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## Paul Collins illuminates sectarian divide in Australian history

### REVIEWS

*Barry Gittins and Jen Vuk*

**A Very Contrary Irishman - The Life and Journeys of Jeremiah O'Flynn by Paul Collins. Morning Star Publishing, November 2014.**

#### Barry:

I was a child at the feet of my late maternal grandfather, a complex, wizened little man brought up in the bosom of the Salvos. They are a quirky branch cut from Methodism, in turn grafted from Anglicanism, duly divorced from Catholicism. I used to hear early 20th century stories of the wide political and religious-cultural chasm that existed between Australian Catholics and Protestants.

It was a sectarian divide of suspicion and prejudice that is thankfully unknown to my children. It was a gap that was bridged sporadically by acts of kindness and fellow travail. *A Very Contrary Irishman - The Life and Journeys of Jeremiah O'Flynn* is a labour of love that was researched, written and honed over several decades. Paul Collins presents a very human, driven man whose actions - and attributed actions - changed numerous lives and in some small ways helped to shape our culture.

Collins is a History PhD with a flair for journalism and background in theology and philosophy. He uses *A Very Contrary Irishman* as a vehicle to transport us back to the temporal and spiritual rifts present in the colony of New South Wales. Many Catholics endured life under officially sanctioned neglect and sometimes oppression, and the story is well set against a wider world of sharp political and religious disputations.

It turns on this truth: before monk-turned-priest O'Flynn arrived in the Antipodes' penal possessions with the Pope's blessing - yet without British permission or knowledge - the mass of Catholic transportees and emancipists and a considerable percentage of the colony's military personnel were without spiritual solace or representation from a priest in Sydney town and Van Diemen's Land. O'Flynn got the ball rolling for those sheep without a shepherd, against the wishes and judgement of the colony's masters (to whom Collins is not unsympathetic, in many respects).

Macquarie's deportation of O'Flynn for other climes marks a wobbly moment in Australian religious tolerance. O'Flynn presents as quite the rebel with a cassock, doesn't he? With the author's warts and all examination of his subject (who may or may not have had punch-ups with other clergy in other locales, and may or may not have knowingly attempted to deceive the ornery Governor Lachlan Macquarie), and authorial discussion of the nexus between history and myth, Collins looks to draw us into an (at times) dry search for lost truths.

The seminal figure in the establishing years of Australian Catholicism, O'Flynn is placed by Collins in a rich tradition of clerical adventurers; spiritual nomads 'with an almost compulsive need to travel to strange and far away places'. (Cue Sydney, with its forbidding Proddies, kangaroos and bizarre foliage.) Putting ourselves in a different culture and time requires vivid, empathic use of imagination; something Collins pursues on the back of solid and extensive research. It's not an easy (nor completely successful) effort.

I confess my ignorance on long-past Catholic controversies over the understanding of,

and devotion to, the Eucharist, that the decamped cleric may or may not have left in Sydney (and over who may or may not have consumed it). I am unaware of the emotional and cultural impact on Catholics of long ago, having been institutionally denied spiritual solace; but I sympathise and see that disregard reflected in current federal policies towards asylum seekers.

What are we to make of our highly idiosyncratic protagonist? Collins contends that O'Flynn was no 'D&M' spiritual sojourner in the postmodern sense, but a feisty, committed priest of his time with a social conscience - a man who could comfort his various flocks by practising religion as 'an external business of fulfilling the rituals correctly'.

'This doesn't mean that faith was absent,' he adds, as 'they saw the Mass and the sacraments as their gateways to the reality &hellip; which was &'beyond&' the everyday pedestrian world'.

Perhaps walking in O'Flynn's shoes may help us understand the Australia that kicked him out.

**Jen:**

Barry, while we do indeed learn about 'Australia's first unofficial non-convict Catholic priest' in detail (down to what he ate as a Trappist monk, for instance), somehow the gist of the man described as 'impulsive and restless' escaped me.

It's curious, really. There's no doubting Paul Collins' painstaking research and cataloguing. *A Very Contrary Irishman* is a marvel of facts, dates, details and footnotes. Obviously, the mythical figure of Jeremiah Francis O'Flynn - aided by the outrageous belief that he'd left behind in NSW the Blessed Sacrament) has long haunted Collins - and he throws himself into the task of bringing the character to the page.

O'Flynn travelled extensively around the globe, most notably, the Caribbean, Italy, the US and, of course, Australia. I know it's parochial of me, Barry, but I must say that I found myself drawn to 'Chapter Four: An Unwelcome Arrival New South Wales'. And I especially enjoyed the fact that it was a 'Captain John Howard' who commandeered the ship that carried at least one illegal passenger on board-that being O'Flynn, himself-who arrived in NSW minus the relevant papers.

Parochialism aside, this felt to me to be where the 'real' O'Flynn resided. Perhaps, here we also detect Collins' own colonial pride, too. Not only can we well imagine the rogue priest busily, and unlawfully, giving communion, marrying and baptising willy-nilly, Collins, too, captures the simmering tension between O'Flynn and the NSW governor responsible for deporting the priest: Major-General Lachlan Macquarie.

Despite O'Flynn's aborted mission, Collins reminds us of his role in helping influence the British government to allow the first official Catholic missionaries to be sent to Australia in 1820. On this important point, Collins never wavers.

But making history relevant for a contemporary audience always carries risk. Engaging the reader is easy said than done (I think back, Barry, to David Hunt's *Girt: The Unauthorised History of Australia*, which achieved this thanks to a generous sprinkling of modern-day *double-entendre*).

Not that I'm suggesting that *A Very Contrary Irishman* lends itself to humour. As it stands, the book is well positioned to attract historians and those with a particular interest in the infamous 'ecumenical tourist', but for me, Barry, Collins's O'Flynn never quite manages to fully shake off the dust of the past.

*Jen Vuk is a freelance writer and editor, and Barry Gittins is a communication and research consultant for the Salvation Army.*

## An Aussie Muslim's Taiwan Christmas

### RELIGION

*Irfan Yusuf*



Christmas is a fabulous time to spend at home. Even those of us who aren't terribly Christian can enjoy a free holiday with friends and family. And if you like choral music, you can always come along with me and a Jewish mate to St Mary's Cathedral. There you will see Catholics wearing all kinds of cultural costume.

Christianity isn't just for white people, just as Islam isn't just for Indo-Pakistanis. Though you'd have trouble convincing me of that back in primary school in the 1970's. Christmas was always a very white affair. In passion plays at Ryde East Primary School, I inevitably played one of the three wise men from the East. The other two were played by a Chinese girl and a boy from PNG. Mary and Joseph were played by white kids, and the baby Jesus was a white doll.

Yes, it was all very white, But it was all very familiar as well. It was conducted in English, my first language. And when it was all over, we would head down to the canteen for a meat pie and paddle pop. The linguistic and cultural boundaries were a given and we fitted in quite well.

Last Christmas I found myself in the Republic of China. Most Australians would hear that name and think of a faraway place where we send all our coal. We don't imagine an island half the size of Tasmania where most people are about as communist as Tony Abbott.

Taiwan is a place where few people speak English. At least that is the impression I had travelling there for three weeks. Street signs and shop signs are almost all in Mandarin, in complex characters (unlike the simpler ones of the People's Republic). It isn't easy to find someone who can provide you with directions in English.

But an ignorant Aussie traveller like me could not exactly complain about some backward place where 'no one speaks bloody English'. Taiwan is in many ways streets ahead of Australia. Taipei is much cleaner than Sydney or Melbourne. Its MRT train system is clean, safe and runs on time. Transport Ministers of NSW and Victoria should take note. Taipei is one of the gastronomical capitals of the world. Eating the street food won't make you sick, though don't expect it to be certified kosher or halal.

I found it almost impossible to go anywhere without Mandarin-speaking Australian friends. Taipei is very easy to navigate but it helps enormously if you can say more than just 'Xi xi' ('thank you') if following the Lonely Planet guidebook still gets you lost. When I was on my own, I spent many joyful hours exploring the colourful and gorgeous temples and shrines.

Taiwan is home to a vibrant religious culture. Traditional Taiwanese Daoist worship includes adoration of the goddess Matsui. Taiwan is littered with temples much more ancient than non-Indigenous Australia has to offer. The rituals and temple culture is unique to Taiwan which was not subjected to the anti-religious paranoia of the Cultural Revolution on the Mainland.

There are plenty of old Buddhist and Confucian temples and shrines. The best place to

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see temples is in the southern city of Tainan (pictured), hardly a 1.5 hour ride on the fast train that travels at upto 300 km/h. Transport Ministers of Australia take note.

Temples are a beautiful spectacle. In the heat and humidity, it was a huge relief to sit in the corner and watch devotees engage in ancient rituals. You don't have to understand what was going on, let alone believe in it, to feel a strong sense of calm.

But this is Christmas. I needed to be in somewhat more familiar surrounds. My Aussie expat friends took me to a Catholic church run by the Salesians of Don Bosco who have been operating in Taipei since 1874. The congregation is a rich mix of Taiwanese and foreign workers from the Philippines and India along with the odd parishioner from one of the few African countries that have full diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

There wasn't enough room inside the main section of the church, and we had to join in the service outside. One of my friends giggled at the priest while he was delivering a small sermon in Mandarin.

'What's so funny?' I asked.

'He is speaking Mandarin in a Filipino accent.'

Many of the hymns were also sung in Mandarin, though I didn't have long to wait for words in English also delivered in a mild Filipino accent. No doubt God wouldn't have minded which language He was being worshipped in, even if a far cry from the Aramaic of Christ's disciples.

I felt comfortable and spiritually fulfilled despite probably being the only Muslim at that service. It certainly felt more familiar than most of what I had seen in Taiwan, even if it wasn't exactly the kind of Christmas event I would have seen in East Ryde during the 1970's. For a start, the kids playing Joseph in the passion play looked more like a young Jackie Chan than Shane Warne Jnr.

Merry Christmas to all!

*Irfan Yusuf is a Sydney lawyer and blogger who spends time in Melbourne.*

## #illridewithyou shows the kind of world that is possible

### AUSTRALIA

*John Falzon*



While the horrible tragedy was underway in Martin Place this week a remarkable thing happened. We saw, and continue to see, a powerful sense of compassion for the people who were being held hostage.

Sadly, we also saw a rush of racist hatred towards innocent people. But we saw an even greater outpouring of solidarity *by* ordinary people *with* the ordinary people who were being threatened with this violence and abuse, crystallised in what can only be described as a love poem written by the people to the people, namely 'I'll ride with you'.

It looked like a simple offer of human support and protection to people of the Muslim faith who were in danger as they rode on the buses, trams and trains across Australia the next morning. But it was always more than this. In its concreteness it was also a deeply profound declaration of a vision for a just and inclusive Australia. It was particularly beautiful because it came from ordinary people and it so strongly struck a chord with ordinary people.

Good policy always comes from below. Without the organised analysis and agitation of the people we would never have seen gains in the fields of industrial rights, women's rights, tenants' rights, environmental justice, workers compensation, Aboriginal citizenship rights and so the list, and the struggle, continues. People were radicalised by reality, by their concrete analysis of the concrete conditions. Good policy was born from such struggles.

Ordinary people thought critically and acted decisively in the face of a dominant ideology that continues to tell us that justice is impossible or, worst still, that inequality and humiliation are the manifestations of justice because the people who bear the brunt of this oppression must obviously deserve it due to a moral failing. Rather than accepting that justice is impossible, they proclaimed with their lives that, in the words of the great Aboriginal poet Bobbi Sykes: 'Justice is inevitable, like birth.'

Against the grain, ordinary people struggled, and continue to struggle for a society in

which people are not blamed because economic structures lock them out or, in some cases, lock them up; one in which people are not told that they would not be poor if only they chose to be a little more productive; a society that does not humiliate people; a society that delivers the rights to: appropriate housing, adequate income, education, health care, jobs and working conditions that are dignified, safe and never demeaning; a society that ensures that the resources and opportunities available to all include the right to engage in sports and recreation and the arts; a society in which it feels normal to care about people; a society that is profoundly, rather than just formally, democratic; created by, and constantly changed by, the collective participation of the people.

Frantz Fanon wrote eloquently of the 'systematic negation of the other person and the furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity.' How accurate a description this is of the people in our midst who are left out, from members of the First Peoples right through to the most recent seekers of refuge and everyone in between who is denied the rights to a place to live, a place to work, a place to learn, a place to heal. And yet these are the people from whom we have the most to learn, the people from whom we take our orders, we who wield the peaceful but irresistible weapon of solidarity. In biblical language these are the *people of God*, not an ethnic or religious group, but the crushed and the cursed, the despised and demonised, the excluded and exploited. And in simple birth of the child in Bethlehem we see a story of complete identification between this God and the crushed of the world, a human manifesto: 'I'll ride with you.'

Pope Francis is unafraid to give voice to this revolutionary message, making it the core of his first exhortation, even though, as he reminds us often, he knows he will be called a communist:

As long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural causes of inequality, no solution will be found for the world's problems or, for that matter, to any problems&hellip;

He also addressed in some detail the need for solidarity and the power of popular movements in October this year:

Solidarity is a word that is not always welcomed&hellip;. However, it is a word that means much more than some acts of sporadic generosity. It is to think and to act in terms of community, of the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few. It is also to fight against the structural causes of poverty, inequality, lack of work, land and housing, the denial of social and labour rights. It is to confront the destructive effects of the empire of money: forced displacements, painful emigrations, the traffic of persons, drugs, war, violence and all those realities that many of you suffer and that we are all called to transform. Solidarity, understood in its deepest sense, is a way of making history, and this is what the Popular Movements do.

The rights of workers, including all who have been residualised and discarded, people who are unemployed or underemployed, must take priority over the maximisation of profits. Our twin objectives are a redistribution of wealth and a redistribution of hope. This is the history we are called by our common humanity to make. This is our beautiful struggle, we who are many, we who make up the massive movement for progressive social change.

And the Christmas story is a whisper from the edge that another kind of world is possible.



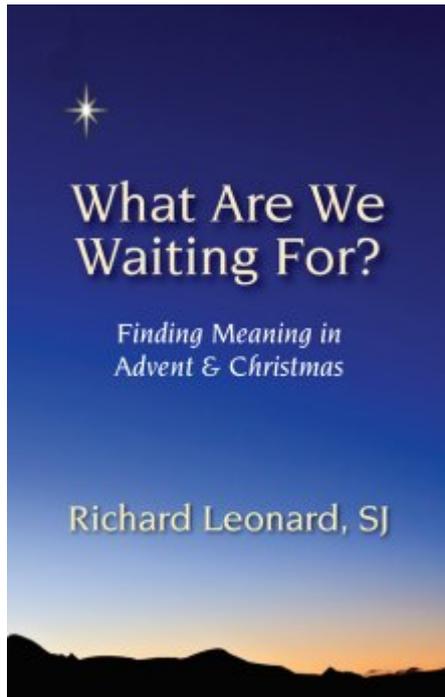
*John Falzon is CEO of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council. Follow him on Twitter.*

*<!--Follow him on Twitter.-->*

## A messy birth and a vulnerable baby

### RELIGION

*Richard Leonard*



Before I became a Jesuit, I was a diocesan seminarian, and during the Christmas holidays, I worked in the pastoral care department of a big Catholic public hospital. At a Christmas party, I met the charge nurse of the maternity ward. Pleading that because I was a celibate I would never be at a birth, I enquired if I might be allowed to come and see'.

The charge nurse thought that would be fine. Six weeks later I got the call. Apparently a student priest watching a person have a baby is not an easy sell! But Mary was sixteen, had been dumped by her nineteen year old boyfriend and shunned by her family. A kindly seminarian was better than no one at all.

On arrival at the maternity ward, I did ante-natal class 101 in ten minutes. All sorts of commands were barked at me:

- hold Mary's hand;
- when the midwife tells Mary to push and keep it coming, keep it coming, keep it coming' - you say it too;
- don't get in the road;
- and don't faint!

Mary and I met six hours into her labor, which was an unusual circumstance within which to meet your birthing partner.' She had very little small talk, maybe because she had no breath at all. From my vast experience of child birth, I thought everything was going along swimmingly until the doctor arrived to perform an episiotomy. If you don't know what that is, you don't want to, and I wish I never did. I swear before God that analgesia would have been invented centuries earlier if men had to go through all of this. We would go on epidurals in the sixth month.

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The baby arrived minutes later. Mary wept. She had very good cause to weep. I wept for no good reason, and the charge nurse wept because I was weeping. There is something so primal and human about the moment of birth that it bonds us to each other.

Friendship born in the trenches took on a new meaning for me.

After the tears came the laughter and joy. The reality of Mary's tough situation was happily postponed.

On discharge, Mary asked me to baptise the baby. I couldn't. I was a long way from being ordained a deacon. I arranged for a priest friend to do it and became Benjamin Michael's godfather. I have stayed in touch with them for the last 30 years. Mary went on to have three more boys to three different fathers. Tommy, the last dad, is now her devoted husband.

When he was four, I got Benjamin into the local Catholic primary school where the principal was Sr. Mary Francis Xavier. She was formidable but fair. She took an interest in Benny and his brothers. She was able to arrange for a scholarship for each of them. Sister only had to go to Mary's home once to demand that the boys got out of bed, were fed, cleaned, dressed, taken to school on time, and later did their homework. It paid off. Benjamin was a good student and Sister Francis Xavier despaired that Mary would be sending him to the local high school. It had a terrible reputation. Sister enrolled all the boys for scholarships to a Christian Brothers High School. On their own merits, Benny, and his brothers in turn, won a place. Sister wins a place in heaven. Benny is a physiotherapist, Daniel is an accountant, Kai is a social worker, and Noah is a nurse. He has just finished obstetrics.

Mary works at the local supermarket. Twenty years ago I received her and Tommy into the Catholic Church and married them in the eyes of God. She now volunteers at the St Vincent de Paul's local hostel for homeless women. Some of them are 16 years old and pregnant.

From a complex conception, a messy birth, a willing midwife, and a vulnerable baby, extraordinary goodness has flowed from one generation to the next.

*Richard Leonard SJ is Director of the Australian Catholic Office for Film and Broadcasting. This article is an extract from his new book What Are We Waiting For Finding Meaning in Advent and Christmas (Paulist Press).*

<!--Follow him on Twitter.-->

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## Ten films that will get you talking

### REVIEWS

**Tim Kroenert**

It's December, and film writers everywhere are putting together their lists of the best films of 2014. But best-of lists are so subjective, so here's our take: ten films from 2014 that are guaranteed to get you thinking, and talking!

#### **Interstellar (M). Director: Christopher Nolan. 169 minutes**

If Christopher 'The Dark Knight' Nolan's reputation was already stellar, it is now officially galaxies-wide as he delivers another visually stunning, mind-blowing blockbuster grounded in strong characters and story. Matthew McConaughey stars as a NASA pilot who leads an intergalactic quest to find a new home for humankind when it is threatened with ecological annihilation. Theoretical physicist Kip Thorne served as an executive producer and contributed some of his own data to help the filmmakers with their modelling of the film's famous black hole.

*Not previously reviewed by Eureka Street*

#### **Gone Girl (MA). Director: David Fincher. 149 minutes**

Fincher's excellent adaptation of Gillian Flynn's controversial 2012 novel documents the violent outcomes of a marriage that has decayed in the clammy clutches of mutual narcissism. When smug, philandering out-of-work writer Nick (Ben Affleck) finds himself suspected of murdering his self-centred yet enigmatic wife, Amy (Rosamund Pike), a media circus ensues. But did he really do it? Captivating and full of twists, *Gone Girl* is a guaranteed conversation starter about the various shapes and implications of domestic violence and misogyny.

*Full review*

#### **Whiplash (MA). Director: Damien Chazelle. 107 minutes**

Miles Teller is a revelation as jazz drummer Andrew, who is singled out for tutelage and torment by a revered but brutal professor (J. K. Simmons) at a prestigious New York music school. As the film unfolds the bully Fletcher's antagonism begets a kind of symbiotic transformation in Andrew, who in literally bleeding for his art emerges as a kindred spirit to his equally obsessive teacher. This gripping, sinister depiction of a young

man's obsessive pursuit of artistic greatness is fired by some fantastic music, notably the Hank Levy tune from which the film takes its title.

*Not previously reviewed by Eureka Street*

**Under the Skin (MA). Director: Jonathan Glazer. 115 minutes**

Glazer's eerie adaptation of Michael Faber's 2000 novel features Scarlett Johansson as an alien who dons the skin of an attractive young woman and tempts men with the unspoken promise of sex, luring them to her lair in order to harvest their flesh. A chance encounter with a man with congenital facial deformities introduces her to the concepts of compassion and mercy, and later the femaleness that she had wielded as a weapon proves also to mark her out as a victim. The film is a disturbing meditation on gender, identity and humanity, dressed in a science fiction skin.

[Full review](#)

**Nightcrawler (MA). Director: Dan Gilroy. 117 minutes**

The desire to objectively document reality in order to hold a mirror up to society is a vital function of news media, that ought to be guided by robust personal and institutional ethics. Gilroy's jet-black satire examines what happens when those ethics are stripped away, and replaced by the bottom line. It stars Jake Gyllenhaal as a morally bankrupt social climber who becomes a 'nightcrawler', a cameraman who shoots the aftermath of road accidents and violent crimes, and selling the footage to news networks.

*Full review*

**Calvary (MA). Director: John Michael McDonagh. 100 minutes**

Ensnared in the anonymity of the confessional, a man informs Fr James Lavelle (Brendon Gleeson) that he plans to kill him. During the week leading up to the deadline set by his would-be killer, the 'good priest' Lavelle goes about his pastoral duties within his windswept seaside parish. As he does so the film canvasses a raft of issues (mortality, sexuality, wealth) in the context of an abuse crisis that has greatly diminished the moral authority of the Church. Features a tour-de-force performance by Gleeson as the flawed but basically decent Lavelle.

[Full review](#)

**In a World (MA). Director: Lake Bell. 93 minutes**

Writer, director and star Bell's film is set in the world of film-trailer voiceover artists. Her character Carol is a talented up-and-comer in a male-dominated industry: literally, she is fighting to have her voice heard. Her greatest rivals in this are her father, veteran voiceover artist Sam (Fred Melamed), and Sam's smarmy protégé, Gustav (Ken Marino). Bell has delivered an extremely touching film, fun and thoughtful and bulging at the seams with perfectly honed and delivered gags, and with a gently administered dose of social satire and feminist critique.

[Full review](#)

**Nymphomaniac Volumes I and II (R). Director: Lars Von Trier. 231 minutes**

The antithesis to *In A World ...* in tone and content, but perhaps not in substance, Danish provocateur Von Trier's *Nymphomaniac* offers an utterly bleak commentary on gender and power as experienced by a sex-addicted young woman, Joe (Charlotte Gainsbourg and Stacy Martin). Often explicit and thoroughly unpleasant, *Volume I* is also disarmingly humane. Things get much uglier in *Volume II* and Von Trier arguably pushes the envelope too far at times in his theatre of cruelty. But the implications of its shocking climax will sit with you for a long time.

[Full review](#)

**Still Life (M). Director: Uberto Pasolini. 92 minutes**

For an individual to die alone at home amid the crowd of suburbia is one of the sadder, and sadly common, scenarios of modern Western existence. Italian-born British filmmaker Pasolini explores this phenomenon in this sweet and thoughtful examination of alienation and loneliness. Eddie Marsan, a wonderful character actor, who appears in a rare leading role as contented loner John, a council worker who studiously and tenderly cares for the posthumous needs of the estranged and unloved ones who die alone in their homes.

[Full review](#)

**Frank (M). Director: Lenny Abrahamson. 95 minutes**

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At the centre of this offbeat comedy by Irish filmmaker Abrahamson is Frank (Michael Fassbender), an avant-garde musician who spends his entire life with his face concealed inside a comically oversized head. The film milks the slapstick potential of this inherently absurd affectation, but does not shy away from the fact that Frank is seriously mentally ill. The endlessly talented Fassbender is all slouched shoulders and shuffling feet, as he conjoins crippling neuroses to on-stage charisma, all from within the confines of the character's inscrutable prosthetic visage.

[Full review](#)

*Tim Kroenert is assistant editor of Eureka Street.*

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## **Bad Christmases are nothing new**

### **AUSTRALIA**

***Andrew Hamilton***

Nowadays people are as likely to reminisce about the bad Christmases when everything went wrong and everyone behaved badly as they are about the good ones. The frankness is helpful: the conventional image of an idyllic time for the ideal family makes Christmas time a crushing burden for people whose experience of Christmas has been of deprivation, conflict and misery. It is always good to know that hard experience has been shared.

Perhaps, too, bad Christmases take us closer to the spirit of the first Christmas. The Gospels present the first Christmas as the Birth of the Messiah. Whatever people of the time imagined that a Birth of the Messiah would be like was systematically unlike the Scriptural accounts. They would have imagined important things happening to important people in important places in edifying circumstances.

Their imagining would certainly not have run to a rocky engagement which the man almost called off on discovering that his fiancée was pregnant with a child that was not his. Nor would it have included a long march to fill in tax forms, having to sleep on the streets and to give birth in a paddock, suffering an invasion of smelly and disreputable shepherds and odd foreigners, an undignified flight in the middle of the night and eking out a life as asylum seekers in Egypt.

But that of course is the point of the Gospel stories - that when the God who comes into the world goes beyond the margins of the acceptable to include outsiders. God defies polite expectations. To unsympathetic observers this birth took place on the wrong side of the blanket and the wrong side of town. In the Gospel stories the good news is that God includes everybody, and the celebration of Christmas nudges us to do the same.

Perhaps that explains why when later generations worked on the stories of Christmas they went beyond the main characters to give faces to people who had only a marginal role. The innkeeper was given a face, the three Magi were given crowns, character and names, animals came into the field, Joseph and Mary found themselves with a servant boy, and Mary discovered a mother and father. Of course a few marginal characters were left out - those such as Elizabeth and Anna who disappear from the story. Also those who were necessary to make things happen: think of Mary's chaperone when visiting Elizabeth, the camel driver of the Magi, the tax officials and the owner of the land on which Mary gave birth. The Christmas stories are about inclusion.

If the Christmas story goes out to the edges to include people who are excluded or neglected, it may be that bad Christmases echo it more faithfully than Christmases that go smoothly. The shady family members who turn up uninvited and drink us out of house and home, the unresolved sibling rivalries that flare, the pressures at the end of the working year and of pre-Christmas buying, and the power failure that warms the beer and liquefies the ice cream recall the organisational disarray of the first Christmas. They remind us that mess and inconvenience are signposts to the places in our lives and world where God wants to be invited and to which Christ came.

Perhaps that is why on Christmas Day so many people want to be close to people who are disadvantaged at Christmas, why they leave their homes to cook, serve meals and entertain at shelters and in hospitals.

It is also why the images of torture in CIA prisons, of detention on Nauru and Christmas Island and of destitution in our cities are so confronting. They are the really bad

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Christmases. The contrast between the hospitable world that Christmas evokes and the bleak brutality of the world that politicians devise is striking. The Christmas story invites us to do something about that.

*Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of Eureka Street.*

## Santa Abbott

### CARTOON

*Fiona Katauskas*



Fiona Katauskas' work has also appeared in ABC's *The Drum*, *New Matilda*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, *The Australian*, *The Financial Review* and Scribe's Best Australian political cartoon anthologies.

## Aussie diggers' pen as mighty as their sword

### CREATIVE

*Gillian Bouras*



Drawn by G. W. Dickinson.

#### EN ROUTE FOR BLIGHTY.

The Dag: "I bet these poor blighters are cussing the Fritz that did this to me more than I am."

Many historians argue that the First World War is not yet over, and indeed, speaking personally, the conflict has always been part of my consciousness, for my Grandfather saw action in Belgium and France, and the framed photograph of the uniformed young man I could hardly recognise is one of my earliest memories.

Grandfather was lucky: nearly 40 per cent of the Australian male population enlisted, and the casualty rate ran at 65 per cent.

All these decades later a book has just surfaced from my motley collection. It was published in 1920, when Grandfather was rebuilding his life after his repatriation in 1919. I bought this book at a second-hand shop in Kings Cross, Sydney, in 1965, and gave it to him. So a note on the flyleaf tells me.

The book's title is simply *Aussie*, and this copy is battered and stained, badly foxed; it has clearly been in wars of its own. It is a bound collection of 'the Diggers' own paper of the battlefield, wholly written, illustrated and printed in the field by members of the AIF' There had been a precedent: British soldiers of the 12th Battalion Sherwood Foresters discovered a printing press in early 1916, during the battle of Ypres, and started to produce the *Wipers Times*: the BBC made a TV film about the paper in 2013.

But *Aussie* was different. It was edited by one Lieutenant Phillip Harris, who had taken a printing press with him when he went to war in November 1914. The press was used for various purposes, and then in 1918 began to print *Aussie*, which as Harris said, 'was not a paper done *for* the Diggers, but *by* them. That's why it reflects their spirit.'

The cover of each issue bore a pen-and-ink drawing of 'Aussie,' who wore the uniform, complete with slouch hat and a gun slung over his shoulder. But his head cleverly forms the map of Australia: his neck is Western Australia, while his chin is the Northern Territory, and his nose is Northern Queensland. In the Christmas issue of 1918, Aussie has flung his hat in the air, his rifle has gone, and he is looking upwards with a grin on his face. The drawing bears the message *Next Year At Home*.

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Harris and his team, despite a multitude of difficulties, succeeded in bringing the periodical out every month of 1918, and it continued as a monthly until 1929. All proceeds in peace time went towards building what became the Australian War Memorial. Every issue of the paper is crammed with a variety of pieces: cartoons, drawings, poetry, tributes to Australian writers such as Banjo Paterson and C.J. Dennis, and jokes about the diggers being on leave in France: Grandfather said the only French he ever learned was for the girls: *Voulez-vous promener avec moi ce soir?* Sure enough, there is a cartoon about *Voulay vous*. And translations such as *Tray beans*, the Diggers' version of the French for *very good*.

A soldier's life is usually one of bursts of brief action followed by extended periods of drudgery and boredom, and never was this more true than during this dreadful war of attrition that dragged on apparently interminably. One huge problem is always that of the necessity of maintaining morale; Harris and his team succeeded magnificently in this, and were indefatigable in their efforts, travelling long distances in appalling circumstances in order to collect contributions, grappling with formidable distribution problems, and scouring bomb sites for paper and equipment: they once found ten tons of paper in an Armentieres cellar. Their reward came in the flow of contributions and in the paper's popularity: circulation grew to 60,000.

*Aussie* seems very dated, inevitably, and often the contributions are clumsily predictable. One cartoon, for example, concerns the 1918 conscription referendum, in which soldiers had to vote. Returning Officer: In what State did you enlist, Private? Private: In a state of drunkenness, sir!

But none of this matters. What matters is that these soldiers, bearing terrible burdens, were able to celebrate and practise creativity in the midst of destruction. For a little time they could believe that the pen was mightier than the sword, and in doing so were able to hurl their own spears at death.

*Gillian Bouras is an expatriate Australian writer who has written several books, stories and articles, many of them dealing with her experiences as an Australian woman in Greece.*

## Joe Hockey's prize orchid

### RELIGION

*Marcelle Mogg*



In his Mid Year Financial Economic Outlook statements this week, Treasurer Joe Hockey construed 'The Economy' as some rare prized orchid, requiring careful nurturing, while the patient gardener waits for just that one moment in a lifetime when the flower blooms.

The trouble with treating *The Economy* like a prized bloom is that we fail to recognise that it exists to serve people. The health of our economy should be measured by the degree to which it lifts up those people who are vulnerable, frail and in need of support. A healthy economy is one in which opportunities are created for people to exercise greater degrees of self-determination, and where people have access to support to enable them to seize the opportunities available.

Listening to Mr Hockey and so many in political leadership speak of *The Economy*, one could be forgiven for thinking that if only the architecture and financial settings were right then all of society's ills will fade away. Sadly the reality is more stark. While Mr Hockey and others tinker with *The Economy* - a little water here, a little fertiliser there - people living in the community are struggling to live lives of simple dignity.

Many non government social services agencies are embedded in the community, lending support to individuals and families day in and day out. Demand for services and support at Christmas will peak as families struggle to find something to celebrate, let alone finding something to celebrate with.

The availability of social support services is not keeping up with the demand. In a recent survey undertaken by the Australian Council of Social Services of 1000 community service workers, 43% of these services reported that they are simply unable to meet the needs of people coming to them for help. The largest service gaps exist in areas of the greatest need: among services working most closely with those on the lowest incomes and with the highest levels of need in their communities.

The May Federal Budget delivered a major blow to expenditure on welfare as well as

changes to income support. This double whammy of reducing levels of support and reducing the support available has directly affected the most vulnerable people in our community. On the surface it appears that the most vulnerable were easy targets for the budget cuts recommended by the Commission of Audit. Revenue raising options were not given the same attention as reducing expenditure on social services to deal with the alleged budget emergency.

As a result of the May Budget, the capacity of non government social services agencies to respond to people in need has been further hampered by changed and protracted tendering processes that go to the heart of their viability. Many agencies are highly vulnerable to the outcomes of this tender process, which is now well-delayed beyond the promised decision deadline. Many are uncertain as to how, and in fact whether, they will be able to continue to support their clients over the Christmas period and beyond. Government has been clear that it wants a more competitive tendering environment, fewer and larger organisations for contract purposes, and a reduction in spending on social services. The Department of Social Services received an overwhelming response to its July 2014 grants selection process, receiving more than 5500 applications totalling \$3.9 billion of services value. However the Government has advised there is only \$800 million available meaning many organisations will be unsuccessful with their applications.

The impact of funding uncertainty has had alarming effects on service providers. The results of a Continuity of Funding survey undertaken by Mental Health Australia were worse than anticipated with 73% of respondents saying that they would be forced to reduce local options for consumers, 40% reporting they have already lost staff and an alarming 91% confirming that if their funding future is not confirmed in the short term they will have to further reduce staffing numbers.

Even if services continue through transferring of funding to other agencies, there is still a significant impact on the people served. Research shows that people who have suffered significant trauma in their lives find it difficult to establish trusting relationships, and trust lies at the heart of effective social support services which enable people to move from support to independence.

Despite the difficult year for the sector, there are some signs of hope for the future. We believe that most Australians do care about how the poor and vulnerable are treated: the widening inequality gap between the rich and poor does not sit comfortably with most Australians. We witnessed a backlash to the Medicare co-payment proposal and other harsh measures including the proposed cessation of income support for six months for young unemployed people. This outcry led to the Government backing down on some of the more punitive changes to social service programs and support.

We welcome the focus in Patrick McClure's Welfare Review on job creation and training as a way of breaking the cycle of disadvantage. Not everyone is capable of working but for those who are able to work, employment provides stability, opportunities for education, and greater social participation as well as an income. Increased employment is also the best means of stimulating growth in the economy.

This Christmas will be a time of anxious waiting for many in the social services sector. Our thoughts are with those affected by the uncertain funding environment, the committed and hardworking staff of our social service organisations and most importantly the people and the communities they support.



*Marcelle Mogg is CEO of Catholic Social Services Australia.*

*Orchid image by Shutterstock.*

*<!--Follow him on Twitter.-->*

## Martin Place terror belies quiet progress in relations between cultures

### AUSTRALIA

*Zac Alstin*



The siege at the Lindt chocolate shop in Sydney's Martin Place is frightening for all Australians. It also obscures that progress of relations between Muslims and Australians generally, feeding into a polarising 'us and them' mentality. It's important therefore to remind ourselves that our cultural diversity is largely what makes modern Australia the dynamic country it is.

To this end, I recall my visit to a friend's house the other day. He is an Australian of Chinese-Malaysian descent; I, an Australian of English and Scottish descent; the two of us using YouTube videos to work out the procedure behind that venerable Mediterranean tradition, cooking and preserving home-made tomato sauce.

What could be more typical of multicultural Australia? Yet at a time when some are questioning the ability of Australia's Islamic communities to 'fit in', amidst news this year of anti-terror raids, and talk of a ban on burqas, we may need something deeper than pasta sauce to restore our confidence in the future of Australia.

We hear the word 'multicultural' thrown around, yet there is already extensive debate over what the term does or should precisely mean in terms of public policy. Does it mean simply welcoming people from many different cultures? Or does it also mean encouraging people to maintain their differences and distinctions, while promoting a kind of cultural neutrality in public institutions?

This debate is important, but there are other aspects of culture and multiculturalism that may shed light on contemporary problems. For example, we tend to forget that the etymology of 'culture' is related to cultivation in an agricultural context. Our culture encompasses the qualities and customs we have cultivated and wish to cultivate among our people. We wish to 'grow' qualities such as tolerance, friendliness, and care towards our neighbours regardless of their ethnic, religious or cultural background.

In this sense although we are a culturally diverse society, implicit in our approach to 'multiculturalism' is the establishment of an overarching 'monoculture' or 'super-culture' - a set of values, customs, and achievements we tend, wittingly and unwittingly, to cultivate across society. These range from the pragmatic shared literacies taught to new migrants on the basics of navigating daily life in this country, to the more abstract values we implicitly albeit haphazardly and sometimes inconsistently extol to all Australians, both old and new: tolerance naturally, but also self-improvement through education and training, openness to change, self-awareness, independence, individualism, and a kind of 'no nonsense' self-effacing humility. Yet the contents of this super-culture are not set in stone, nor are they simply a reflection of government policy, or other contrived attempts at social engineering. Perhaps they are best described as *emergent* - a layer of culture that necessarily develops out of and in response to the underlying heterogeneity. This cultural heterogeneity is not restricted to ethnic divisions; the dividing lines of multi-culture are diverse. Anyone who happens to live outside the predominant football and cricket cultures can attest that culture clash, exclusion, and alienation can be equally powerful *within* ethnic boundaries. It may seem petty to compare social and sporting interests to the divisions between different ethnicities, but we shouldn't underestimate the significance of these phenomena. It is not hyperbole to refer to Australia's drinking culture, barbecue culture, beach culture, business culture, consumer culture, and so on. We can quite often have more in common with people from different religious and ethnic groups than with people from our own ethnicity whose lifestyles and interests are totally divergent.

What matters in the end is having something in common, even if the sole common point is the desire to understand one another. I have had warm, thoughtful, and engaging conversations with strangers from vastly different backgrounds: an Egyptian nurse, Coptic Christian, curious about the origins of my name; a Pakistani specialist, intrigued that I was studying philosophy, who extended the consultation so we could discuss the possible points of contact between Buddhist and Hindu metaphysics and the God of Abraham. But put me in a room full of AFL fans and you'll start to wonder how well I have 'assimilated'. Immerse me in the 'systems', ethos and cant of corporate culture and you'll soon discover how intolerant I can be.

The ill-defined hope that Australian Muslims will learn to become 'more like us' belies the complexity of our cultural make-up. Which 'us' are they supposed to emulate? Which culture are they supposed to embrace? And who are we to decide what can and cannot be a legitimate expression of Australian culture? Sometimes it seems like the vast majority of Australians would be happy if new migrants just adopted footy culture on arrival. Yet this enthusiasm does not extend to the surprising adaptation of some young Muslim men to the unique culture of motorcycle gangs.

There is in fact no single Australian culture, and indeed, no single religious or ethnic culture from which each set of new migrants must transition. The growth, development, and emergence of cultures within our society is dynamic and unpredictable. Furthermore we all lack true self-awareness of the cultures which shape us and in which we take part as individuals, such that the cultural expectations we project onto new arrivals are neither accurate nor realistic. To 'assimilate' is, after all, a very un-Australian quality compared to the prized values of stubbornness, self-belief, and doing things our own way.

Without putting a gloss on it, the most likely outcome for Australia's Islamic communities is that their own mix of cultures will change and develop in interaction with the complex of cultures already present in Australia. Just as the English, Irish, and Scottish arrivals changed and developed in this new environment, so too will all new migrants inevitably change. Within the intricate composition of our multicultural landscape, the real question is which values, ideals, virtues and achievements we wish to cultivate across our whole society.

Even so, it's not enough to simply 'wish'. We need to actually embody in our own lives

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the values we would like to see shared by all Australians. My Muslim doctor was so keen to impress upon me his faith's respect for Jesus and the Virgin Mary, he read out the relevant passages of the Virgin Birth from a Koran app on his smartphone. As Christmas approaches I can't help but wonder: does this count for him or against him in our increasingly secular Christmas culture?

*Zac Alstin is a freelance writer and PhD student in Philosophy of Religion who lives in Adelaide. He blogs at [zacalstin.com](http://zacalstin.com)*

## Wee Mary MacKillop minds the shop

### CREATIVE

*Brian Doyle*



### Poem for Miss Mary MacKillop, of Fitzroy

Today's startling news: Australia's only recognized Catholic saint,  
So far, was born on Brunswick Street, in Fitzroy! Now, you might  
Wonder why this is an astonishing bit of ironic and amazing news,  
If you have never been to Fitzroy, a rough neighbourhood in the tall  
Old seething roaring city of Melbourne - but I have been there and  
I can tell you that Fitzroy always was and will be a wry wilderness;  
Every colour and ethnicity and language you can imagine lives there.  
I am not kidding. The commission flats, the dogleg brooding alleys,  
The trams - I walked there for weeks and saw every kind of sad and  
Cruel and lost and tough and gentle and graceful and awful and holy  
There is, seems to me - I saw a lot of Australia in twenty city blocks.  
And now I see wee quiet shy Mary MacKillop there, minding a shop.  
She is fourteen. Her people are Scottish. She will be legendary, later,  
For her ferocious dedication to helping the poor - you cannot ignore  
Them, she will say one million times to power and money and pomp.  
You cannot pretend you do not see them. You cannot say that we are  
A great and lucky country when so many innocents are starving. You  
Can lie to yourself and in public but I will not lie also. Look at all the  
Huddled souls, raped and beaten and hungry and cold. They are all us.  
Yes, they are. This has nothing to do with religion and class. They are  
All us. If there is a great Australia it will be the one that rises to house  
And feed and protect those who have nothing. I saw them when I was  
A child on Brunswick Street and now I can't not see them. Thousands

Of them in every city and county and state and reserve. They're all us.  
The whole country is Brunswick Street. Come with me to pick one up.

### Times Tables

Just got a note from my mom, in which she tells me  
That my gentle wry witty subtle sister, now resident  
In a monastery, used to rock my cradle with her foot  
While chanting her multiplication tables aloud. How  
I would love to report that I remember every blessed  
Moment of this, how my sister tried to achieve a sort  
Of whispered chant (loud enough to be articulate but  
Soft enough not to wake me), how my mother would  
Forget about us and get absorbed by heated table talk  
About religions and wars and then realize with a start  
That my sister was on her seventeenth run-through of  
Her times tables, how my dad would smile and say O  
Let her rip for another hour and the both of them will  
Be math geniuses! But I don't remember&hellip;do I? Now  
That I think about it, I worship rhythm and measure it  
Unconsciously, automatically - I have an extra ear for  
The cadence of crows, the coughing of motors, an owl  
Calling eleven times to another, who calls back eleven:  
The Deft of It Just spent four days with my mom and dad, Who together are a hundred  
and eighty-four Years old, and there are so many wry funny Things to report, and some  
saddening things Also, like fragility, and the ravines that pain Cuts in faces after years of  
winching. But I'll Tell you just one; my dad at one point tosses A bag of bread from his  
seat at the oak table Onto the thin counter to his right. Maybe six Feet of air, and he  
didn't glance at the target. A little flick of the wrist, and the bread lands Exactly right.  
This nailed me, but Pop didn't Look up from the crossword puzzle. It could Easily be  
explained: Former excellent tennis Player, knows the spatial music of the house In his  
bones, probably made that throw sixty Times, but still&hellip;the silent casual easy  
grace, The deft of it! He's all bones now, he weighs Less than he did when he was a reed  
of a kid Away to the war they thought would kill him For sure, but when I hug him he's  
still all tall Though some of the tall is bent. Look, I get it That someday he won't be  
sitting at the table. I get it. Believe me, I have examined the idea. But that his deft won't  
be there, his sideways Smile when I gawp at something he says; I'm Not quite getting  
that. He says he'd like to be Buried in a military cemetery in a deep forest About an hour  
away. There's oak and cypress And pine. This will happen, I guess, and then He'll be a  
thin kid again somehow or the most Deft of the falcon chicks or the willow branch That  
finally figures out how to sip from a lake All easy and casual, like it didn't take practice.  
Bar Brawl Yes, I was in one. In Chicago, many years ago. A blues bar, not noticeably  
rough, on a Sunday; You would think the odds would be against fist In eye and smash of  
glass and table overturning And guys picking up pool cues. The bartenders Punched  
guys. I saw a woman throwing drinks. Yes, it was terrifying. This was not some movie  
Gig where it's choreographed. This was savage And sudden and there is screaming. I see  
a man Swing a pool cue like a bat and hit another man With the sound of a pumpkin  
smashing. It ends In about two minutes with one guy unconscious. I never did find out  
why it started - I was afraid To ask, and afraid to leave too soon, too, in case I'd get  
blamed. I was afraid, is what I am trying To say. I'm not trying to draw some conclusions  
Here - I just want to record a moment we've all Endured, and we do not talk about. We  
ought to, You know. There's no shame in it. We all drank From the terror cup. I have  
friends who got shot At and they were terrified, and I know men who Were lost in  
forests, and we've all been terrified In traffic accidents. This has nothing whatsoever To

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do with courage or heroism. It's about saying Honestly man, I was so scared I couldn't breathe. I feel like if we say it honest than somehow we'll Find a way to trim the number of times when it's Our fault. Maybe we could outthink our own old Urge to make other people scared. It worked for Us for a million years, but now it doesn't so well, You know? I'll stop - but you think this one over.

*Brian Doyle is the editor of Portland Magazine at the University of Portland, and the author most recently of the essay collection Grace Notes.*

*Image: Mary MacKillop Heritage Centre*

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## Politics of mediocrity threaten Blake religious art prize

### AUSTRALIA

*Michael Mullins*



Artists play an important role in deepening our cultural imagination in a way that helps us to see and understand how religion is returning as a social and cultural force to be reckoned with and celebrated.

Blake Society Chair Rev Dr Rod Pattenden has written about the power of religion to maintain our 'tribal' differences while at the same time acting as a resource for dissolving the false boundaries in our society that hold us back from a spirit of 'generous understanding' of each other.

The announcement of the winners of the Blake Prize for religious art is usually a welcome demonstration of the fact that corporate sponsors recognise the role religious imagination has to play in our society. But the apprehension at Saturday's event at the UNSW Paddington Campus in Sydney was a sign that this recognition is faltering, and that the 63rd award of the Prize may be the last.

Without a major sponsor for the past seven years the prize is in desperate need of a miracle to maintain its running costs of around \$60,000. Pattenden spoke about the 'big hole' in the Blake's finances that needs to be addressed.

'In approaching sponsors, many of them recognise that spirituality is a difficult, if not prickly, subject for consideration in Australia,' he told Fairfax. 'Sponsors prefer their art to be popular and safe.'

On Saturday the main prize of \$25,000 was awarded to Melbourne artist Richard Lewer for his hand-drawn animation that depicts the story of elderly Perth man Bernie Erikson, who survived a failed suicide pact with his wife. Lewer said he wanted to raise questions about euthanasia as a live issue in a way that did not judge the morality of Erikson's actions.

Pattenden described the winning entry as a beguiling work that presents a complex story of love and death in a simple story-like form. 'It invites reflection and the format is really very beautiful and the soft compassionate voice of the artist leaves us with questions to consider'.

The Blake includes a poetry prize and a Human Justice Award, which was awarded on Saturday to another Melbourne artist - Hedy Ritterman - for her depiction of 96 year old Richard with his hands on a museum plinth holding a belt that is his only possession that survived his World War II incarceration in concentration camps (pictured).

Works such as this command our attention and deep reflection, and they defy our society's demand for commodification. Our fickle politics of the past few years shows that

the majority of Australians are prepared to gloss over serious issues such as how to answer the life and death needs of the refugees whose lives have been disrupted by the wars we wage.

Politicians are driven by opinion polls, and most corporate sponsors are inclined to follow their lead. The Blake is looking for sponsors and philanthropists that value the asking of difficult and unpopular questions.



*Michael Mullins is editor of Eureka Street.*

<!--Follow him on Twitter.-->

## Activists strike back against the Empire

### RELIGION

*Sally Cloke*



Another week, another group of Christians arrested. 53 Christian leaders were arrested or removed from the offices of politicians on Wednesday as part of a nationwide prayer vigil to protest the detention of asylum seeker children.

Their crime: staging a 'pray-in' at a politician's office. Under the banner of Love Makes a Way, this loose coalition of believers from a range of mainstream denominations promises to keep protesting until given a timeline for the release of children from immigration detention.

Respectable citizens singing hymns while being bundled into divvy vans naturally recalls the civil rights movement. Indeed, Love Makes a Way spokespeople have claimed precedents for their actions in Martin Luther King, Jr, and even the Old Testament prophets.

Protest and prophecy have much in common: both seek to draw attention to what is wrong with the status quo, often through the use of symbolic action (think Ezekiel building a clay model of Jerusalem as the stage for his own 'lie-in'). And there is something to be said for seeing the Love Makes a Way activists as part of a welcome resurgence in prophetic Christianity.

But maybe there is more to be said for seeing them as martyrs.

A martyr is normally one who dies for her or his faith. But the Greek word  $\mu\upsilon\tau\epsilon\rho\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$ ; (martyr) originally meant 'witness' - one who testifies.

Both prophets and martyrs are motivated by religious convictions to stand against untruth and injustice. Both, as the cliché goes, 'speak truth to power'. But they are characters in what we might call two very different political dramas. To interpret the Love Makes a Way participants as either prophets or martyrs is to call forth two radically contrasting conceptions of contemporary Australian public life and the place of Christianity within it.

The message of the prophets may be summarised in two words: 'Back to!' Prophets urged Israel to repent and return to a previous age when the nation did what God required. Autonomous nationhood and a tradition of justice can be seen as the two principles on which prophecy depends.

What happens if we try to map this schema onto Australia's immigration policies, the focus of Love Makes a Way's protests?

While immigration has long been placed at the heart of Australian 'nation building', a closer examination suggests that, in the main, it exhibits more of the out-workings of colonial mimicry. Consider the White Australia Policy, which sought to 'protect' our country by making it as like that of our British imperial masters as possible. Or our present regime of 'border protection' which sees every leaky boat as a potential terrorist landing-force.

Yes, there have been some bright spots in Australia's immigration history - our

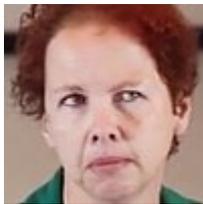
pioneering multiculturalism, the Whitlam Government's passing of the Racial Discrimination Act, the Fraser Government's resettlement of Vietnamese refugees. But it has largely been a story of injustice, not righteousness; of the imitation of empire instead of autonomous nation-building.

The concept of empire brings us back to martyrdom, because while prophets assume a politics of nationhood, martyrs and empires have something of a symbiotic relationship. The classic cause of martyrdom in the early church was the refusal to worship the emperor.

One of the things that sets an empire apart is its claims of ultimacy. Empires present themselves as ahistorical, the way things have always been and will be. Whereas a prophet's critique is based on calling the nation back, under empire there is no *back* to go *back* to. Thus Martyrs critique the present by comparing it with their God's future, a future which is always imminent, but not contingent.

The imperial claim of ultimacy also extends to monopolising the stories a culture tells itself. It alone decrees what success or failure looks, what is praiseworthy or pathetic. But whether they're being eaten by lions in an arena or carted off by police as the TV cameras roll, martyrs' power lies in turning mockery and humiliation into an alternative and superior victory.

So what does this mean for the future of Christian activism in Australia? If one of the most interesting protest movements of the year is modelling martyrdom, then it suggests that a shift has occurred in the understanding of the relationship between church and state. The time for mainstream denominations to be chaplains to the status quo may well be finally over, and in its place may be emerging a call to construct something new.



*Sally Cloke is a theology PhD candidate at the University of Newcastle.*

*Image: Activists in Julie Bishop's office. Photo: Love Makes A Way*

*<!--Follow him on Twitter.-->*

## My Christmas cake friend

### AUSTRALIA

*Catherine Marshall*



On Christmas Eve I will deliver, for the twelfth year in a row, an iced, naively decorated fruitcake to my oldest and dearest Australian friend, Enid. I will pull up into the driveway of her brick home, set post-war style beside a neat, suburban stretch of lawn. She will open the front door before I have even knocked, and before she's even kissed me hello will tell me how beautiful the cake is and how she couldn't possibly cut into it. She will take the cake in her delicate hands, walk over to the ornate wooden dresser near the window with the venetian blinds and the view of the leafy street on which I, too, once lived, and will place my offering on a crystal cake stand; and then she will ask me to take a photograph of it.

Enid has tried to sway me from this ritual in of late - 'You're not to make me a cake this year, you have too many other things on your plate!' - but I will not be deterred, for this is not merely a Christmas gift or a sweet treat designed to heighten the season's celebratory mood. No, this is an object that contains within it the story of a friendship between two women almost forty years apart in age; folded into it is all the joy and delight and love she's given me over the years, and which am now returning to her. I met Enid 13 years ago when we rented the house next door to hers. We had recently arrived in Australia, an immigrant family moving hazily through each day, rabbits frozen in the headlights. She was at our back door in an instant, offering in her unobtrusive way information about milk delivery and rubbish pick-ups, recommending dentists and doctors, insisting we use her tumble drier during a spell of seemingly endless rain. With no children of her own, she happily tolerated - welcomed! - my own three as they romped across the fenceless boundary and into her garden, used her front lawn as an extension of their cricket pitch, and hid out behind her garage during games of cops and robbers. She would make plates of egg sandwiches and serve them with bottles of icy ginger beer to the crowds of children dangling from the tree in our front yard. But our children's merriment concealed a deep familial unease: despite our qualifications

and experience, neither my husband nor I could secure employment. The months rolled on as rejection letters streamed in and our savings dwindled. Interviews led to shortlistings, hopes were raised and then dashed with inevitable refusal. Offers came in from the Western Australian Goldfields, and we prepared with heavy hearts to leave. Then, suddenly, our fortunes changed: after six months I was offered a job as a features editor; after eight months my husband was employed as an engineer. We scrapped plans to move interstate and Enid came round with a bottle of celebratory champagne. That Christmas, having weathered our first year in a foreign country - enduring unemployment and rejection, homesickness and the profound heartache that accompanies it - I made Enid her first Christmas cake. The fruit had been steeped in too much brandy and the cake stuffed indulgently with nuts and glace cherries, the way I like it. It was covered in marzipan and home-made royal icing, and decorated by my young daughters with edible sprigs of holly. She must have known when we delivered it to her front door that it was a triumph of sorts: our first Christmas in Australia, and for this occasion a gift for my very first Australian friend. This year's cake will be the twelfth. In the years that have passed our friendship has deepened into something that is comforting and familiar and bears its own history. When we became Australian citizens Enid presented us with a bunch of waratahs - the flower for our home state, NSW. Over the years she's shown in me the same pride my own, late, mother would have done, and has watched with love and admiration as my children - who she remembers first meeting as cherubs with 'haloes of golden hair' - have grown into teenagers and young adults. Enid continues to serve them the plates of egg sandwiches they love, even though we long ago moved from the little house neighbouring hers, the one she still refers to as ours. She often tells me I was robbed when I failed to win best fruitcake at the Royal Easter Show - a competition I finally entered at her insistence. It doesn't matter: as far as she's concerned, she says, my cake is always best.



*Catherine Marshall is a Sydney based freelance journalist and travel writer.*

*Christmas cake image by Shutterstock.*

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## Australia turns its back on a world in need

### AUSTRALIA

*Paul O'Callaghan*



An extraordinary gathering of survivors and Catholic leaders occurred last week in Colombo, Sri Lanka, for the 10th anniversary of the Boxing Day Tsunami, the most devastating natural disaster in modern history.

We gathered to commemorate a decade since the Tsunami that killed over 230,000 men, women and children and left many millions displaced and whole communities torn apart. We listened to the stories of devastation from those who had survived, and we listened to the stories of hope. We also listened to some alarming news from home.

Last week the Australian media reported Juie Bishop's confirmation that Australia's overseas aid program is in line for further budget cuts as the Government seeks to find savings for the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook.

This news is deeply concerning. Between September 2013 and May 2014 our Government cut the aid budget by close to \$8 billion over the next five years. Australia's overseas aid program only makes up 1.3 per cent of the Federal Budget. The 20 per cent of total savings the aid budget absorbed in May was more than a fair share of the budget burden.

Australia prides itself on being a fair country. But how is it fair to have the world's poorest people to shoulder more cuts? As the tenth wealthiest country on earth, this trend damages our reputation and undermines our ability to be taken seriously as a global leader.

It was upsetting for me to hear news of potential cuts to Australia's global compassion while witnessing the successes of Australian aid. There was Faridah, a young woman from a village in the East Coast of Sri Lanka, whom I met with her three children. Faridah lost her parents and other relatives. Her husband, a fisherman, also disappeared.

Faridah's life, stability and support network was destroyed by the Tsunami. She lost all hope for her children's future. Yet, with the support of Australian aid, she was slowly able to re-build her life. Following the Tsunami, Faridah and her children were able to access life-saving assistance in the form of food, water, shelter. She also received psychosocial support on an ongoing basis. Faridah went on to become a community leader and role model. All three of her children are now in school.

Faridah's is just one of the powerful stories of hope made possible with the support of Australian aid.

Australia was the largest per capita contributor to the Tsunami recovery effort. Our Government committed more than \$60 million in immediate emergency relief. This represented the largest peacetime operation Australia has ever undertaken overseas. Australian aid made possible the rapid deployment of emergency health workers, food, clean water and temporary shelter. All of which played a huge role in supporting people

and communities to survive and to re-build.

Internationally there is a deep appreciation for Australia's role in providing urgent humanitarian assistance and working in partnership to rebuild families, homes and futures.

It was in this context that the delegates who attended the commemoration expressed surprise and dismay at the proposed further cuts to Australia's overseas aid program. In their eyes, Australia has developed a reputation as a tremendous actor and leader and one that is so often *there* during times of crisis.

Delegates questioned why Australia, as the most prosperous country in our region, would now turn its back on the world's poor.

Successive cuts to our overseas aid program mean that we are starting to be seen as a country turning inwards.

Other OECD countries have been far more generous and recognise the importance of steadily growing their overseas aid program. Take for example the United Kingdom; under a Conservative Government the country has steadily increased its overseas aid contribution to an impressive 0.7 per cent of gross national income. Not bad for a country hit hard by the GFC, with greater levels of debt than Australia and with lower levels of *per capita* income.

Australian aid saves lives. It increases access to healthcare, helps educate children and in times of crises like the Tsunami, helps people like Faridah recover and re-build.

Every year almost two million Australian households donate to the work of Australian aid and development agencies. While Australians reach out to the men, women and children most vulnerable to poverty and natural disasters they expect their government to do the same.

We are surrounded by countries that are better able to tackle the challenges of poverty and natural disasters when our nation plays its rightful role as a leader and a contributor and as a country that sees its future inextricably linked to the future of our region.

*Paul O'Callaghan is CEO of Caritas Australia.*

*Image: Wikimedia Commons*

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## Drug mule's poo strike stymies bad cops

### REVIEWS

*Tim Kroenert*

**The Mule (MA). Directors: Tony Mahony, Angus Sampson. Starring: Angus Sampson, Hugo Weaving, Leigh Whannell, Ewen Leslie. 103 minutes**

The 'gross-out movie' has been a part of the Hollywood vernacular at least since 1978, when *National Lampoon's Animal House* proved that the dubious comedic value of exaggerated bodily functions could be a bona fide money-spinner. Fast forward a few decades and we've seen *Porky's* pave the way for *American Pie*, and the Farrelly Brothers and Judd Apatow turn the gross-out into an art form.

But when is a poo joke not just a poo joke? The Farrellys and Apatow have made films that are heartfelt and humane, despite their occasional scatological preoccupations. Now a band of roguish Australian filmmakers, too, have turned the art of the gross-out to a deeper purpose than mere cheap laughs. Their suspense-filled and utterly gross black comedy *The Mule* is one of the best Australian films of the year.

Co-writer-director Sampson stars as impressionable country footy dork Ray Jenkins. During an end-of-season trip to Bangkok he is badgered by teammate Gavin (Whannell) - who's working for sinister club patron Pat (Noble) - into turning drug mule. He ingests an uncomfortable number of heroin-filled balloons for transport back to Australia, but is subsequently busted at Melbourne Airport.

Ray is a consummate clubman, and is not going to surrender his cargo easily. He pleads innocence, but the law allows him to be detained for up to seven days, or until he defecates. So he is placed in custody in a seedy hotel room, where one seriously nasty cop (Weaving) and his mild-mannered partner (Leslie) employ both reason and violence in their efforts to persuade him to open up.

The presence of Whannell - the man behind the notoriously graphic *Saw* films - not just as an actor but as co-screenwriter might give you a hint as to the excesses at play as this scenario unfolds. But most of *The Mule's* excesses are contextual, and deeply rooted in character. Ray's pained farts and gut-gurgles reinforce the physical agony inherent in his ordeal, painted equally effectively on his pasty, sweaty visage.

Likewise the film's destined-for-notoriety shit-eating scene is not merely about shock, it's character building, literally - Ray may be an underdog, but he's no pushover. *The Mule* makes no apologies for trying to disgust its audience, but it is well enough written and performed that the greatest level of disgust is evoked not by scatology, but by the truly excremental nature of some of its characters.

These 'inspired by true events' play out contemporaneously to the 1983 America's Cup, a fact that does more than place the story in history and foreshadow the pivotal role the room's television set - on which characters are frequently seen to be watching the race - will later play in the plot. By paralleling Ray's plight with the historic win of Alan Bond's

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*Australia II The Mule* both celebrates and satirises the great myth of the Aussie underdog.

Bond, of course, was destined to become a poster child for corporate corruption - a fact not lost on the filmmakers, who at one point have two characters debate his status as an Australian hero. Ray is cut from different cloth altogether. He is beset on all sides by systemic corruption, which makes his defiance of The Man - fuelled not by greed but by a kind of everyman nobility - seem truly heroic.

*Tim Kroenert is assistant editor of Eureka Street. The Mule is available on iTunes, and on DVD and Blu-Ray.*

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## Lessons learned from Phillip Hughes grieving

### AUSTRALIA

*Andrew Hamilton*

Many words have already been written about the life, death and burial of Philip Hughes, the gifted cricketer and evidently generous person who died two weeks ago. People have also noted the way in which the man and his death were remembered by cricketers at all levels around the world. Some have applauded the widespread popular response to his death: others have questioned it. So it is worth trying to untangle the threads in it.

Responding to death is never simple. We need to learn the steps. Death is an ending, a separation, an absence, a breaking of connections, an absence, a source of great pain. It has no reason and defies explanation. So a response needs to recognise all this reality of death, strengthen connection, make the dead person present in memory, allow grief, and find symbols that open out to meaning and to hope, so enveloping silence.

All deaths and the responses to them are distinctive because they involve human beings. In Philip Hughes' death there were three central elements. First he died as a young man whose future path remained untaken. The death of young people inevitably confronts us with our own mortality and pushes us to ask what have been building out of the material of our own lives. It also reminds us how precarious are the lives of our children. So it touches us deeply.

Second Philip Hughes' death was distinctive because it took place in the midst of play. He played professionally a game that many thousands of people have enjoyed playing for recreation. Play mimics the reality of our relationships to the world. In their play children explore, and adults rehearse, ways in which they might interact with others in life, how they might accept success and failure, cooperate with or dominate others. That is why children make heroes among cricket players whose mannerisms they imitate and who embody some of their dreams.

The relationship of play to reality is complex. Although play mimics reality and is an important part of it, it is discontinuous with reality in the sense that it represents a world of possibility, of make-believe. So cricketing heroes are always young and live entirely in the world of cricket. The complex reality of their lives never intrudes. They are not so much role models as dream figures. So when a cricketer dies playing cricket, the proper relationship between play and reality is shattered. The death is totally disorientating; it both demands and defies response.

The natural way of responding is to explore the resources of play and the way in which players handle death. So in many schools the day after Hughes died whole classes of children turned up next morning wearing black armbands. Nothing had been proposed by the schools; all was done by social media. The gesture, which clearly met a felt need, echoed a common way in which clubs honoured the dead.

Another symbolic response originating in social media was for cricket players to place their helmets on bats and stand them in line. It quickly spread through the cricketing world. The gesture echoed the fallen soldiers' battle cross of rifle and helmet placed for dead comrades. It too expressed in the idiom of play solidarity with others in honouring the dead.

Third the death and funeral of Philip Hughes were significant because they became a media event. His life was described in great detail and the reactions of his friends and companions to him and to his death were sought. His funeral was intensively covered. Although the mainstream media were sometimes criticised for creating this event, they

built on public interest already there.

At a deeper level, though, media reporting does affect the way people respond to death. It publicises death and grieving, making them visible to a large audience. It also analyses them. This makes it more difficult to respond simply and naturally to death because we are made self-conscious, aware of what we are doing and of how it might be seen by others.

Self-consciousness affects the connections we make in grieving. The community of family, friends and town becomes a crowd with a conspicuous media presence that not only reports but changes what it sees. Intimate connections are made complex. Self-consciousness also affects the symbols through which we respond to death, particularly those that open out to hope. The language and symbols of prayer, for example, evoke a shared world beyond the immediate grief, and invite the mourners to enter it unreflectively. When symbols are explained or words are carried abroad on the media winds, it becomes harder to accept that invitation and to be touched by hope. The symbols left are words and demonstrations of grief. When self-conscious, words easily become so general that they are pieties, not intimations, and grief can become so specific that it only exacerbates loss.

This, of course, is not the fault of the media. It simply indicates the difficulty of responding to death when there is no overarching shared framework of belief and symbol.

It is a truism that ultimately we die and grieve alone. That was true for Philip Hughes and his friends and family. But it is also true that each person's death touches us even if we are not touched by it. The public participation in the mourning of Philip Hughes testifies to that.

*Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of Eureka Street..*

## The (Mean) Spirit of Christmas

### CARTOON

**Fiona Katauskas**



Fiona Katauskas' work has also appeared in ABC's *The Drum*, *New Matilda*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, *The Australian*, *The Financial Review* and Scribe's Best Australian political cartoon anthologies.

## Hapless Joe Hockey

### ECONOMICS

*David James*



One of the fascinating aspects of Australia's political pantomime is the manner in which the Federal Treasurer is forced to metamorphose into a used car salesman who is spruiking the Australian economy. 'Jaw jaw', rather than actually doing something, seems to be the core skill of economic regulators, these days.

One reason for the relative impotence of the Treasurer is that the Federal government only has control over fiscal policy. Monetary policy, the interest rate, is set by the Reserve Bank, not the government.

Another reason is Australia's heavy dependence on volatile commodity prices. The nation heavily depends on its resources base for its income, so the fiscal situation can change dramatically and unexpectedly. This is not something that politicians can control or influence.

The effect of the impotence can be seen in Joe Hockey's increasingly fraught demeanour. In a recent radio [interview](#), he squabbled with the interviewer about the meaning of consumer confidence surveys, sounding a bit like a used car salesman waxing lyrical about a flash chrome fender.

Yet trying to talk up consumer confidence is really the only option available. The sharp drop in commodity prices has created what some are dubbing an 'income recession' as profits and wages fall sharply. That creates pressure on the Federal Budget and fiscal policy.

It is only part of the story, however. Australia's economy, like most developed economies, is heavily dependent on consumer spending. According to the World Bank, household final consumption expenditure accounts for 55 per cent of Australia's GDP. This is lower than America's 69 per cent and Britain's 66 per cent (China is only 35 per cent) but it still means that the main game is getting consumers to spend. Little wonder that Hockey is exhorting people to get out there and buy. His government has rejected the idea of anything resembling an industry policy, which might have softened some of

the effects of the commodities boom and bust, on the grounds that it would lead to 'market distortions' and 'rent seeking'. Australia's manufacturing base has been sacrificed to the soaring Australian dollar and it is unlikely to be reconstructed.

Saddled with his party's anti-government, neo-liberal ideology, Hockey is caught between a Scylla and Charybdis. On the one hand, because government is inherently bad and an unacceptable drag on the markets, it is essential to get the Budget 'under control'. On the other hand, those same markets are delivering lower revenues, making it impossible to balance the Budget without, at least to some extent, increasing taxes. Yet taxes are inherently bad, and a drag on the markets. So getting the Budget under control is simultaneously necessary and unacceptable. Do not pass Go; do not collect \$200.

Little wonder that Mr Hockey is looking slightly bemused. He has resorted to trying to blame the Labor Party, but for those of us who objected to the Coalition's mindless blocking of everything when it was in Opposition, there is little sympathy. It is also clear that many of the cost savings measures, such as the proposed six month withdrawal of unemployment benefits for people under 30, the GP co-payment and the deregulation of universities, are simply bad politics. A far better option would be to nibble away at the really big tax loopholes like negative gearing and superannuation, but in those areas the government seems more inclined to stick to its word.

It makes good sense to keep the Budget in balance over the long term. If there is one lesson in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, government debt makes an economy highly vulnerable in a way that private debt does not. But tightening fiscal policy in the bad times carries self evident dangers. The IMF, shedding crocodile tears, has recently admitted it got it wrong in enforcing fiscal austerity in 2010-2011. An IMF report acknowledged that: 'IMF advocacy of fiscal consolidation proved to be premature for major advanced economies, as growth projections turned out to be optimistic&hellip;This policy mix was less than fully effective in promoting recovery and exacerbated adverse spillovers.'

Quite. Tightening an economy by reducing government spending when it is already contracting because of market developments only worsens the downturn.

Australia's government debt remains unusually low for developed nations because Peter Costello, a salesman who also showed some other skills, kept the Budget in surpluses during the good times. That gives the Federal government some limited leeway now.

The big problem is Australia's private debt, especially mortgage debt, which is largely the consequence of bad tax policy under both the Coalition and Labor governments.

Government debt is about 14 per cent of GDP, although it will increase as the Budget worsens. Household debt is over 100 per cent of GDP.

The main determinant of consumption will thus be interest rates, which some are predicting the Reserve Bank will reduce further. If interest rates are lowered it may give heavily indebted households a reason to spend, but this is something Hockey is unable to influence. He will simply have to hone his salesman skills, and hope that someone is listening.

*David James is a business journalist with a PhD in English literature. He edits Personal Super Investor.*

## Fighter who found community on the streets

CREATIVE

*Steve Sinn*



### **Susan Gaye Bloomfield 7th February, 1967 - December 2014**

Elizabeth told me Sue had died. She had been dead in her Ashfield flat for 18 days before she was found. The heater was on. I don't want to think about how she was when she was found. I don't know how she died. There is talk of ice.

Sue had been just below the surface of my consciousness for weeks, just this unease. She had rung and asked me to ring her. She didn't think to give me her number. Street people change their mobile numbers all the time and the one I had had the familiar: 'Optus advises that the number you have rung has been disconnected.' I rang Elma at the Wayside and they hadn't seen her or knew her number. I thought of going to her flat.

Sue was a giver and it used to bring her undone, especially with men. They would take and take and finally they would turn on her, violently, because no one likes to receive all the time. They would bash her, stab her and the cycle went on with someone else. She gave because she had no capacity to affirm herself, she had no sense of her own value or worth.

On 19th January, 1969, in the Saleyards Camping Area, Griffith, Margaret Bloomfield was shot by her husband, Hector Bloomfield. Margaret was 26, they had 8 children. Susan

was the youngest, 11 months. She was found under a couch. She had hid there when she heard the bangs. As an adult, a loud bang would send her ducking for cover. A total of three people were killed by Hector that day, two other relatives. Her adult family was wiped out. Sue and another sibling were separated from her other siblings and brought up in institutions in Waitara and Goulburn. She was on the streets at 12 and I met her at St Canice's.

I remember her saying to me she once went to the library in Griffith to look up reports of that day in the papers. She found plenty of photos of her father but none of her mother. She was looking for one, she never found one photo of her mother.

'I wanted a family,' she once said to me. She did have one, she had six children. But she didn't know how to be a parent, she had never been parented herself. She didn't know how to make a home. 'I find community on the streets,' she told me. When her children visited her they would live on the steps of the church with her. You could tell she had lived in an institution. Her bed was always the neatest and most well made on the steps. She liked the corner spot.

I can't remember if she could read. She had that directness and eye contact that people who can't read have, who need to take their cues on what to do from others. Her mail came to the church. Mostly it was warrants for not turning up in court. She asked me to safe-keep her records. That's how I know the details about her mother, she gave me her mother's death certificate: 'Shock and severed spinal cord in the neck as a result of bullet wounds.'

Sue had a mouth she could use when needed. I was shocked and amused at the same time when I first heard her on the steps late one night having a piece of someone. They were going hammer and tongs at one another, then it would die down, and then Sue would have the last word, and it would begin again. She had to have the last insult. There was a lot of fight in her. I suppose she didn't know any other way. But she had the most direct, warm, generous nature you could imagine. I used to think that God took a direct hand in her life, seeing that we had failed her. How else could she have had such a beautiful nature? She never sought pity, she never complained about her lot. She never thought that others had a better life than she had. She worried about her children, about others, about me: 'You used to smile a lot,' she said to me once. I knew then that I had been at St Canice's for too long and it was time to go.

Sue lived in the present, with a cheeky grin and laugh. She was embarrassed she had no teeth. That's why her mouth is closed in the photo. She had her jaw broken by surgeons so they could fit her with new teeth. She felt better about herself with teeth. I preferred her no teeth smile but I loved how proud she was of her new look.

Her father spent a long time in Long Bay. He turned to painting the walls of the exercise yard there. When he came out in 1987 he asked to see Sue. 'There is only one thing I regret,' he said to her, 'and that is that I didn't kill all of you.' He then went and shot himself in the pavilion of a Rockhampton oval.

The late Greg Denning once wrote that his task as an historian was to rescue from anonymity just some of the vast numbers of people who have gone before us and are now names on war memorials, in death records and the like. Sue will always be for me flesh and blood, her trust I will forever cherish. Hers was a wretched life from the beginning to the end. But for some reason I feel impelled to lift her name out of that narrative. It is not one she would recognise. She once told me that she was 'one of the lucky ones'. For me she is a bright star shining in our darkness.

*Steve Sinn SJ is the long time former parish priest of St Canice's, King's Cross, and now works in retreat ministry in rural NSW.*

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## Another year bites the parliamentary dirt

### AUSTRALIA

*Frank Brennan*



Another excruciating year in the Australian Parliament ended last week. What a dreadful year it has been for parliamentary democracy.

In the House of Representatives, Speaker Bronwyn Bishop has taken pride in the number of members she has ejected, describing the chamber not as 'a polite debating society, not a classroom, but a battlefield and we've given up guns, swords and fists and we fight with words'.

The Senate is more fractious than ever. There is nothing unusual in the government not controlling the Senate. Sometimes cross benchers can win some concessions from government, improving legislation and gaining special privileges for prized constituencies. The late Brian Harradine, whom we mourned this year, was a past master at it. Tasmania's Jacqui Lambie is still on a rapid learning curve, as are Ricky Muir and the other new arrivals on the cross benches. Caught in the cross wires in the refugee debate on the last night of the year's Senate sittings, the motoring enthusiast Muir lamented:

They told the people in detention that they rang the office of the man whose decision it was to decide whether they would be out of detention before Christmas. That man wasn't the Minister for Immigration; it was me. It should not be like this but it is. The crossbench should not have been put in this position, but it has.

In the next two years, Ricky and his colleagues will be put in this position more often.

Liberal Democrat Senator David Leyonhjelm announced in his maiden speech on 9 July 2014: 'I believe we are about to begin one of the most exciting periods in the life of the Senate.' Being a little known politician he set out his political philosophy:

In the service of this mission, at the outset I declare that I am proudly what some call a 'libertarian', although I prefer the term 'classical liberal'. My undeviating political philosophy is grounded in the belief that, as expressed so clearly by John Stuart Mill:

'The only purpose for which power can be rightfully ever exercised over any member of a civilised society against his will is to prevent harm to others.'

He went on to say:

As William Pitt the Younger observed: 'Necessity is the plea for every infringement of human freedom. It is the argument of tyrants; it is the creed of slaves.' Perhaps some are scratching their heads right now. How can someone support marriage equality, assisted suicide and want to legalise pot but also want to cut taxes a lot? If you are scratching your heads, it is because you have forgotten that classical liberal principles were at the core of the Enlightenment, the period that gifted us humanity's greatest achievements in science, medicine and commerce and also brought about the abolition of slavery.

On 25 November 2014, Leyonhjelm gave notice in the Senate that he would be introducing a bill for the recognition of same sex marriage. He told the Senate that he and his wife of 30 years were not married and that he saw no need for the institution of

marriage. But if the institution were to be provided by the state, it should be available to all couples regardless of gender or sexual orientation. In media commentary, he ruled out marriage of close family members 'for biological reasons' and he ruled out polygamy for everyone including Muslims who thought it socially and religiously acceptable. So he does see some role for the state in drawing the line. He told the Senate:

To my libertarian constituency, it barely qualifies as progress. To them, a better option would be to remove the government from marriage entirely by repealing the *Marriage Act* and leaving it to the law of contract-as in civilian countries. I do not disagree, and my own situation reflects that. But that is not as simple to achieve as it sounds. The fact is: the community places a certain significance on the institution of marriage. It accepts that individuals can live together in all kinds of relationships, irrespective of gender and numbers, but marriage is different. We need to respect that.

Next day he introduced to the Senate his *Freedom to Marry Bill 2014*. He told the Senate that the purpose of his bill was to address an injustice: 'When the law says that gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, and intersex people cannot marry, in an important sense it is diminishing their liberty and their ability to make life plans: a major choice is closed off.' In the United States, 34 States as well as the District of Columbia now permit same sex marriage. In 15 of those States, the change was made by federal court decisions made and applied in only the last three months. It has been a rapid change, but not driven by state congresses or public referenda.

The initiative has come in the federal courts reading the judicial tea leaves in the light of the Supreme Court's 2013 *Windsor* decision which struck down Congress's attempt to limit State laws to marriage between a man and a woman. The Court did not decide whether the States had to legislate for same sex marriage. There are 16 States where same sex marriage is still not allowed. There are five applications presently before the Supreme Court asking that the court rule in favour of same sex marriage in some of these remaining 16 States.

On 9 January 2015, the court is likely to indicate that it is now ready to consider the question. As ever, the contested moral political issue will be decided in the United States by the nine Supreme Court judges; here in Australia, the decision will rest with the Commonwealth Parliament.

Just as the Supreme Court judges have discretion when to buy into the argument, so too the Coalition party room in Australia has discretion when to decide on a conscience vote for all its members, thereby indicating that the government is ready for the matter to be debated again in the Parliament.

There is very little chance that the Abbott government will want to hand the bouquet for breaking the logjam on same sex marriage to David Leyonhjelm. As I predicted a year ago, the issue is unlikely to come to a head in the Australian Parliament until after the next federal election, by which time the US Supreme Court will have handed down its decision, probably in October 2015.

I continue to support a conscience vote for Australian members of parliament. Given that there is little support on either side of the argument for civil unions, I accept that same sex marriage is the only way ultimately to extend equality and respect to same sex couples wanting state endorsement for their committed relationships, and that the state has an interest in supporting such relationships which enhance the care for such couples especially when they are sick or ageing. But I continue to plead with lawmakers that we not lose sight of cultivating the best possible arrangements for the bearing and nurturing of children.

That is why I continue to favour state adoption agencies being able to consider the desirability of an unrelated child being nurtured in a family unit constituted by an adult male and an adult female. This is still a relevant, though not the only, consideration in determining the best interests of the child.

It is also why I favour a review of state administration and supervision of assisted reproductive technology which produces children without one known biological mother

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and one known biological father. I readily accept that in future there will be some children unharmed by not having such parentage, but I fear there will be others who will find it an unbearable existential burden.

Their prospective voices need to be heard amongst the popping of champagne corks in favour of marriage equality. To get this right, we Australians will need our parliament to be a more considered and dignified place than a battlefield, and our politicians will need to use words not just as fighting tools. Those like Ricky Muir on the Senate cross benches will need to brace themselves. And David Leyonhjelm might need to step out of the limelight and defer to someone in the Coalition joint party room.

*Frank Brennan SJ, professor of law at Australian Catholic University, is presently Gasson professor at the Boston College Law School.*

## God's little twinkler

### CREATIVE

*Jordie Albiston*



-watery reliquary -mass -God's little  
twinkler -trembly bubble of life -  
raindrop clinging still to cold window glass

-empty sentence -koan -heavy  
as nothing -words flown the coop  
-cicada prison fits precisely what is gone

-vellum lips -slant -virgin mouth  
ajar -sex the only lexicon -open-  
throated orchid knows no word for want

-bony finger -point -incunabula  
of torment -ding dong the witch -  
winter trees waving without a stitch on

-illuminated deity -stunning -  
hosanna on heat -heaven in a melt  
-earth on its knees beneath serious sun

-impossible pigface -numberless -salt-  
blown sandblasted miles -an eyeful of  
pink -October rolls out its carpet of smiles

-incoming jet -underbelly -proud  
pterodactyl flight -day turns to night -  
pelican trades places split second with sun

-passionate climate -flame -  
-fire makes of life her own requiem -spiralling wind -clockwise -mocking what's solid -  
blowing the beach away - millions of worlds whirling before your eyes -unanswerable  
truth -why -when is forever -what is a death -black swan's questioning neck needs no  
reply



*Two of Melbourne-based Jordie Albiston's eight poetry collections have been adapted for music theatre and have enjoyed seasons at the Sydney Opera House. Her awards include the 2010 NSW Premier's Prize.*

*Girl at window image by Shutterstock.*

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## Death of a disability dynamo

### MEDIA

*Fatima Measham*



Death loses its abstraction when a person like Stella Young dies. It becomes material. It makes itself manifest in the silence, which it somehow solidifies: the unwritten word, the unspoken retort, the unmade joke.

It is difficult even now to think of a world without Stella. I do not know her, but knew of her. She captured our attention in 2010 as the founding editor of the ABC blog Ramp Up, where she showed exceptional lucidity and passion as a disability advocate.

I met her once when she took time out of her Saturday to coach first-time panelists for a writers festival. She is as everyone says she is. Was. Is there a more awful word?

Stella was sharp, funny and warm, whether in person or elsewhere. She was fearless. She wrote a [letter](#) to her 80-year old self, published only last month, which is ferocious in its clarity. She outlines what she expects her life to have been by that age, full of love and loss, and marked by inner triumphs. There are no references to regret.

'Perhaps that thing I always say flippantly, usually with a third glass of wine in my hand - that I'm here for a good time not a long time - perhaps that's true,' she writes.

'But on my path to reach you, I promise to grab every opportunity with both hands, to say yes as often as I can, to take risks, to scare myself stupid, and to have a shitload of fun.'

It is worth wondering what Stella would think of the reaction to her death, knowing how much she bristled at being described as courageous and inspirational. 'Disability doesn't make you exceptional,' she told a TED audience in Sydney last April. 'But questioning

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what you think you know about it does.'

She flipped what we thought we knew about many things. She preferred to be called a disabled person rather than a person with disability, not just because her being a person should be assumed anyway, but because it correctly puts the onus not on her physical limitations, but on how the conditions around her - from stairs to policies - failed to account for people like her. She made disability visible and vocal, and made us wear the shame because it fit us - not her.

She wrote about abortion from the nuanced perspective of a pro-choice feminist with a genetic condition that can be screened. She pointed out the limits of a deficit view of disability, especially in debates around voluntary assisted death or euthanasia, where medical assertions of 'quality of life' don't necessarily cohere with how a disabled person views their dignity.

Stella did not make it easy for us to be passive, unthinking or dispassionate. She asserted her presence in our lives in this way, even if we had never met her.

When people who shine fiercely leave us, we realise suddenly the darkness that had been held at bay.

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## Almost no silver lining in new TPV cloud

### AUSTRALIA

*Kerry Murphy*



Thursday evening's Senate debate on the *Migration and Maritime Powers Legislation Amendment (Resolving the Asylum Legacy Caseload) Bill* illustrated the truly unacceptable choices faced by the cross bench Senators. Labor and the Greens opposed the Bill and unsuccessfully sought to move amendments to reduce its harshness. But what finally passed will haunt us for years to come.

The speeches by Senators Xenophon, Madigan and Muir are worth reading, as they show what happens when Senators are faced by an intransigent Government determined to reintroduce bad law. Law that we know causes serious stress and mental harm, yet we have reintroduced it.

In deciding to reluctantly support a bad law, Senator Xenophon set out his reasons, and they make compelling reading.

It has and will continue to be a passionate debate about a wicked and vexed issue. For me it is always important, always, to remember that we are dealing with legislation that relates to people, our fellow human beings. They are not numbers; they are not the myriad of labels that have been applied to them by all sides of the debate; and they are not political inconveniences, punching bags or props. They are mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, friends, neighbours and acquaintances. They are, in short, people just like you and me who have found themselves in extraordinarily difficult circumstances - some, unimaginable circumstances. &hellip;

Senator Xenophon spoke of his fear that not passing the Bill was worse than passing a flawed Bill:

&hellip; If this bill does not pass there is also the real risk that the government will use a nonstatutory process instead, which will not result in any better outcomes for the people who are currently in Australia. This problem is a true Hobson's choice: we are left to decide between two potentially negative outcomes. &hellip; What is being proposed by the government here is by no means perfect-in fact, it is quite imperfect-but the

consequences of not supporting it will mean that asylum seekers will be in a worse position, in my view.

The Senator spoke of amendments agreed to by Government, which while not great, are better than nothing. Senator Muir also voted reluctantly for the Bill and stated:

Coming to a decision on this bill has been, without a doubt, one of the hardest decisions I have had to face-a choice between a bad option and a worse option. It is a decision that involves human beings: children, mothers, fathers. It involves the lives of people who have had to endure unthinkable hardship, people pushed to the point where they go to any lengths to seek asylum.

In contrast, Senator Madigan voted against the Bill mainly because of the TPV reintroduction:

The bill will do many things, not least of which is the bringing back of TPVs. As I understand it, the government will not back down on their view in support of TPVs, and I have a problem in backing down on my view against them&hellip;.&hellip;I personally think the whole debate has become so polarised.

The reintroduction of Temporary Protection Visas (TPV) reflects intransigence by the Government. The TPV was only ever a punishment visa for arriving in Australia by boat and then being found to be a refugee. The Coalition made it part of their policy and have now removed any of the hope for a permanent visa that it may have had under the Howard Government.

Once on a TPV, the best you will ever get is another TPV, for another three years unless you apply for the Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV). You can work or study on a TPV but there is no family reunion and it seems no chance to travel to see your family.

The prolonged negotiations mean that we finally have the criteria for the SHEV and they are very restrictive. The SHEV gives you five years in Australia but you must live and work or study in yet to be designated regional areas. If you spend 42 months earning or learning, without receiving certain yet to be specified social security benefits, then you get the prize of being able to apply for up to 42 other visa types - some temporary (such as student or the 457 temporary working visa) and some permanent. Permanent protection is not available, ever.

Realistically, unless someone marries or forms a *de facto* relationship with an Australian, their chances of gaining a permanent visa are slim because the skilled and employer sponsored visas have high level English and work experience requirements. They are designed for the skilled migration program, not the lucky dip prize for refugees. Skilled migration is also expensive, and often requires a skills assessment.

For those traumatised by their refugee experiences, or more recently by detention or even just the asylum process, finding full time work in one of the designated areas, in an occupation that leads to a possible permanent visa will be hard. Not every job will lead to a skilled visa, and some occupations require sponsorship by a State or Territory as well.

For those who are unable to progress out of the SHEV or TPV, the only options are to return home or apply for a new TPV or SHEV, and look for some other occupation.

Though it is possible to travel on a SHEV, you must get prior permission from the Minister and establish compassionate and compelling reasons to do so. No other substantive visa has such an irrational and punitive condition that restricts travel. You can visit your family in a third country, but only if there are 'compassionate and compelling reasons'. Very generous indeed.

There are many other changes in the way refugee law is interpreted, and most will make it harder to be successful. In the meantime, the 30,000 asylum seekers still waiting will get permission to work while the Department grinds through the caseload. People will be released from detention and eventually the resettlement program will be increased in four years to over 19,000 places- after the Government cut it last year by 6250 places in what some would call an 'efficiency dividend'.

It is possible to understand why Senators Xenophon and Muir supported this bad law.

They saw it as a small improvement now for people in desperate circumstances, and that

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is true. Without their intervention, people would be stuck in a limbo with no visa. The silver lining in the cloud is the realistically limited possibilities for permanency for people we accept are in need of international protection. The real culprit is the irrational and punitive policy pursued by the Government.

On Friday morning, I was told by an asylum seeker who is still awaiting a decision: 'It is so stressful to live another three years in limbo and uncertainty.' Indeed it will be stressful for them, and from what I can see, there will be little relief from this unwarranted anxiety caused by our law.

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## Good parents don't make gender stereotypical choices

### AUSTRALIA

*Michael Mullins*



Among silly season news stories in the media this year is the trivialising treatment of Greens Senator Larissa Waters' deadly serious call for parents to avoid buying Christmas toys that gender stereotype their children.

She quotes a No Gender December campaign coordinator's declaration that 'women mow lawns and men push prams, but while we've moved on, many toy companies haven't'. Waters says apparently harmless child gender stereotypes can adversely affect self-perception and career aspirations, and even end in domestic violence that echoes the bullying many have experienced as children.

Liberal Senator Cory Bernardi heard about the media release and thought his fellow senator had 'consumed too much Christmas eggnog'. He said: 'To say you're giving a boy a truck or a hammer is somehow leading to domestic violence and gender pay gaps is simply bizarre'. He had in mind the so-called 'gender wars' of the 1970s, rather than all the work that has been done to identify the causes of young people committing suicide. Meanwhile there was a mixed message from the Prime Minister, who sniggered and joked about political correctness as he uttered the cliché 'let boys be boys, let girls be girls'. But then he was spot on when he went on to declare: 'Above all else, let parents do what they think is in the best interests of their children.'

Of course all devoted parents work hard to make sure their children are 'happy little Vegemites'. Mostly, thoughtful choice of appropriately gendered toys, clothing and other accoutrements, helps to give children a sense of psychological fulfilment. These things often have them feeling one with their environment and not on its margins.

Parents put love before dogma in supporting their children to come to terms with who they are with respect to gender. Dogma refers to social norms and expectations in the various sectors of society. Tony Abbott's utterance 'Let boys be boys, let girls be girls - that's always been my philosophy' is an expression of dogma. It is, to turn his slur on himself, politically correct.

Dogma is part of a deductive process that does real harm to people who don't measure up to expectations. Dogma judges and excludes them. They feel alienated from family and various social groups and units of society and develop a sense that their life is unworthy. A logical consequence of that is that they can be driven to thoughts of suicide.

The Church is often perceived to put dogma before love, and the desire to redress this was behind discussion that took place at the Synod on the Family, reflecting Pope Francis' 'Who am I to judge?' approach to acknowledging and affirming diversity. 'Who am I to judge?' has become a catchphrase very much identified with the pontificate of Pope Francis. It can also act as a reality check formula for parents of children struggling to establish gender identity.

Parents must understand that choices of toys for Christmas that are based on dogmas such as 'blue for boys, pink for girls' do not necessarily make their children contented or help them to grow into fulfilled adults. It's much better if parents are able to discern what really makes their children happy and to act on that, even if it means that they themselves end up on the margins of society.



*Michael Mullins is editor of Eureka Street.*

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