indonesia in 2007. Indonesian officials claimed that the men would quickly be sent back to Sri Lanka, the place of claimed persecution. The reason for Australia not proceeding with the push back was given in cables between Australia's foreign affairs and immigration departments:

The practicalities of Australia's domestic legal set-up, including the implementation of our refugee obligations under the 1951 Refugees Convention, create high thresholds for access to refugee determination processes that the Australian government must meet.

As Indonesia is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugees Convention or its 1967 Protocol, we recognise that the procedural thresholds for Indonesia may be different. In the light of this, Australia has decided to send the Sri Lankans to Nauru ...

Abbott has never explained how he would ensure that those high thresholds would now be met in the same non-signatory country. In fact he can't. But it hardly matters to a man who is rarely held to account for the empty rhetoric he offers in place of policy.

Indonesian Ambassador to Australia, Primo Alui Joelianto, claims that the Coalition's Julie Bishop has promised Indonesia a say on boat tow backs if the policy was ever enacted. But Indonesia has already made clear its opposition to the policy. The Coalition has so far been unwilling to listen.

Better conditions, processing and resettlement options are vital across the region and Indonesia must be assisted to provide more humane support for every asylum seeker arriving within its borders. NGOS and human rights groups must also be supported to better monitor conditions and treatment of refugees and asylum seekers and work with Indonesia to improve its practices.

Human beings should never be used as a means to a political end. The politically motivated support and encouragement from both of our major parties for the incarceration of innocent people in poorly monitored Indonesian detention



centres must be condemned.

## Zero tolerance for ritual humiliation

EDITORIAL

*Michael Mullins*



The Church is recognised as having tolerated abuse of children and young adults, and sometimes regarded it as character building, in connection with corporal punishment and activities such as drinking rituals at university residential colleges.

Yesterday's *Sun-Herald* led with the [story](#) of a first-year female student at the Catholic St John's College at Sydney University rushed to hospital after being pressured to consume an initiation drink during an Orientation Week ritual.

In recent years other colleges at the university have also had to deal with the entrenched culture of ritual humiliation involving alcohol and sex. A student from Wesley College at Sydney University [wrote](#) in 2009:

*Many young women feel disempowered, or attempt to win male 'respect' by going along with their incessant chanting to 'get your tits out for the boys' — and losing their self-respect.*

Yesterday's *Sun-Herald* revealed that the St John's College rector Michael Bongers has implemented the college's zero-tolerance policy on excessive drinking and other anti-social behaviour which had been a more or less accepted part of the college's culture for many generations. Bongers has suspended 30 students over the recent incident.

Suspending 30 students makes a powerful statement that ritual humiliation destroys rather than builds character, and it won't be tolerated. It was a tough and potentially divisive decision that will involve collateral damage. The college is likely to take a substantial financial hit, and at least some of the 30 will feel they played little or no part in the offence and do not deserve to have their education disrupted.

Zero-tolerance is also the risky strategy that federal defence minister Stephen Smith employed in dealing with the Skype scandal in the defence force. He perceived that the message sent by Commodore Bruce Kafer's insensitive timing of his disciplining of the alleged victim undermined public condemnation of the act, even though Kafer did not break any rules. Smith has put his job on the line, and hopefully he and the defence force will emerge stronger after the dust settles.

Military cadets and college students are at an impressionable and vulnerable stage of their life. Technically they are no longer minors, but they remain sensitive to many of the stresses that can undermine their confidence for the rest of their lives. It's worth alluding to the positive energy created by the [recent](#) Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children inquiry.

In *Eureka Street* last week, Monsignor David Cappo [highlighted](#) its strategy of

both prevention and high level intervention. He also discussed the interconnectedness of issues such as violence, alcohol and substance misuse and mental health problems.

When a cocktail of such factors is placed in the hothouse environment of a military academy or university college with a tradition of robust behaviour, there is a certain inevitability in the result. But this need not be the case if those in charge are prepared to take decisive action to stop behaviour that has been tolerated in the past.

## **Kony collared by the sound of a million Tweets**

HUMAN RIGHTS

*Michael McVeigh*

In the early 2000s I worked as a communications officer for an international aid organisation. Each week, I'd see dozens of stories come across my desk from communities ravaged by natural disasters, famine and poverty.

One of the few times I went home and cried was after reading the testimonies of former child soldiers in Northern Uganda. Drought, earthquake and poverty were bad enough, but the horrors that the children of Northern Uganda were put through by the Lord's Resistance Army were something else.

I spoke about the stories with friends, but they had never even heard of the group or its leader, Joseph Kony. It just wasn't on anyone's radar.

On Thursday night I went for dinner at my sister's house and she asked me about 'this guy Kony'. She'd seen some posts about him on Facebook, and had decided to look him up on Wikipedia. She wanted to know more. She wanted something to be done.

Somehow, a conflict that never, even in its worst days, made it to the front page of our newspapers, has become a topic of conversation around the world.

We've been hearing for some time about the power of social media to change the power balance in the world — to take it out of the hands of governments and society's elite, and put it back into the hands of the masses. The potential is surely there: more than 750 million people are on Facebook, while Twitter averages around 140 million posts a day.

The electronic age has seen an explosion of voices shouting their opinions and views into cyberspace, but organising the vast mass of voices behind a single idea has proved difficult.

While social media played a role in uniting and informing protesters in the Middle Eastern uprisings, it was used mostly in support of the on-the-ground activism that brought down the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt. The Occupy Movement used social media as a vehicle and awareness raising, but the proliferation of voices and agendas diluted the campaign until people stopped listening altogether.

This time, we saw something different. An orchestrated social media campaign involving a 30-minute video and a simple call to action has put Kony in the minds of millions.

US-based advocacy organisation Invisible Children has been working since 2005 to make people aware of the horrific suffering of children at the hands of the LRA in a conflict that has gone on for more than 20 years. Their first production looked

at the plight of children who each night would take refuge on the streets of the city of Goma in order to avoid being kidnapped or killed by the rebels.

Their latest video sets its sights on Kony, and calls for him to be brought to justice for his crimes.

The video itself has been criticised for being overwrought. It plays on the emotions rather than providing a great deal of background information about the conflict or the current political situation.

It also glosses over the important fact that Kony and his rebels haven't been in Uganda for a number of years — he and the remnants of his followers have been hiding in South Sudan, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Efforts to pursue Kony in these countries have been frustrated by the complex politics of the region.

No matter how many people in the West sign on to the campaign, bringing him to justice is a complicated prospect.

Yet what's most fascinating and exciting about the video is the way it has united people behind a single moral purpose.

There is no question that Kony should be held accountable for crimes against humanity. His depravities are outlined in numerous testimonies from former child soldiers and captives. He was the first person to be issued with an arrest warrant by the International Criminal Court.

This information has been available on the web for years. But thanks to this ingenious social media campaign, we now have a million twitterers all talking about it at once.

So much so that mainstream media took up the campaign. Channel 7's *Sunrise* was first, announcing a rally on Sunday at Martin Place. Channel 10 devoted an hour of prime time on Thursday to airing and discussing the video. Invisible Children's global campaign on 20 April is sure to grab headlines.

And so we are about to find out how much noise a million tweets can make. Can the noise cross borders, seas and penetrate into the heart of Africa? Or will 'slacktivism' prove to be a balm on Western consciences that does little to make people's lives better on the ground?

Does it really matter to have a million, or a billion, people behind your campaign when you have no power to do anything on the ground?

The world's despots and warLords will be watching the outcome with interest. Modern technology has meant that their brutality can no longer go unwitnessed around the world. But can social media bring them to justice? If this works, they must be asking themselves, who is next on the list after Kony?

