Contents

Catherine Marshall
Voting yes to black and gay rights ................................................................. Page 3

Michael McVeigh
Please treasure marriage .............................................................................. Page 6

Ruby Hamad
What is identity politics really? .................................................................. Page 9

Andrew Hamilton
Notes from India’s margins ........................................................................ Page 12

Gillian Bouras
Ghosts of letters past .................................................................................. Page 16

Binoy Kampmark
The violence in making America great again .............................................. Page 19

Fiona Katauskas
Sticking to their guns .................................................................................. Page 22

Fiona Katauskas
Dying to leave ............................................................................................... Page 23

Wally Swist
Cloud meditations ........................................................................................ Page 24

Tseen Khoo and Jen Kwok
The increasing relevance of our Asian Australian cohorts ....................... Page 34

Rachel Kurzyp
Access to housing isn’t a reward it’s a human right ................................. Page 38

Andrew Hamilton
'Seamless garment' extends to care for older Australians ......................... Page 40

Tim Kroenert
Courting women’s and gay rights ............................................................... Page 43

Kate Galloway
Paternalism is no answer to disadvantage ................................................ Page 45

Fiona Katauskas
Political incorrectness gone mad ............................................................... Page 48

David James
Is Google and Facebook’s imitation game doomed? ................................. Page 49

Frank Brennan
The Catholic option for ‘yes’ or ‘no’ ............................................................ Page 52
Julie Perrin
Finding grace amid difference of marriage equality opinion

Ann Deslandes
Refugee rift piques PNG's anti Australian sentiment

David Holdcroft
How forced migration defined Francis' papacy

Hoa Dinh
Euthanasia bill could put vulnerable Victorians at risk
Voting yes to black and gay rights

INTERNATIONAL

Catherine Marshall

One of the first votes I ever cast was the one in which I got to help decide whether a marginalised group of people should have the same rights as me.

It was March 1992. I was a young, white, enfranchised South African working as a journalist at the South African Broadcasting Corporation. A couple of years earlier I had interviewed F. W. de Klerk, then Minister for National Education and Planning, and just months away from being sworn in as state president. He struck me as a man of moral conviction, one who was not willing to be held hostage by an old guard clinging in vain to
its conservative ideology.

The referendum was one of the methodical steps taken by de Klerk in the dismantling of apartheid: the ban on anti-apartheid groups (including the ANC) had been lifted, Nelson Mandela had been released from prison, the group areas act had been abolished and the government had started negotiating with the ANC for a peaceful resolution to its armed insurgency.

Undermining these efforts was the Conservative Party which had, until now, exercised much power in marshallng voters' anti-egalitarian sentiment. Apartheid had taken root in their Calvinist dogma; God had ordained white people as superiors, they believed, and had designated black people (and those of mixed race) the 'hewers of wood and drawers of water' as described in the scriptures. An end to apartheid would be an assault on their religious freedom, and on God's will. De Klerk's reforms infuriated them.

But the electorate was getting restless: it was time for change and they knew it. De Klerk's YES campaign promoted the ideals of peace and equality; NO supporters warned of civil war and chaos and communist rule. Of course none of these things materialised; the YES campaign won, with a massive voter turnout returning an almost 70 per cent vote in favour of reform.

On the day of the referendum, I cast my vote at a school in my childhood neighbourhood alongside other white constituents. We were among a minority of around 12 per cent of the country's population, and the only ones allowed to vote. Then I went back to work, to report on the referendum. It was thrilling to be part of this historic event as both participant and observer. A year later, de Klerk and Mandela jointly won the Nobel Peace Prize, and a year after that South Africa held its first democratic elections.

I've been thinking a lot about that long-ago referendum as Australia 'votes' on the issue of same sex marriage. Of the huddle of empowered whites lining up to determine the rights of people whose skin colour was different from theirs; of myself, a nā'uiuml;ve white woman barely out of school, who got to decide whether my 50-something black colleague could one day vote, too; of the weight that people's individual prejudices were given in determining whether our government would start treating everyone equally in the eyes of the law.

"In years to come, we will hopefully all recognise - as many white South Africans now do - the utter absurdity of asking one group of people to determine the fundamental human rights of another."

Though de Klerk had good reason to call the referendum (apartheid was a time-bomb that could only be defused with the most delicate, the most intuitive of hands) it should never have got to the point where whites were called on to debate the legal rights of blacks. If not for the staunch, morally indefensible support of entrenched discrimination, such change would surely have been passed through parliament.

And so it is with Australia's postal survey: it should never have come to this. We should never have been given the right to debate and determine the legal rights of people whose sexuality doesn't match our own. But for the staunch, morally indefensible support of entrenched discrimination, such change would most certainly have been passed
through parliament.

Instead, homosexual people must now rely on heterosexual people to help determine their marital rights. Much like those 'hewers of wood and drawers of water', they must listen as conservative Christians publicly proclaim their own religious freedoms - and their biblical interpretations of sexuality - to be more sacred than gay people's civil rights. They must sit by as debaters conflate legal marriage and religious matrimony. They must look on as their very personhood is attacked.

When else would we allow one group of people to judge and evaluate another in so public, so humiliating, so divisive a way?

With luck (and some prudence), Australia's NO campaign will suffer the same defeat as did the pro-apartheid campaign during South Africa's historic referendum. Dissenters notwithstanding, Australia will do what the once bigoted, intolerant South Africa did as far back as 2006 and legalise same-sex marriage. And in years to come, we will hopefully all recognise - as many white South Africans now do - the utter absurdity of asking one group of people to determine the fundamental human rights of another.

Catherine Marshall is a Sydney-based journalist and travel writer.
Please treasure marriage

RELIGION

Michael McVeigh

Getting married last year was one of the most significant things I have done in my life. I had found someone who I loved, and who loved me, and who I wanted to start a family with.

It could have ended with that - an agreement to live our lives together. But when we exchanged vows, in church, in front of our family and friends, it felt like we were giving birth to something that had been slowly growing inside us since we'd first found a partner in the other. The marriage gave life to the deep loving connection that we had - one we
both understood as a blessing from God.

Australians are now being asked whether marriage should be made available to same sex couples who want to make the same, in name if not in belief, deep commitment that my wife and I made.

There are many people in our society for whom marriage is extremely important, whether we come from Christian, Muslim, Jewish, or other religious or non-religious backgrounds. One of the main issues with the current politicising of marriage is that it risks devaluing deeply-held understandings of marriage in the same way that other understandings have already been devalued in the modern world.

Our modern, secularised society has a tendency to take institutions that have a deep, spiritual meaning to religious people, and transform them into things that - stripped of much of their meaning - are more acceptable to the masses.

For example, Christmas - once a celebration centred around religious ceremonies - has become for many a day where they gather with family and share gifts. Easter sees stores filled with chocolate eggs and Easter bunnies, but few images reminding people of Christ's death and resurrection.

In a Christian sense, marriage has been about bringing a couple together for life according to the teachings of Jesus. While there might be ups and downs, and even breakdowns, there's still a Christian ideal to aspire to. Similar ideals exist in other religions, and as noted, even people without a particular religious belief can still find beauty and purpose in the idea of a life-long loving commitment to another person.

"My hope is that those who are voting 'yes' see marriage as more than a commodity which same sex attracted people are excluded from."

However, that ideal is often far from evident in today's society. Shows like Married at First Sight, Wife Swap and The Bachelor(ette) turn married relationships into a form of entertainment. Gossip magazines turn relationships into sports - sharing updates each month about which celebrities are getting together or breaking up. Apps like Tinder and OKCupid sell themselves on the chance to experience more relationships, rather than deeper ones. TV shows focus on the dysfunctional, and find little drama in couples getting along. As we look around us, there are few examples of people seeking, let alone finding, relationships that they can see themselves in for the rest of their lives.

On the one hand, one could look at the campaign for marriage equality and feel that it's refreshing that a section of society wants marriage to be affirmed and made more available. But what are people really going to be voting on when they make their decision in the postal survey?

My hope is that those who are voting 'yes' see marriage as more than a commodity which same sex attracted people are excluded from. By voting yes they are saying that they trust same sex couples when they tell them that the love they feel for each other is just as deep, just as enriching and life-giving, as any love that men and women who get married can feel for each other. Their vote says that calling that bond anything but
'marriage' would be a lie.

In the same way, my hope is that those voting 'no' to same sex marriage are doing so out of a deep love for humanity, and only after listening to the experiences of same sex attracted people. If Christians choose to exclude same sex couples from even a secular, non-religious understanding of marriage, it should only be after the sort of passionate engagement with human experience that Jesus modelled in his own life. This is a question of love, and our loving hearts need to be fully engaged in answering it.

Marriage is more than a political and social battleground. One real danger of politicising the definition of marriage isn't so much that people with different belief systems might embrace the beautiful institution of marriage, but that the institution might be further taken away from those who most value it, stripped of its beauty, and sold back to our children as something smaller and less significant.

That would be a tragedy for anyone who treasures the institution of marriage.

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Michael McVeigh is the editor of *Australian Catholics* magazine and senior editor at Jesuit Communications.
What is identity politics really?

AUSTRALIA

Ruby Hamad

The horseshoe theory of politics may be largely discredited, but when it comes to identity politics, the left and right may have far more in common than they admit.

The confusion around this term, and its frequent misuse across the political spectrum, sees it regarded with suspicion and contempt, as both conservatives and the traditional left use it as a slur to dismiss any discussions of racism and sexism.

Speaking at the Museum of Australian Democracy in Canberra recently, former Prime Minister John Howard took identity politics - or rather what he mischaracterised as identity politics - to task. Identity politics, he said, is 'poison to democracy', because it encourages 'the pursuit of individual groups', who may be reluctant to join a political party if 'they think it is dominated by one particular group'.

Similarly, Columbia University professor Mark Lilla blamed the Democrats' US election loss on identity politics, writing 'the age of identity liberalism must be brought to an end', because 'the fixation on diversity' discourages the concept of a shared destiny and duty towards all fellow citizens.

It's true that many identity politics enthusiasts appear to focus on the 'identity' aspect at the expense of the 'politics'. This can be seen in the proliferation of online 'call out culture' where feminist and anti-racist movements expend more energy taking down the 'problematic' figures in their midst than they do challenging the powerful institutions and politicians that oppress us all.

But neither this nor what Howard and Lilla describe is, as Mychal Denzel Smith explained in The New Republic, what identity politics actually is.

Denzel Smith traced its roots to the radical black politics of the 1970s and the black feminist group, The Combahee River Collective, and their manifesto, A Black Feminist Statement. In its original incarnation, identity politics was neither a distraction from economic issues nor a divisive tool to prevent social cohesion.

"It should come as no surprise that older white men such as Howard and Lilla are among the most hostile to the concept since, whatever side of the 'horseshoe' they reside, it is they who remain the closest to power."

Regarding black feminism as 'the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions' of race, class, gender, sexuality and so on, the Collective argued that since no one else was working to liberate black women, leaving them to suffer the worst marginalisation on multiple levels (we now call this 'intersectionality'),
then it follows that 'the most ... radical politics come directly out of our own identity'.

In other words, their embrace of 'the politics of identity' was not a call for every group to focus only on themselves but a declaration that the liberation of black women necessitates the liberation of everyone else.

Identity politics then was not created, as some argue, to create division or distract from 'real issues', but as a reminder that discrimination and oppression is based on proximity to power. The closer to power a person is, the less their 'identity' is held against them.

It should come as no surprise that older white men such as Howard and Lilla are among the most hostile to the concept since, whatever side of the 'horseshoe' they reside, it is they who remain the closest to power.

Nonetheless, there is much to be concerned about when it comes to how we see and invoke identity today. Despite being referred to by others as an 'identitarian', it is not something I have ever used to describe myself, mostly because I fear neither those who embrace it nor those who loathe it use the 'politics of identity' in the radical spirit which the Combahee Collective intended it.

Although I write frequently on issues of race and gender, I know these to be structural, not individual issues. Furthermore, while I believe we need to hear directly from those most affected by specific issues, I have never argued that only people from certain groups are permitted to talk about certain issues nor that they are always and automatically right. This attitude leaves me cold both because it lacks intellectual rigour and because it only serves to keep us locked in these boxes marking us as 'different'.

Nonetheless, I am called upon to 'defend' identity politics by some while being dismissed by others as 'identity politics at its most feral'. I can only conclude that this is because we have reached a point where any discussion of any 'ism' is now considered identity politics and identity politics is considered a performance of shallow individualism.

"It seems that white socialist men are determined to live the revolutionary dream by proxy, and do not appreciate any complexity that Syrian voices who disagree with them bring to the discussion."

When I pointed out, for instance, that western leftist factions ignore Syrian voices as they fight the Syrian conflict by proxy from the safety of the west, my objections were shouted down as 'stupid identity politics'. It seems that white socialist men are determined to live the revolutionary dream by proxy, and do not appreciate any complexity that Syrian voices who disagree with them bring to the discussion. Never mind that is not they, but Syrians like my family who actually live in the danger zones, who will live or die with the consequences.

How convenient that 'identity politics' means they can feel good about refusing to listen.

Despite the best efforts of both conservatives and progressives to paint it as such, pointing out and demanding an end to racism, or sexism, or any form of discrimination, is not shallow identity posturing; it is material analysis. The more marginalised 'identities'
a person has, the more likely they are to be economically alienated and disenfranchised.

I can't see us returning to the original spirit of identity politics from where we are now. But while there is much to legitimately critique about it, denying the additional barriers to freedom and opportunity some of us experience is not a rejection of our supposed self-absorption or a genuine call for unity; it is a rejection of us as people and a demand that we submit to the demands of the dominant population.

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Notes from India's margins

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

In the 1970s members of Catholic religious congregations held often heated conversations about poverty. The reasons were complex. The heat was understandable.
Disturbing the Dust
Notes from the margins

Tony Herbert S.J.

Catholic spirituality is the following of
Jesus whose life, mission and way of death were bound up with poverty. This was normally interpreted in terms of simplicity and austerity of life, a guilt-inducing enough topic of conversation when community arrangements were put into question.

Discussion became more complex when Catholics recognised that the poverty of the many was not simply a fact but was imposed on them by the choices and attitudes of the few. They resonated with Anne Sexton's address to Jesus, 'Skinny man, you are somebody's fault'. Many religious privileged ministry with and to the poor and the advocacy that it required. The discussion then turned to the relative value of different works to which people had given their lives. It became a conversation best avoided.

A recent book by Fr Tony Herbert, Disturbing the Dust: Notes from the Margins, invites a return to this conversation. A Jesuit priest who has worked for over 30 years in India with the poorest villagers, he grapples with three questions: what to make of poverty, what happens when you commit yourself to people who are indigent, and how, in living, the three aspects of poverty - religious poverty, material poverty and its injustices, and personal emptiness - come together. He builds his reflections around encounters with villagers on his own journey.

His story begins when his religious ideal of serving the poorest of the poor leads him to enter their dusty reality. He finds himself a stranger there, unable to read situations, to understand people's lives or to lead them to better themselves.

Social analysis helped him to understand the nature of their poverty and its effects. They were of lower caste, in debt to higher caste landlords who underpaid them and took their land, abetted by the judicial and administrative system. Young people who protested against the injustice were savagely beaten by higher caste thugs and came to see themselves as naturally inferior and worthless. If they stood in the way of coal mining in the area, they were simply pushed off the land. They were not seen as inferior: their humanity was not seen at all.

Any foreigner who wished to associate with Dalits was naturally suspect and unwelcome in this world. When disturbing the dust of poverty by encouraging people to stand up for their rights and accompanying them to see landlords or officials, he was humiliated along with them, as their fear made them revert to subservience.

"He allows us to enter his terror as he rides at night with a villager on a motorbike along unfamiliar roads searching for the body of a fellow Jesuit murdered for his advocacy on behalf of his people."

Constant failure, loss of the security, social place and power to persuade that had undergirded his self-respect and the fears attendant on his work confronted him with his own inner poverty. He allows us to enter his terror as he rides at night with a villager on a motorbike along unfamiliar roads searching for the body of a fellow Jesuit murdered for his advocacy on behalf of his people.

His path also inevitably led to tension with his fellow Jesuits and church leaders who worked with less impoverished groups, mostly through education, to better their lives. It was hard for them to understand a sustained ministry to a small, powerless community
apparently with only repeated failure as its badge.

In his case tension did not become a breach. Like others who worked among the Dalits, he was supported by his religious congregation. He was sometimes helped to find support in his advocacy for his people through well-connected alumni of Jesuit educational institutions.

The deeper source of tension, however, lay in the difference between the personal depth of his commitment and the nature of institutions. Institutions, educational or social, are properly concerned with effective service, with sustainable programs, with evidence-based research, with winning battles and with a life-work balance. These qualities make them powerful allies in the struggle for justice of people who are poor.

The personal commitment to the indigent, however, leads people to stay with people and to sift through the ashes of the latest failure or dispossessio to find there grains of possibility. With the commitment to the poor, as in the following of Jesus, there is no balance, whether on the scales of justice, between life and work, or between defeat and pride. If the miners destroy your people's land and living, you help them find work in the mines.

There is a tension between Catholic institutions and the radical following of Jesus, but it is a tension between commitments that need one another. The nature and depth of the commitment to following Jesus along the path of poverty is a gift both to the people who are served. It is also a gift to Catholic institutions. It helps keep them honest. Tony Herbert’s book brings that gift in a powerful and non-combative way.

Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of Eureka Street.
Ghosts of letters past

ARTS AND CULTURE

Gillian Bouras

Last time I was in Athens I saw a ghost. Well, you expect such experiences in an ancient city, but this shade of a departed friend belonged far away in another country. Yet there he was in an Athenian street.

Even with his back turned to me, I knew him instantly. Slight build, skinny legs, T-shirt and long shorts, runners and a baseball cap. Even his gait was the same. Reason was nothing; impulse was all. And so I followed this figure for about three blocks, keeping at a discreet distance.

Of course the inevitable happened. The man eventually turned so that I saw his face, and thus realised he was nothing like my friend at all. I felt as if I'd been doused with icy
water, even though the returned sweet voice of reason was whispering 'Well, obviously ... ' The same, but not the same.

But the whole strange episode set me thinking, and I've now decided that one can be haunted in many ways. For example, conscientious friends have recently sent me bundles of the letters I wrote them decades before.

These bundles were almost literally bolts from the blue, and I found myself strangely reluctant to look at them, or even loose the letters from their envelopes. The longer I procrastinated, the more I asked myself why I was doing so, and concluded that memory is another form of haunting: those letters are home to ghosts.

I wasn't so reluctant seven years ago. During a visit to Melbourne I watched and waited as my friend Lesley came along the street. Behind her, bearing the weight of three large boxes, toiled her son.

Lesley had started writing to me when I was first in Greece, and 30 years later the correspondence was still going strong. But she had decided to return the collection, the letters she had received from me, as it was thus far, and it turned out she had saved everything. The boxes contained a masterpiece of organisation, for every letter, postcard and photo was in its own plastic envelope, and all were in chronological order; there was even a pair of white gloves.

"I experienced intimations of mortality at an early age, but of course these are more pressing now, and like Prospero, my every third thought is of the grave."

I managed to get the content of the boxes home to Greece, where persistent work ensured that the letters I had received from Lesley were interleaved with mine to her in some sort of chronological order. Soon after, I read approximately five years' worth of correspondence, and then stopped. But I enjoyed the reminiscences, the remembrance of times past, the comments on my own letters, the photos, the bookmarks, the newspaper cuttings we had sent to each other.

But now: why the reluctance to revisit the past? One answer to this question is that much has happened in seven years. After all, pseudo science has it that we are quite literally new people at the end of that time: shedding and renewing of skin (not to mention the wrinkling of it), changes in organs, alteration in appearance, and so on. And it goes without saying that the inexorable march of time and the quixotic nature of fate bring other changes.

I experienced intimations of mortality at an early age, but of course these are more pressing now, and like Prospero, my every third thought is of the grave. When my grandmother was about 90, she told my mother she didn't want to die. My mother understandably floundered a little. 'But you've always believed in the life everlasting,' she said. 'Oh, I'm not worried about that,' came the reply. 'I just don't want to say goodbye to you all.' I understand this, and old letters remind me that I have already said goodbye to my little boys.

It is obvious that I cannot return to what is past and is no more, and I enjoy my life now for all sorts of reasons. But I can still yearn for what I had: the adventure of watching my children grow, the rather egotistical belief that I had souls in my keeping, the deluded
idea that I had plenty of time, the precious interludes of my parents' visits. Then there is the question of my essential *self*. Like the ghost in Athens, I am the same, but not.

So I have not read those old letters. But I will. One day.

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.
The violence in making America great again

INTERNATIONAL

Binoy Kampmark

Such is the modern conditioning inherent in the news cycle that assumptions were immediate. A terror attack had taken place on a public gathering at the Route 91 Harvest Festival in Las Vegas. It was, as the case had been in the Bataclan shootings in Paris on 13 November 2015, a matter of inflicting mass damage in an enclosed space filled with revellers.

The toll proved terrifying. The shooter, from his room on the 32nd floor of the Mandalay Bay Hotel, had inflicted 500 casualties, with 59 fatalities. (This number is bound to rise.) When the death toll passed 49, the efforts of Stephen Paddock of Mesquite, Nevada had shaded those of Omar Mateen at the Orlando Pulse night club last year.

Within a matter of minutes, the Las Vegas Police Department lifted the urgency of its tweets, noting that the shooting had become a mass casualty event. It proved so stretched that various services were halted. 'Due to the mass shooting incident last night, our Records and Fingerprint Bureau, at our Headquarters campus, is closed for business today.'

It was cold comfort to see that the attack was a local affair, not of official, internationally directed terrorism, but a mass shooting in its traditionally violent form. The behaviour of the shooter could not be explained as an act of anti-American delight, an instance of affirmation to a foreign ideology or code.

There was no call of smug delight surging its way through social media from ISIS, an ecstatic assumption of responsibility. Paddock had seemingly worked alone, fastidiously assessing the situation, stockpiling arms in his room, and waiting for the moment when the crowd would be most concentrated.

Las Vegas sheriff Joseph Lombardo stonewalled on the semantics. Had an act of mass domestic terrorism just taken place on American soil? Perhaps not, despite the Nevada statute defining it as such: the police had yet to ascertain what the 'belief system' of the shooter was. When specifically pressed on whether this could be deemed an act of 'domestic terrorism', Lombardo hedged: 'we have to establish what his motivation was, first.'

President Donald Trump also avoided the term. Terrorism has its loaded associations, a distinct demonology. To suggest that a US citizen might be a terrorist hardly accords with
the project of Making America Great Again. Paddock was not a Muslim, which would have been a useful alibi for the restrictive policy on arrivals from specific Islamic countries.

"This was a side of the United States that has spoken for generations: the man with the gun is king, if only for a brief and spectacularly bloody period of time."

It follows that there are no such things as American terrorists, since Americans do not commit acts of terror. Such tormented logic explains Trump's assiduous references to 'senseless murder' and an 'act of pure evil'.

Shaun King, in a penned piece for The Intercept, played on this theme, bringing in the essence of identity politics. (Perhaps only in the United States can matters of colour find their way with effortlessness into a discussion of mass murder.) 'Paddock, like the majority of mass shooters in this country, was a white American.' A cruel reasoning was at play: 'Whiteness, somehow, protects men from being labelled terrorists.'

The question of toll and cost remain marked but unanswered. In Trump's America, it has become fashionable to vent the spleen, to lash out at the unmentioned, to malign without distinction. The forgotten shall speak; the ignored shall be recognised again. But this was a side of the United States that has spoken for generations: the man with the gun is king, if only for a brief and spectacularly bloody period of time.

As the Sandy Hook Promise group, named after the 2012 atrocity at the elementary school that gave it its name, noted in the aftermath of the shootings, discussion and inertia tend to be the mineral elements of the debate on gun violence. 'Over the past five years, we have witnessed how we generally respond (or don't) as a country to mass shootings like Las Vegas.'

The response tends to be 'cyclical', eventually normalising the unspeakable. It starts with searing grief, followed by a debate about banning assault weapons or encouraging the arming of even more Americans; it moves on to mental debility and the 'good guys vs bad guys'. Then come the mumblings on policy, where inertia sets in. Discuss options, draft them, but never pass them.

In terms of a durable legacy from the legislatures, change will be scant. There will be prayers for loved ones, plentiful work for the counsellors, and stump positions for politicians. Under the Obama administration, changes to gun control were cosmetic and even frustrated at a time when the Democrats had a majority in the Senate. Currently before the House of Representatives is the Sportsmen Heritage and Recreational Act which actually lessens restrictions.

'By the end of the next week,' rue the members of the Sandy Hook Promise group, 'this story will be almost gone as if it never happened, even while those most impacted are still reeling from shock and grief.'
Dr Binoy Kampmark is a former Commonwealth Scholar who lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne.
Sticking to their guns

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas

Dying to leave

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas

Cloud meditations

ARTS AND CULTURE

Wally Swist

Selected poems

Cloud meditation

Even when I was a child,
I had a distinct intuition that I had lived
previous lives in which I was trying to

enlighten others around me. I find
most people are not receptive, and, to
an astonishing degree, they think that

they know so much more than I do
when the truth of the matter is that
they know barely anything of what

they speak at all.
I spoke with someone the other day
who told me about a person who gave

workshops on cloud meditations,
that after anyone took a class of his
they looked at the sky differently.

Although when that teacher
wanted to meet with the person
I spoke with at twilight to gain

a different perspective on looking at
the sky, they didn't go since they said
it was too hot at that time of the day.

I neither believe in someone who
teaches cloud meditations,
which resonates with such new age
shallowness it could be what
the Fort River looks like after
a drought summer, with no rain for

six weeks; or anyone who doesn't
follow through on anything due to
the heat at a certain time of day

if it really has the import for them
that they claim. I would trust neither
person with any modicum of truth.
Whatever truth you could offer them
they would hand it back to you, and
say, *this isn't truth, this is just*

*another cloud in the sky.*
Whereas, an artist or writer invested
in their craft, a J. M. W. Turner,
painting clouds, and not just
giving classes on meditating on them;
or, myself, might write:

*clear summer day -
clouds shapeshift and vanish
over the Peace Pagoda.*

**Ode to the letter 'A'**
Initial vowel
that always reminds us that

we are beginners who are
about to begin, where would

we be without you? How
would our school year
dreams of the best report
cards be without you to strive
toward? Where would our
ability to describe a sneeze
be without the stress on you,
leaving God bless standing
alone as an answer to achoo!
And what about apple?:
the delicious and hardy
fruit of the discontent
in the garden between
Adam and Eve that provides
the first soft syllable before
that lusty crunch past
the skin and into the juicy
white pomaceous flesh?
What would our physicians
do when placing down that

popsicle stick tongue
depressor, as they peer

into our mouths and
look into our throats,

asking us to say *ah*, if not
for you? Where would

we all be if we didn't have
you to depend on when

we needed to express our
appreciation in our daily

salutations with one another
if we could not even begin to

utter *auf weidersehen* or *y'all*?
How would we ever possibly

think to start all of the words
that begin with a
in the lexicon of our lives
without you as our red letter?

Mall walker
If you arrive early enough
you can begin your laps before any store
opens, observe the business owners
and staff open for the day. It is
one of your only tacit social connections -

a retiree whom most people have
forgotten or who many no longer want
to see. Although the black and white
linoleum could be called an art deco
pattern, few would even think about its

mesmerising aesthetic. A saw whines
from a storefront closed for upscale design.
The worker whose dropped roll of tape
you fielded several months ago, like
a ground ball, waves in acknowledgment -

and you respond, appreciative of small
reciprocities. There is always someone
new rounding a corner, beginning
a lap of their own, often a pair of women
discussing their worlds, or a prospective employee carefully holding
their job application as if it were a leaf
from the King James Bible or the Koran.
Sometimes an infrequent regular
comes your way: the professor emeritus in economics, an octogenarian,
with whom you have traded courtesies.
And there is the young man,
plugged into his ear buds,
with whom you have never spoken to,
just off the bus, sipping his coke,
waiting on a steel bench until he can
begin his shift as a dishwasher
or prep cook, who always waves,
who is as much a part of your day
as you are his. No nationality is
excluded here, no one is castigated
due to gender. By definition
the air conditioned market-place is
of an egalitarian nature.

To window-shop or to purchase is legal tender. To walk among the indigent troops of retirees for the sole sake of exercise is an act of gratitude for those whose practice it is to appreciate each day as if it were the last. One never knows if the person you no longer see while walking the mall is still here or gone forever. Sterile yet not antiseptic, the mall glimmers from tiled floor to the skylights in the ceiling, as the mall walker’s soles step almost soundlessly, as if over glass, through a concatenation of the mall’s phantasmagoric aquatic reflections and its synthetic splendour, a swimmer swimming through an otherworldly but fabricated watery glitter.
Reading Tagore

‘Nirvana is not the blowing out of a candle. It is
the extinguishing of a flame because day has come.’
- Rabindranath Tagore

Your words find me again this morning
in the cold spring sunlight,

reminding me of when I first found you,
reading the dulcet verses in Gitanjali;

and then later, after spending a night
with a friend on Clipper Street

in San Francisco, taking the bus back
across the Golden Gate,

early the next day, with one
of your books in my hands, having just

had a square of baklava
for breakfast; now over forty years later,

I am still not able to distinguish the taste
of honey in my mouth
from the lyricism in your poetry, as I
rode back to San Rafael,

over the bay in
Marin, Tamalpais a beacon in the near
distance; the green California hills still
lush after the winter rains.

Wally Swist's books include *Huang Po and the Dimensions of Love*, *The Daodejing: A New Interpretation*, with David Breeden and Steven Schroeder, *Invocation*, and *The Windbreak Pine*. His forthcoming books are *The View of the River*, *Candling the Eggs*, and *Singing for Nothing: Selected Nonfiction as Literary Memoir*. 
The increasing relevance of our Asian Australian cohorts

AUSTRALIA

Tseen Khoo and Jen Kwok

It would be fair to say that Australia is in a hyper-nationalist phase. Pauline Hanson's One Nation party is back in the Federal Parliament, extremist anti-migration micro-parties have gained a foothold, and recent proposals for migrant entry echo the days of the White Australia dictation tests, which was once used to exclude those who were considered 'undesirable'. 
Yet, our national population is more diverse than ever, particularly when it comes to those of Asian Australian heritage. Just how diverse is something we need to examine more closely if we are to develop a more inclusive, welcoming society.

It is commonly understood that more than half of Australians were born overseas or have a parent who was born overseas. It is also commonly understood that Australia has one of the largest overseas born populations of any nation - 28 per cent according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics in March. These statements are easily translated into the slogan that Australia is one of the world's most successful multicultural nations.

When we take a closer look at the 2016 Census, tracking key characteristics and change across Australia's Asian populations, we find the extent to which cultural and ethnic diversity is a far more common characteristic among younger generations of Australians.

Taken from a total of 3.5 million people representing 15.1 per cent of the total Australian population, the median age for those of Asian ancestry was 30 years, compared to 38 years for Australians across the board. When we drill down into an analysis of Australians by age group, we find that close to 1 in 4 people living in Australia between the ages of 20 and 34 years were from an Asian ancestry.

Even when we remove non-permanent migrants (such as international students), the last ten years tells a story about transformative change in relation to racial and cultural origin.

These shifts are not only changing the way the next generation of Australians looks. It is changing the way these Australians relate to the institutions that represent them, attitudes and perceptions that are largely out of step with what is presented in conventional media and popular culture.

"Our Asian Australian demographic is growing, particularly across the younger age
brackets, and Australia's civic, educational and cultural organisations must do more than pay lip service to supporting a diverse population."

When we add back the tremendous temporary migration flows occurring in Australia's urban centres, we could ask whether our current cultural and civic institutions are sophisticated enough to depict this diversity, let alone explore it in any meaningful sense. The answer may well be no, given the findings in the publication Leading for Change (Australian Human Rights Commission), the necessity of founding an organisation like Diversity Arts Australia, and numerous other initiatives that aim to counteract representations of Australia as only a white nation.

Asian Australian activism has grown over the last couple of decades, and Asian Australian scholarly activism is a small but important part of this broader momentum. For example, the Asian Australian Studies Research Network (AASRN) supports researchers networking in these areas, and is a mobilising platform for intellectual and cultural activist projects relevant to Asian Australians. Its publications, such as this recent special issue of the Journal of Australian Studies, includes papers that demonstrate the important cultural work being done by community and scholarly researchers. They provide answers that many assume aren't out there: What does Japanese Australian history look like? What is going on in Sydney's Chinatown and what does it mean? Is there such a thing as queer Asian Australian identity?

Over ten years and longer, the network's presence has generated a range of outcomes in academia, the creative arts, and for cultural activist communities. The AASRN emerged from a broader desire held by scholars and cultural producers across migrant communities to understand ourselves better and to tell different stories, stories that are sensitive to the power dynamics of not only who tells them but also how they are told.

Our Asian Australian demographic is growing, particularly across the younger age brackets, and Australia's civic, educational and cultural organisations must do more than pay lip service to supporting a diverse population.

Tseen Khoo is a lecturer at La Trobe University and founder/convenor of the Asian Australian Studies Research Network (AASRN), a network for academics, community researchers, and cultural workers who are interested in the area of Asian Australian Studies. She tweets as @tseenster.
Jen Tsen Kwok is an honourary research fellow at the University of Queensland, an associate at the Asia Institute, University of Melbourne, and a founding member of the Asian Australian Democracy Caucus (AADC).
Access to housing isn't a reward it's a human right

ECONOMICS

Rachel Kurzyp

The Australian government has recently committed to spending an additional $375.3 million - with funding to be matched by state and territory governments - over three years on improving housing outcomes and reducing the number of people sleeping rough.

On the face of it, increased government spending makes sense. Demand for emergency accommodation is at a historic high due to people on low incomes being unable to afford increasing rent prices, access limited public and community services and secure permanent work. There are 35,000 people waiting for public and community housing in Victoria alone.

Yet history tells us that we won't end homelessness in Australia by building more crisis accommodation, and it's clear we can't rely on the private market to fill the growing housing gap. We've known since 1988 that social housing plays a crucial role in reducing homelessness, alongside government spending on community services like emergency shelters, mental health clinics, and criminal proceedings.

So what's stopping us from investing in social housing and replicating the success we've seen in countries like Finland? The Nordic country is the only EU state not in the midst of a housing crisis and has just 52 shelter beds in the entire country, a reduction from 600 in 2008. Finland's success has been attributed to a major government investment in social housing, which focused on moving people into permanent homes as soon as they became homeless instead of accessing crisis services and entering the system.

This Housing First approach does not require people experiencing homelessness to address all of their problems including behavioural health problems or to graduate
through a series of services before they can access housing. The model assumes people have to be housed in order to get 'well', and that allowing the person experiencing homelessness to have a choice over their home and how they interact with community support services increases the likelihood they will remain in their house and improve their life.

In Australia, like most western countries, there has been a political shift away from the provision of public social housing and the Housing First model. This is because as a society we still see homelessness as an issue of personal pathology or deviance, not as a sign that our housing markets and community services are dysfunctional.

As a result, our approach to homelessness and, therefore, our services, are built around making people 'ready' for housing or helping them to address certain issues in order to gain access to permanent housing. This Housing Ready approach positions housing as a reward that those experiencing homelessness must prove themselves worthy of.

"As a society we still see homelessness as an issue of personal pathology or deviance, not as a sign that our housing markets and community services are dysfunctional."

Recent research conducted in Ireland, however, shows us that traditional explanations around homelessness to do with mental health, addiction and institutionalisation aren't the root cause of homelessness. The country has seen an extraordinary increase in homeless families over the last two years from nearly 100 families to about 1500 families in Dublin as a result of social housing no longer being built. Ireland historically has been dependant on the private sector which proved unstable during the economic crisis, causing housing prices to soar and forcing low-income families onto the streets.

While we may be oceans apart, there are valuable lessons to be learned from Ireland's and Finland's responses to homelessness. Contrary to popular belief, the Housing First model does work and is already being implemented in Australia. Common Ground is a Housing First initiative that has helped over 100 chronically-homeless people in the last five years find permanent, subsidised housing. Once housing was secured, the clients were then able to access wrap-around support systems for a range of services from substance abuse to cooking to budgeting so they didn't fall back into homelessness.

By adopting the Housing First model, the Australian government could save millions over the next five, ten and 20 years as evident by countless research. One recent Australian study found that people used $13,100 less in government-funded services when securely housed - $35,117 down from $48,217 over a 12-month period. But it never was about the cost of homelessness services, was it? We know that it costs the government less to end chronic homelessness than it does to perpetuate the cycle of homelessness. Now it's time for us to advocate where we want to invest our public money and to what end.

Rachel Kurzyn is a Melbourne-based writer and communications consultant with a focus on human rights and digital inclusion.
'Seamless garment' extends to care for older Australians

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

The International Day of Older Persons, celebrated on 1 October, presents itself with a slightly apologetic demeanour. ‘How old is older?’ we might be tempted to ask. The wording certainly allows those of a certain age free to opt in or opt out. But the United Nations may have shown its hand in its promotion, telling us that by 2050 there will be fewer children than people over 60.

Whatever of its boundaries, the day is topical. Legislation to legalise euthanasia is soon to be introduced into the New South Wales and Victorian parliaments. Opponents and supporters have both focused on the predicaments of older people.

The conditions in many nursing homes where huge profits are said to be made out of the neglect of the elderly have also aroused public disquiet. Internationally, photographs of refugees fleeing war and persecution always include elderly people whose hold on life is tenuous.

Discussion of ageing is often confined to practical matters. The deeper questions of why older people matter and of what value a good society should put on them are either answered in slogans or not considered at all.

These questions are best put in a broader framework than that of age. I have found attractive the image of the ‘seamless garment’ of questions to do with life. It was widely used in the 1980s by Chicago Cardinal Joseph Bernadin to argue for a consistent ethic of life that extended from conception to death, and to view within a broad vision the controversial issues of abortion, capital punishment, war and euthanasia. He was widely criticised by people who focused on single issues of individual or social morality for
minimising the absolute importance of their cause.

The image of the seamless garment is resonant in Christian circles: in John's Gospel Jesus' possessions were divided among the soldiers who crucified him, but his garment was not cut up because it was seamless. The image was much used in the early church to commend unity in the face of the differences and hostilities that threatened to tear it apart.

At the heart of the image of the seamless garment of life is the recognition that life is a gift and a privilege. It is therefore to be respected, nurtured and served. It is not a possession to be used or discarded, to be bartered or to be cut according to the demands of the situation. The value of life comes from the unique value of each human being, whether old or young, and the respect due to them.

As habitual attitudes, respect and gratitude for life as a gift may be contrasted with control over life as a possession to be used, directed and cut by choice. In the logic of choice, life will be negotiable at each stage and in each situation from birth to death, either at the choice of the individual or of the state. There is no seamless garment of life to be respected but a collection of ribbons to be torn off or let flutter as the individual or national situation demands.

"Underlying the International Day of Older Persons is the insight that life is a gift and that from its beginning to its ending, people deserve respect. That should be a common cause."

Setting these two attitudes to life in sharp contrast highlights the different directions in which they lead. It also explains the mutual incomprehension that often marks discussion on issues to do with life. Usually, however, people alternate between the two approaches, depending on the topic under discussion. Understandably so, because choice and gift are not contraries. The freedom to choose is central to the unique gift of each human life, and so is to be celebrated and defended. But as an expression of life, it should not be used to destroy life but to enhance it. the International Day of Older Persons invites us to make this choice for life.

This means we should also find room for a seamless rhetoric in conversation about life, built both on respect for life and for freedom of choice. The image of the seamless garment recognises both common ground and for difference of judgment when discussing the issues it embraces. It therefore encourages us to explore the limits of choice and of the claims of life across all its stages.

The centre of any rhetoric of the seamless robe does not lie in words but in symbolic action. It includes such disparate activities as caring for and accompanying old people, demanding proper regulation of nursing homes to ensure that they can live freely and decently, protesting against military actions and penal measures that deter people from choosing life and advocating for an economic framework that allows families to raise children decently.

Underlying the International Day of Older Persons is the insight that life is a gift and that from its beginning to its ending, people deserve respect. That should be a common
cause.

Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of *Eureka Street*. 
Courting women's and gay rights

ARTS AND CULTURE

Tim Kroenert

Battle of the Sexes (PG). Directors: Jonathan Dayton, Valerie Faris. Starring: Emma Stone, Steve Carell, Andrea Riseborough, Bill Pullman, Elisabeth Shue, Jessica McNamee, Austin Stowell. 121 minutes

The 1973 exhibition match between tennis champion Billie Jean King and former pro Bobby Riggs is a historical story for our times. The showdown between King and self-styled 'chauvinist pig' Riggs came at a time when King and other women from the pro circuit had broken off from the tennis establishment to hold their own tour, as a protest against unequal pay in existing tournaments. King, a later campaigner for LBTIQ rights, was also coming to terms with her identity as a gay woman, against the cultural expectations of her sport and broader society.

Fast forward to 2017, and there is still a significant gender pay gap in professional sports, including tennis. Gay rights have become an increasingly popular cause in western nations, but the conversation around marriage equality in Australia has aroused significant nastiness, especially in the context of the postal vote. Several of our sporting institutions and individuals have been highly visible in the fray. The notoriously macho AFL backed a 'yes' vote before softening its stance in the face of a public backlash. Tennis great and evangelical Christian Margaret Court has openly campaigned in favour of a 'no' vote.

Given these ongoing issues and debates, a film about the King-Riggs match and its context should have plenty to say to the present day socio-politics of sexuality and gender. But Battle of the Sexes suffers from an identity crisis of its own. Is it a sardonic
take on gender inequality? A gentle account of personal sexual awakening, in the context of forbidden romance? A drama about true selves and true loves withered under the gaze of a society that disapproves? A 'David and Goliath' story about victories, personal and professional, achieved against the odds? Well it's all of these, and ultimately none of them.

"The climactic match will have you barracking for the hero King against the villain Riggs and the patriarchy for which he stands, both in the sport and in society."

To her credit, Stone, in gawky wig and outsized glasses, disappears into the character of King. She brings a stoicism to her standoff with the tennis establishment - personified by former pro turned administrator and commentator Jack Kramer (a suitably smug Pullman) - and sweetness to her affair with hairdresser Marilyn Barnett (Riseborough). The latter blooms under the disapproving gaze of a coolly villainous Court (McNamee). Yet here already there are signs of disjointedness: while the film initially sets up Court and her conservatism as a prime antagonist, it all but sidelines her later in the film.

The treatment of Riggs is more jarring. True, Carell brings his considerable comedic strengths to bear, making of Riggs a buffoonish hustler with a penchant for publicity, mugging for the press while playing tennis in the rain wearing flippers, using a frypan as a racquet, or lobbing shots from amid a flock of sheep. The film arrays several characters around Riggs to shore up some sense of dramatic import for the character in his own right, including his wife (Shue) and adult son who have grown weary of his antics. But none is well enough conceived in the script, or executed on screen, to have the intended impact.

As a sum of its parts the film is entertaining enough. Certainly the climactic match will no doubt have you barracking for the hero King against the villain Riggs and the patriarchy he stands for, both in the sport and in society. But given the material's obvious resonances with contemporary issues, the film's failure to unite its various strands either tonally or thematically amounts to a missed opportunity. Instead of a 'historical story for our times', both entertaining and significant, Battle of the Sexes is a lightweight crowdpleaser that ticks off its various issues without giving due weight to any of them.

Tim Kroenert is the editor of Eureka Street.
Paternalism is no answer to disadvantage

AUSTRALIA

Kate Galloway

In the supermarkets, cafes, and shops in my city neighbourhood, I am part of a demographic that spends its money on all manner of consumer items, often with little thought. While many of us may budget, our choice as to how we fill our baskets is ours alone. This choice is not, however, available to all Australians.

The Northern Territory Intervention saw the rollout of income management. Under the Basics Card scheme, welfare recipients in certain NT communities are given a card that limits the ways in which they can spend their money. They are able to use it only at approved outlets, and for approved purchases.

There is an ostensible logic behind income management. The assumption is that poverty in families living in the targeted communities arises from them spending all their welfare money on alcohol, cigarettes, and gambling instead of food and essentials. Further, income management aims to minimise the anti-social behaviour that some claim arises from expenditure on alcohol and gambling, by preventing spending on those items.

Yet such assumptions are flawed. It is the lack of job opportunities in remote communities, and not a desire to fund a life of leisure, that is a prime reason for seeking access to welfare payments. Those who are addicted to alcohol or gambling will find other ways of feeding their addiction if their funds are cut off.

In its original formulation, income management affected only Aboriginal people, in the NT and in other locations on Cape York, as part of a program there. These communities are easy targets: remote locations, large numbers of welfare recipients, few retail opportunities, and populations seen as ‘other’ by the mainstream and the political class.
The stereotyping of residents of these communities supports the logic of income management, with little need to consider dignity and humanity.

There are complex reasons for the behaviours government seeks to modify through income management. Consider, for example, the ongoing lived legacy of dispossession, of profound family disruption through removals and stolen generations, of paternalism in all its guises, including stolen wages and rations. Redirection of welfare payments is not a solution to the complex needs of individuals and communities. It is a replication of the paternalistic policies that contributed to those problems in the first place.

Many have objected to income management, but they have been ignored in favour of the voices of those well connected to power, such as Andrew Forrest. Although proponents of the scheme claim it has cut violence in participating communities, there is other evidence to show a rise in crime. Despite this, the government proclaims the success of the program. Following further trials in WA communities and an ‘independent review’, income management is now to be rolled out more broadly across WA. The review though has been roundly critiqued, leaving doubt over government claims of success.

While income management may have started in Aboriginal communities, government is likely to roll it out more widely. It is part of a broader attack on welfare recipients including the recently-mooted urine testing of Centrelink clients. The purported aim of this new measure is to divert addicts to appropriate treatment. But as with income management, the underlying rationale is more ideological, invoking so-called 'mutual responsibility'. However, this is a significant misnomer.

"Human dignity is asserted through various means, including self-determination - being in a position to exercise decisions about one's own life free from government interference."

The role of government is to protect the people. Theoretically, the people give up a modicum of their personal sovereignty to government to empower it to pass and enforce laws that will enhance our lives through community. It is government's duty to serve the people. People do not serve government.

Welfare is a redistributive mechanism that serves as a safety net for those who are otherwise without. That redistribution supports the dignity of the individual within our community. Human dignity is asserted through various means, including self-determination - being in a position to exercise decisions about one's own life free from government interference.

In tying conditions to payments government is denying the self-determination of welfare recipients, counter to the very purpose of welfare. Further, it does so disingenuously identifying ‘appropriate’ income expenditure as the solution to difficult problems whose genesis lies elsewhere.

Solutions in these communities are difficult to see. I do believe that everyone wishes to see an improvement in the lives of those who are suffering. The reality is though, that income management is not that solution. And the so-called evidence supporting its expansion is not helping a clear-eyed view.
Kate Galloway is a legal academic with an interest in social justice.

The Senate is currently inquiring into the Cashless Debit Card Bill that will expand the program. The closing date for submission is 29 September 2017. The reporting date is 13 November 2017.
Political incorrectness gone mad

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas

Is Google and Facebook’s imitation game doomed?

MEDIA

David James

You heard it here first. The two giants of modern media, Google and Facebook, are in trouble and might not even exist in their current form in a few years.

At the moment, these two global behemoths seem to be part of the very fabric of the world. In June, two billion different people used the social media site, and Google remains overwhelmingly the search engine of choice.

But it is not a stretch to say that this might be the peak of their power. This is not just because, as they get bigger, they are running out of new humans to generate growth and new revenue. It is mainly because businesses are by their nature only temporary. Remember MySpace, which once ruled the social media landscape? Don’t be surprised if these two modern giants go the same way.

To understand the dynamic, we need to look at what a business is. The first stage - captured cleverly in the film The Social Network - is intensely creative and risky. Often, it is not the inventors who make the business. They are usually left lamenting how they have been cheated, like the Winklevoss brothers were with Facebook. Rather, it is those who understand how to translate an idea into transactions who reap the rewards; that is, the people skilled in creating a business.

Once that initial stage has been completed - whereby the product offering creates sustainable profits - businesses then turn to repetition. The aim is to keep people buying the product at a price that is profitable, over and over. This allows businesses to achieve economies of scale. That is why management is mostly about controlling repetition in order to make it progressively more efficient. After a while, such repetition comes to
characterise the business. Creativity has by then been lost.

The approach works for as long as the market doesn't change. But as soon as it does, incumbent businesses have enormous difficulty altering their strategy (despite all the quacking about 'innovation' and 'change management'). It is at that point that decline sets in.

There are very few examples of companies that have been able to genuinely change when confronted with new circumstances. Apple under Steve Jobs is perhaps one instance. But usually companies keep on doing business as usual until they have no business left. And it can apply to entire industrial sectors, as can be seen in the fate of the media industries around the world. These companies have almost all been caught like rabbits in headlights when online advertising changed their situation.

It looks increasingly to this writer that Facebook and Google are approaching this situation. In the case of Facebook, there are competitors. Snapchat has 166 million daily users, Twitter 328 million monthly users. But the challenge is likely to come from some quarter that is new and surprising - just as the demolition of conventional media came from two companies that could have barely been imagined just 20 years ago.

"That users of Facebook are not disturbed by the fact it is the greatest surveillance machine in the history of the world can be explained by our desire to imitate, in the absence of knowing what to think and desire ourselves."

One ominous sign is the increasing intrusion of politics into what are pure businesses. Salil Mehta, adjunct professor at Columbia and Georgetown, who teaches probability and data science, was recently banned by Google - who knows why. Google owns YoutTube, and is increasingly dictating who can make money from ads along political lines.

Facebook, likewise, is intruding more and more into the views of its user base, claiming to get rid of fake news and hate speech. But where exactly that line sits is at the very least problematic, especially when the so-called mainstream media has become one of the worst offenders when it comes to confectioned stories. That is dangerous because of the nature of the consumer base. Facebook, and to a large extent Google, rose to prominence because of word-of-mouth. That is usually how businesses thrive, the difference is that these recommendations could be global.

In the case of Facebook, the word-of-mouth had at lest two layers. The Silicon Valley billionaire Peter Thiel, who invested early in the company, commented that 'Facebook first spread by word of mouth, and it's about word of mouth, so it's doubly mimetic.'

Thiel was impressed by the French philosopher René Girard's idea that humans are motivated by what he called 'mimetic desire': observing what others are doing, or want, and then copying. Girard thought this was the basis of all human behaviour; he would no doubt consider the growth of Facebook to be a demonstration of his thesis. That users of Facebook are not disturbed by the fact it is the greatest surveillance machine in the history of the world can also be explained by our desire to imitate - in the absence of knowing what to think and desire ourselves. If we don't know what we want, we are not particularly troubled about being spied on.
The problem for the two giant players is that such imitation can shift at any point; it is by its nature fickle. Today, billions like to look at Facebook to see what others are doing, or reflexively use Google to search. But this can just as easily change. If it does, the two businesses that now seem dominant and invulnerable will fade away like so many other businesses have in the past.

David James is the managing editor of businessadvantagepng.com. He has a PhD in English Literature and is author of the musical comedy *The Bard Bites Back*, which is about Shakespeare's ghost.
The Catholic option for 'yes' or 'no'

RELIGION

Frank Brennan

Australian voters are deciding which box to tick when asked, 'Should the law be changed to allow same-sex couples to marry?' Unlike some bishops, I argue that a committed Catholic could vote 'yes' or 'no'.

For many Catholic voters, this has been a difficult issue because for the first time in their lives they have found themselves in the same position which our politicians find themselves every time they have to vote on contested moral and political questions in parliament. They don't find themselves getting all that much help from official church declarations. This is no criticism of our bishops. They are the custodians of a tradition which has been somewhat skewed on this issue for a long time.

In 1975, the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) declared that 'homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered and can in no case be approved of'. Then in 1986, under the leadership of Cardinal Ratzinger (as he then was), the CDF declared that 'special concern and pastoral attention should be directed toward those who have this condition, lest they be led to believe that the living out of this orientation in homosexual activity is a morally acceptable option. It is not.'

In 1992, the CDF identified 'some principles and distinctions of a general nature which should be taken into consideration by the conscientious legislator, voter, or Church authority who is confronted with such issues'. The CDF claimed that there was 'a danger that legislation which would make homosexuality a basis for entitlements could actually encourage a person with a homosexual orientation to declare his homosexuality or even...
to seek a partner in order to exploit the provisions of the law'.

Many Catholics nowadays find such declarations unhelpful and insensitive, perhaps even downright wrong. Even those Catholics who find such teaching helpful in determining their own moral stance might question the application of such teaching when deciding whether to tick the box 'yes' or 'no'. For most contemporary Catholics, Pope Francis has been a breath of fresh air with his observation, 'Who am I to judge?'

Some voters are voting 'yes' boldly and assuredly, hoping that our politicians will just get on with it and legislate for same sex marriage as quickly as possible. Some are voting 'no' just as boldly and assuredly, hoping that the matter will then be put off the legislative agenda for another generation, much like the outcome of the republic referendum in 1999.

I am one of those voters who believes that same sex marriage will be legislated either by this present parliament or by the next parliament. It would be in everyone's interests if it could be done right, and done now during the life of this parliament. Further delay will simply occasion ongoing hurt and angst in the Australian community.

For it to be done right, our politicians will need to ensure that they have accorded due protection to religious freedom. Some have been pointing to New Zealand which legislated same sex marriage four years ago. Fran Kelly, a strong advocate for the 'yes' vote, told ABC Insiders on Sunday: 'Some reassurance really for those who are worried about religious protections, religious freedoms, if the 'yes' vote gets up. We had a look at New Zealand - a country, society very like ours. Four years ago, they passed legalised same sex marriage. Basically, no incidents. No concerns of religious freedoms being contested or challenged. The Churches seem to have no issue.'

"There's no way the Turnbull government would legislate a human rights act. Perhaps they might consider a religious freedom act. But even that I doubt."

Earlier in the week, Kelly had interviewed New Zealand Prime Minister Bill English on ABC RN Breakfast. When asked about same sex marriage, he stressed that freedom of religion is important. She observed: 'You voted 'No' in 2013 but you've said if the vote was held now, you would vote 'yes'. Does that mean that the New Zealand experience of marriage equality has been a positive one for your country?' English replied: 'It's been implemented. There are a number of people taking advantage of it. We haven't had quite the same challenges around free speech and religious freedom as here but I think it's really important that that's maintained. But it's a pretty pragmatic approach really. It's in law. I accept that that is the case: we have same sex marriage in New Zealand and we're not setting out planning to change it.'

When elected prime minister, English described himself as 'an active Catholic and proud of it'. His predecessor Jim Bolger, who had been prime minister in the 1990s, told David Speers on Skynews during the week that there have been no problems with the protection of religious freedom, 'and I say that as a conservative Catholic'. He has found much of the Australian debate 'unnecessarily provocative and wrong'. Pointing to Catholic Ireland, he suggested that we should be able to 'put that to history'. He said that New Zealand had been a positive experience and that there were no grounds for victimising
people.

I think English and Bolger are right. And I have no reason to question their Catholicity. They are experienced politicians well used to weighing the prudential considerations which come to play when contemplating legislation in a pluralistic democratic society.

But there is one point of distinction between Australia and New Zealand which has not been considered by Bolger and English and those Australians invoking them to assure us that all will be well. There is a clear legal reason why New Zealand has not had the same controversy around free speech and religious freedom. That's because they already had in place the legal architecture recognising and protecting these rights. For example, the *New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990* provides: 'Every person has the right to manifest that person's religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, or teaching, either individually or in community with others, and either in public or in private.' We have no such provision in our Commonwealth laws. And that's the thorny issue. That's the issue being aired so constantly now by John Howard and Tony Abbott. In the past, they have been strong opponents of any statutory bill of rights.

"I've voted 'yes' and I hope the 'yes' vote gets up. But there's plenty of work then to be done to protect religious freedom, just as it is protected in New Zealand. Like Bolger and English, I won't be expecting much guidance from the CDF on how best to legislate in this domain."

There's no way the Turnbull government would legislate a human rights act. Perhaps they might consider a religious freedom act. But even that I doubt. Last November, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop asked the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade to conduct an inquiry on freedom of religion. Human Rights Sub-Committee Chair, Kevin Andrews, said the public hearings of the committee would focus on the legal framework of religious freedom in Australia. Prior to the public hearings in June 2017, he said, 'Australia has certain obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other international human rights instruments. We have an opportunity to examine how effectively Australia is meeting its obligations, with highly qualified legal scholars and religious freedom advocates offering a diverse range of legal opinions. The effectiveness, or otherwise, of these protections, and whether Australia needs a more comprehensive legislative framework, will be discussed in detail.'

One of those qualified legal scholars is Professor George Williams who has told the committee: 'Without stronger protection, freedom of religion, along with other basic rights, are vulnerable to abrogation by Parliament. In addition, public debates and policy discussions are not informed by legal structures and standards that ensure freedom of religion and belief is given the status in Australian society that it deserves.'

The findings of the Joint Standing Committee will hopefully assist our parliamentarians to design the right legislative framework for the protection of religious freedom when considering how best to legislate for same sex marriage should the ABS survey result in a 'yes' vote. I've voted 'yes' and I hope the 'yes' vote gets up. But there's plenty of work then to be done to protect religious freedom, just as it is protected in New Zealand. Like Bolger and English, I won't be expecting much guidance from the CDF on how best to legislate in this domain.
Frank Brennan SJ is the CEO of Catholic Social Services Australia.
Finding grace amid difference of marriage equality opinion

RELIGION

Julie Perrin

I once held a school chaplaincy position where I nearly got sacked in my first week on the job. I was employed by the Council for Christian Education in Schools (now known as ACCESS Ministries). In the lead up to my appointment there was some disquiet.

On the first Thursday of term the monthly meeting of the chaplaincy committee was held in a private home of one of the parents; this group was charged with fundraising and support of the chaplain. I was expected to attend but the welcome was muted - there was an awkwardness in the room. When it was indicated that the committee would like me to pray at the close of the meeting it felt like a test.

At home I had been praying the words of a Miriam Therese Winter blessing song with my nine-year-old daughter at bedtime. Winter was one of the Medical Mission Sisters - in the 60s, their song ‘Joy is Like the Rain’ was a signature tune in guitar-playing Christian circles. Thinking to offer the blessing as a benediction, I was brought up short when I remembered it referred to the Spirit in the feminine. That would certainly stoke the fires of discontent - I mentally scrolled through prayers I knew by heart and selected an alternative.
When the moment came to pray, I opened my mouth and found myself speaking the familiar words of the blessing song: 'May the Blessing of God go before you. May Her grace and peace abound. May Her Spirit live within you. May Her love wrap you round. May Her blessing remain with you always. May you walk on holy ground.'

When I finished, the air in the lounge room was thick with reproach. Heads lifted and eyes met. Within a couple of heartbeats voices rose in fiery protest. One man distinguished himself by the immediacy of his objections and the forcefulness of his challenges. He declared himself to be a fundamentalist, and, astonishingly to my ears, a creationist.

In the initial outcry, he was the one who spoke up and stared me down, asking if I was planning to teach children that God is a woman and if I believed that homosexuality was acceptable. I responded that I had quoted the words of a Christian songwriter; then I added that I understood God as being beyond gender; finally I stuttered that the Hebrew word 'ruach' for Spirit was in the feminine. No one looked convinced. I left the house and drove away with a thumping heart.

The following week the chairperson of the committee resigned when I was not sacked and the self-avowed fundamentalist stepped up as chair. I was dismayed by this. We now had roles with intersecting responsibilities. With our beliefs so at odds, I didn't know how we would ever be able to work together. But something transpired that seems remarkable to me to this day.

"I'm telling this story because there was a time when two people deeply divided by their beliefs had the grace to trust one another and to live side-by-side in their difference."

I discovered that the fierce fundamentalist was a man gentle in prayer. Unlike the flaring moments in the lounge room, when I invited him to talk and pray with me in my chaplain's office his voice was low and measured. The silences between the words allowed our prayers to resonate where words could not reach. The language of lordship that he used was familiar from my childhood as a daughter of a Baptist minister.

Over time we realised we did have something in common - a care for the school community. At the committee meetings there was never prolonged questioning or micro-management about funds needed to support families struggling to pay for school books or class camps. In time we grew to trust one another and to cooperate in numerous events that built the possibilities for kindness in the school community.

Neither of us tried to persuade the other to our beliefs, nor did I spell it out that for me, this care for the school included affirming young people struggling with sexual orientation. I felt I owed the students my loyalty in their vulnerability.

Several years into my time as school chaplain, a journalist asked for my opinion in relation to the taboos long held by Christians regarding homosexuality. I knew my views would be regarded as a betrayal by some of the parents and I put a call through to the gentle-fierce man. I did not want to unravel the remarkable friendship we had built, but neither did I want to remain silent on this issue. When I explained the dilemma, he said something I have never forgotten. 'Julie, you know I believe that homosexuality is an
abomination before God. But you have your own integrity. Tell them what you think.'

In 2006 I left the school having seen hundreds of teenagers grow up and begin finding their way in the world. Some of them thanked me in that hugely generous way young people do - 'You saved my life.' One student contacted me from university. I recalled him in his schooldays as both lost and courageous in the face of homophobic bullying. 'Thank you', he wrote, 'for telling me I was okay, that there was nothing wrong with me.'

Recently I rang my fundamentalist friend. I wanted to ask him if he remembered that pivotal conversation as I did. 'Yes Julie,' he replied, 'That is what I said.' He gave me permission to quote him and went on to remark that the friendship we had formed was still a source of wonder to him - 'God's love goes beyond doctrine.'

In the postal vote about marriage equality my fundamentalist friend will vote no and I will vote yes. Our differences have not been erased. But I'm telling this story because there was a time when two people deeply divided by their beliefs had the grace to trust one another and to live side-by-side in their difference.

Julie Perrin is a Melbourne writer, oral storyteller and Associate Teacher at Pilgrim Theological College, University of Divinity.
Refugee rift piques PNG’s anti Australian sentiment

INTERNATIONAL

Ann Deslandes

As Behrouz Boochani reports from Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, a number of the over 900 refugee men who have been detained there by Australia will soon fly to the United States where, under the fraught deal struck between the US and Australian governments in 2016, they will be allowed to settle.

The Australian government is shutting down the detention centre on Manus while many of the refugees who have been detained there over the past four years are demanding, as they have from the beginning, that they be afforded the human right of being permitted to settle in Australia - a country where they are likely to be safe from war, poverty, and persecution.

They have suffered beatings, deaths, and endemic mental illness in detention on Manus, and the alternatives being suggested by the Australian Government - settlement in PNG or return to the country from which they are seeking asylum - are no better for them. That the men are even in PNG is due to another deal, struck in 2013 between the Australian and Papua New Guinean prime ministers, known as the Regional Resettlement Agreement.

What is the impact of this ostensible regional partnership on relations between Australia and PNG? The agreement, such as it was, is now arguably in tatters. The suffering of the refugees in detention, the abuse of their human rights, has been monumental. Manusians and Papua New Guineans more broadly have had this suffering in their faces, often finding themselves blamed for it, such as when refugees have been attacked by locals outside of detention on the island.
Plans to resettle the refugees in the US have been the subject of international scandal, stopping and starting several times before the current assurance that some 50 will be flown there soon. Many of the jobs promised by Australia for the remittance-dependent Manus Island have not materialised, and Manusians (e.g. local Member of Parliament Ronny Knight) have repeatedly expressed concern about the volatility of a situation where so many men are held in poor conditions with no realistic exit point in sight.

Australia has shown no intention of intervening to improve the situation for the refugees, nor for PNG. In this, we have probably brought relations between the prosperous island nation and its former dependent territory to its lowest ebb in decades.

Many Papua New Guineans feel that Australia has ducked its responsibility to resettle refugees and treated PNG like a dumping ground. Knight has suggested PNG could declare the refugees illegal residents and deport them to Australia, while the PNG Attorney-General has warned that his country is 'not going to allow a situation where Australia has withdrawn'. From the Pacific Islands Forum this month Prime Minister Peter O'Neill said he is appealing to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the absence of help from Australia.

One senior development consultant, an Australian with decades of experience in the region, told me they've never seen such significant anti-Australia sentiment in PNG public discourse.

"Why should Papua New Guineans have to also absorb the costs of resettling refugees who sought asylum in Australia, simply because their wealthy neighbour and former colonial master says they must?"

This makes sense. A former colony of Australia, PNG grapples with social problems on a scale unknown to our prosperous country. Many of its citizens are working hard to overcome political corruption, poverty, and conflict. Why should Papua New Guineans have to also absorb the costs of resettling refugees who sought asylum in Australia, simply because their wealthy neighbour and former colonial master says they must? This must feel especially biting in the face of failed promises of economic investment from Australia.

Many Australians would agree: it's not a good idea to piss off your neighbours. I wonder what will be the consequences of the last four years for the deeply intertwined investment, trade and aid relationships between us close neighbours in the Pacific.

Ann Deslandes is a freelance writer and researcher from Sydney. Read her other writing at xterrafirma.net and tweet her @Ann_dLandes.
How forced migration defined Francis' papacy

RELIGION

David Holdcroft

From the very first moments of his pontificate, Jorge Bergoglio signalled a departure in style from that of his immediate predecessors. His taking of the name Francis, his eschewing the full papal vestments, and his appeal to the masses gathered in Saint Peter's Square below to pray for him, before imparting his own blessing, all indicated a more personal, pastoral style.

Francis, most commentators agree, was elected on his perceived ability to address the need for reform of a Roman Curia increasingly beset by paralysis, inefficiency and scandal. It soon became apparent, however, that he saw this reform as a subset of a wider and more comprehensive renewal of the Church as a whole, one not so much theological in nature as, for want of a better word, popular.

Was this reform to be merely superficial in nature? It is almost in parenthesis that we note Francis' pontificate coinciding with the rise of numbers of forced migrants to historically unprecedented post-war levels both in Europe and around the globe. This presented Francis with a unique opportunity to develop and demonstrate his vision for a renewed Church, repositioned in and for a globalised world.

Notwithstanding the importance of other ethical issues, the complexity and nature of forced migration and its attendant ethical debates provides a unique challenges to Church. It has been notoriously divisive, in seeming contradiction to the consistency, since the papacy of Pius XII, of Church teaching on the subject. The difficulty is in the application, with responses necessarily involving ordinary people of all faiths and none, and institutions such as NGOs, governments and various multi-lateral bodies of the United Nations. Within the Church itself the issue points to arguably impoverished concepts of sin and God's mercy and justice.

Francis' approach was not primarily theological; it was in the first place pastoral and active. It was to travel and place himself at the centre of people's lived experience, withholding moral judgement, but helping its participants to situate their experience - and suffering - within a larger narrative and analysis. His homily, spoken in July 2013 during Mass on the island of Lampedusa, off the coast of Italy, the landing place of many boat migrants attempting to make their way to Europe, was unequivocal both in its gesture of solidarity and in its universal challenge.
Francis spoke powerfully of the situation as the cumulative result of multiple injustices to which we all at some level contribute, the solution to which, it follows, we all become at some level responsible. In so doing he exposed the moral vacuity of isolationism, and simplistic reductionism, at the same time as enriching John Paul II's concept of solidarity, bringing it to the level of obligation and thus tying it to universal human dignity.

At the same time, it draws on a concept of wrong doing which has its origins in individual actions but which works at systemic and social levels. To not attempt to address the injustices that result can become sins of omission - as serious as any equivalent active wrong doing. The 'remedy' to such injustice begins with real and lasting personal conversion. Without this, and the humility that results, no way forward is possible. And without God's merciful love, even this step itself will remain theoretical and remote.

In the English speaking world, it is easy to miss the richness of the concept denoted by the word 'mercy'. In the beginning of the Year of Mercy, Francis called on its fuller meaning by using the Latinate form *misericordia*, literally 'a heart (cordia) for or with the poor (miseri). God's love for us is of this nature, just as ours should be for others.

"Francis' approach was pastoral and active. It was to travel and place himself at the centre of people's lived experience, withholding judgement, but helping its participants to situate their experience and suffering within a larger analysis."

In this manner Francis built on the theological work of Benedict in particular to contribute a more coherent response to the 'God is dead' critique of 20th Century theorists such as Heidegger and Buber, arguably lacking in the Church hitherto. God's justice and mercy co-exist. This avoids sentimental constructions of God which risk continuing the violence already perpetrated against victims of injustice while at the same time correcting an imbalance that sees a justice-oriented Godhead as sometimes overly remote, inhuman and utopian.

Francis' pastoral response went further to create a formal structure to ensure ongoing movement in the refugee area. The Dicastery for Migrants and Refugees has the mandate to draw the whole church - the people at every level - into this work. It is a profoundly active and communal vision and places 'Church' firmly back in the public sphere with such work as a valid and constituent expression of church life.

This active and public Catholicism stands as a critique of a more privatised, individualised construction of religion and national sovereignty. It has also resulted in the unprecedented contribution of the Church to the multi-lateral Global Compact on Refugees and Migrants in the process of being negotiated at this time by the United Nations.

Francis' major contribution has been to focus upon the most vulnerable and most intractable and difficult of human situations, finding a way to incarnate existing theological developments, to make them concrete for the Church as a whole and the world beyond it. Perhaps his greatest achievement, however, is the underlying step that sets this process in motion: it is to model and preach a God who is both justice and mercy that draws people - is attract too strong a word? - to want the conversion of which he speaks so credibly.
Australian Jesuit David Holdcroft is currently conducting a strategic review of post-secondary education in forced migrant settings for the global Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS). David worked for seven years as director of JRS operations in Southern Africa. The full text of this article is published this month in Grace and Truth, journal of St Joseph's Theological Institute, Hilton,outh Africa
Euthanasia bill could put vulnerable Victorians at risk

RELGION

Hoa Dinh

In June 2016, the eight-member Legislative Council Committee submitted to the Parliament of Victoria the final report of the inquiry into end of life choices.

In this report, the committee recommends the legalisation of doctor-assisted suicide and euthanasia in Victoria. The committee suggests that doctors should be authorised to prescribe lethal drugs to dying patients who can use them to end their life.

The committee also insists that, for a person who is physically unable to take the lethal drug, due either to disability or incapacity, 'a doctor should be able to assist a person to die by administering the drug'.

In October, the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill will be debated in parliament and then voted on before the end of the year to determine whether assisted suicide and euthanasia will be legalised in Victoria. If the bill is passed, Victoria will be the first state in Australia to legalise euthanasia and assisted suicide since the NT Rights of the Terminally Ill Act was annulled two decades ago.

In 1996, Northern Territory passed the Rights of the Terminally Ill Act to legalise euthanasia. This was overturned less than a year later by the federal government. Since then, other euthanasia bills have been rejected in Victoria, South Australia, and Tasmania.

In the last few years, euthanasia campaigners such as Andrew Denton and Dr Rodney Syme have presented stories of persons dying in unbearable distress to argue the case for assisted death. Last year in The Australian, Denton reportedly told the 'church to get
out of euthanasia debate'. In the aftermath of the royal commission investigations into institutional responses to child sexual abuse, the religious voices are frequently dismissed by the public on this issue.

The 2016 report also puts forward the arguments in support of change in law. It argues that euthanasia legislation would (1) enhance individual autonomy or self-determination, (2) provide relief from suffering for patients and loved ones, (3) prevent suicide by other means, and (4) benefit the doctor-patient relationship. It also argues that (5) assisted dying occurs already and is unregulated, and (6) assisted dying is a form of palliative care. These arguments are either erroneous or simply naïve.

First, as British actress and disability rights advocate Liz Carr said in her captivating address to Victorian parliament on 22 March 2017, euthanasia legislation would lead to further coercion against vulnerable persons in society: the elderly and people with disability. Once voluntary suicide is legalised, to continue living becomes a choice that people will have to justify to themselves, their family, and society.

"In this context, legalising euthanasia would diminish individual autonomy, not enhance it, if we consider the most vulnerable persons in society."

It is especially the case for persons who have to depend on the assistance of others: the elderly, and people with disability. Note that elder abuse is currently a growing concern in Australia. The Australian Law Reform Commission is calling for law changes to protect elders from abuse at the hands of their children and carers. One suggested intervention is a national register of enduring powers of attorney in order to 'prevent greedy children from using the document as a "licence to steal" from their elderly parents'. In this context, legalising euthanasia would diminish individual autonomy, not enhance it, if we consider the most vulnerable persons in society.

Second, the role of palliative medicine is to relieve pain and suffering, but not by killing the ones who suffer. The Hippocratic Oath which gave rise to modern health ethics explicitly states, 'I will neither give a deadly drug to anyone who asked for it, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect.' Within this medical tradition, the goal of medicine is to save lives, to promote health, to relieve pain and suffering, and to care for patients. Intentional killing of patients is not a medical treatment, and assisted suicide is not a form of palliative care.

Third, legalising assisted suicide is not an answer to the problem of pain and distress in the dying patient, but improving the quality of palliative care and access to it for Victorians is. Stories of 'horrible deaths' cited by Denton and Syme often highlight the need for advance care planning and palliation, rather than the need for euthanasia law. It should be noted that within current Victorian laws, the use of analgesics and sedatives to relieve pain and distress for patients with terminal illness is justifiable even if it can lead to the hastening of death. In this case, the principle of double effect would justify the administration of analgesics such as morphine for the purpose of relieving pain.

The argument that medical suicide will prevent suicides by other means is not very coherent.

Fourth, as Professor Margaret Somerville points out, the medical profession is trusted because it carries the value of respect for life in a secular society. Authorising doctors to
cause their patient's death would damage the doctor-patient relationship by undermining that trust. In Canada, increasing numbers of doctors request to be removed from the 'assisted dying' lists after they assisted patients to die. Euthanasia legislation would result in great harm not only to vulnerable individuals and populations, but to health professionals as well.

Fifth, the key difference between palliative care and euthanasia is the intention behind the medical intervention. In palliative care, the intention is to care for the patient by relieving pain and distress. In euthanasia and assisted suicide, the intention is to cause the death of the patient. For this reason, euthanasia and assisted suicide are radically different from palliative care. The British House of Lords (9 May 1994) regards the prohibition of intentional killing ‘the cornerstone of law and of social relationships’. To overturn this prohibition would undermine the very fabric of society.

For these reasons, the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill in Victoria must be rejected.

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