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## Iconoclasts' challenge to turn the other cheek

### EDITORIAL



When the Jesuits' founder St Ignatius Loyola was on the road riding with a Moor in 1522, the Moor argued that the Virgin Mary was no longer a virgin after Christ was born.

The instinct of the recent former soldier Ignatius was to kill the Moor on the spot. But they were approaching a fork in the road, and Ignatius decided that if his mule took the same path as that of the Moor, he would kill the Moor. If the Moor took the other path, he would let the Moor live. As it happened, charity, mercy and understanding ruled, and the Moor's life was spared.

We can only hope that Muslims who would like to kill Pope Benedict XVI for similar reasons will also allow themselves to be stopped in their tracks.

Australian Jesuit Daniel Madigan, a consultant to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, says in this issue of *Eureka Street* that both Christianity and Islam have shown themselves ready historically to use coercion and violence to root out schism and heresy.

"War and violence still find support among religious people of both traditions, and Benedict seems poised to go even further than John Paul II in his opposition to it," he observes.

Meanwhile there was no threat to kill the editor, but we provoked a strong reaction from an Adelaide reader last week after pontificating in our subscriber email about Steve Irwin's lack of real reverence towards animals. He told us to "connect with Australia's ordinary folk".

"Steve Irwin was a good bloke and a family man—the vast majority of Australians recognise this and don't need elitist pretensions... to discern his significance."



There are two sides to every argument, and often they are both right. Our iconoclasm rolls on in this issue, with Binoy Kampmark's contention that Irwin or any other zookeeper cannot be a true animal lover because zoos are essentially "cordoned off spaces, celebrating the subjugation of nature". From another angle, Brian Matthews asks why Australians barely noticed the death of Colin Thiele, who is one of our great children's writers.

"Thiele and Irwin died within a week of each other. The Prime Minister said that Irwin died a 'quintessentially Australian' death while Colin Thiele, whom Howard never mentioned, died of a heart attack in Brisbane."

We might well ask if Thiele's reverence is unAustralian.

## George W. Bush and "super-sized" war for freedom and values

### COLUMNS



Now that President George W. Bush has significantly upgraded his 'War on Terror', from simply a "clash of civilisations" to a war for "civilisation" itself, it is time to reflect on just what sort of a civilisation we are defending. By any standard, and whether or not the war is regarded as a struggle for land or ideas, western civilisation—or at least, American civilisation—is losing in the Middle East, in Asia, Africa, and in a good deal of Europe.

According to his speechwriter, the sight of an old man pulling the election lever [except in Florida, we assume], girls enrolling in schools, or families worshipping God in their own traditions...| the way of life enjoyed by free nations...| for the possibility that good and decent people across the Middle East can raise up societies based on freedom and tolerance and personal dignity....

I'm all for these things too, as well as apple pie, home ownership, private enterprise and the right to follow whatever football code one likes. But it's the increasing disconnection between what we say we are fighting for and what we actually seem to be fighting for, not to mention the increasing hysteria of those who insist that the price of maintaining our freedoms is the truncation of those very freedoms, which make me, and lots of others, wonder whether this is a war from which we should abstain.

They form,... he says, a global network of extremists who are driven by a perverted vision of Islam—a totalitarian ideology that hates freedom, rejects tolerance, and despises all dissent...| their goal is to build a radical Islamist empire where women are prisoners in their homes, men are beaten for missing prayer meetings, and terrorists have a safe haven to plan and launch attacks on America and other civilised nations....

Yet the evidence of our civilisation teetering on the brink is not very great, while the evidence against those on "our side" who would brutalise our culture and our freedoms, unconcerned about the means we use to defend our remaining freedoms, is getting increasingly substantial.



This is not to deny that there are terrorists in our midst, or a real threat of terrorist incidents, even in Australia. It is still of the essence of our society that the overwhelming proportion of Australians, including the overwhelming proportion of our Muslim Australians, reject and repudiate the ideology of our terrorists, and that there is no prospect whatsoever of that ideology prevailing here. There is, however, the possibility that the threat is being over-dramatised.

George Bush, John Howard and others insist that we are winning the long war

against terrorists, and perhaps by body count they are right. But there is evidence that even within our own societies, the way we fight the war has not only positively recruited young men and women willing to give their lives against us, but massively increased popular sympathy for such people in some parts of the world.

“Our side” has stumbled badly in trying to make a complete conspiracy of a movement with many faces and many differing aspirations. In doing so, we may well have created a unity which might otherwise not have existed. There are and were links between Islamist movements in Morocco, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Indonesia and the Philippines, but each had very local features and grievances, and the idea that shadowy figures such as Osama bin Laden were, or are, calling the shots is ludicrous.



It is useful to remember that the intelligence debacle that so convinced George W. Bush of the need to make Iraq a battleground, was not confined to false views about the existence of weapons of mass destruction, but also arose from false ideas about the attitude of Iraqis to their liberation. There is no evidence that it has confronted this failure: the optimism that things will ultimately come out right looks more and more like wishful thinking.

The real war—the war of ideology—will not be won in Canberra, London or Washington—but in the hearts and minds of people in countries quite different from ours. Muslim countries, and also those countries on the fringes of Islam, in Africa, behind the old Iron Curtain, Thailand and the Philippines must, if George Bush’s notion of freedom is to prevail, repudiate not only terrorism, but the medievalist vision of the complete Islamic state which provides it.

During this phony war, instead, we have probably amplified, particularly through television and the cinema, all of the images which make our civilisation seem alien and unattractive—even horrifying—to “them”. From the point of view of Australians, moreover, we probably reinforced the notion that the freedom for which we were fighting was Americanism, not our own rather different culture.

## Religious freedom and the inflammatory power of the Cross

### COLUMNS

#### Summa theologiae

I was intrigued by two recent controversies over religious symbols. Both involved the Christian symbol of the Cross. In Melbourne, a girl complained that her school had forbidden her to wear a cross. She saw the cross as a sign of her Christian conversion.



In Glasgow, the police gave a warning to the Celtic goalkeeper after an away game with their rivals, the Rangers. The goalie had made a sign of the cross, a normal thing for Polish players. The culturally Protestant crowd saw it as unnatural.

The two cases were interesting because in their defence, the girl and the goalie could invoke two principles that are normally kept quite separate: the right of individual self-expression, and the right of religious freedom.

Initially the girl's case was presented as a straightforward infringement of self-expression. It was interchangeable with stories of long hair, wrong dress, or boycotting particular classes. The standard photographs of aggrieved yet determined mother and daughter accompanied the story.

This story, however, became a little edgy because it was religious faith that motivated the girl to wear the cross. The preferred form of stories of individual self-expression identify Christian symbols with authoritarian repression of the secular individual's choice, not with self-expression. To have an apparently secular school council crushing Christian self-assertion is a bit awkward. There was some relief when the Council made clear that its opposition was not to crosses, but to jewellery. It was no longer a story about displaying faith but about flaunting wealth.



The story of the Glasgow goalie, Artur Boruc, little reported in Australia, stirred Britain. Catholic Church authorities, Labour Party ministers in England and the Scottish Nationalist party were all concerned that the sign of the cross was considered an inflammatory gesture. Ruth Kelly, the minister, saw it as an issue of self-expression.

The Scottish authorities then issued a clarification. It turned out that Boruc had an arsenal of signs to hand. In addition to the sign of the Cross, he had gestured to the crowd with a V for victory sign, and with an obscene gesture. It seemed a case of three signs and you are out.

They added that they would not countenance formal action against individuals for acts of religious observance, but had to be concerned about behaviour that would encourage civil disorder. This explanation satisfied the Catholic Bishops, and indeed

Glaswegians generally. As this became a story of individual self-expression, anger turned to awed disbelief. For a goalie to stir up the Ibrox Park crowd is like a rabbit kicking sand in a lion's eyes.

In the end, the strands of religious freedom and freedom of individual self-expression in both events were disentangled. In the Catholic understanding of religious freedom that is how it should be: religious freedom has only loose, although necessary, associations with freedom of self-expression. This can be seen in the seminal and bitterly contested Vatican II document on religious freedom.

The prevailing position before the Council was that the Catholic Church embodied true religion, and therefore was privileged over "erroneous" religions. Tolerance of other faiths was by privilege and not by right. The slogan that summed up this position was that error had no rights.



This theology caused difficulties in pluralist societies, particularly in the United States. The question facing the Council, then, was how to ground religious freedom in a way that does not endorse religious relativism, and so fail to respect the claim of truth.

In the document, in fact, truth is the basis out of which the argument for religious freedom is made. If we are to seek and embrace truth, including the truth of Christ, our commitment must be freely made. Without freedom, it makes no sense to speak of being committed to truth. So, to maintain the claim that Christianity is true and makes a claim on us, Christians must allow religious freedom to all human beings.

This document assumes, too, that we are not solitary seekers for truth. Our search for, and our recognition of, truth commits us to other people and to a tradition. Religious freedom, then, assumes freedom to associate in a common and received form of religious expression.



In this framework, religious freedom rests on our responsibility to follow communally the truth that we recognise, not on our right as individuals to choose our values. But the two principles of the right to individual self-expression and the right of religious freedom do have some common ground. Both see freedom as a central human value. The large freedom to live according to the truth that we recognise depends on a more general freedom to embody what we value.

The right to practise faith communally is undeniable. But the forms in which we give personal expression to faith may be limited by the common good for compelling reasons. The Scottish Crown appealed to that principle, and it is equally accepted by the Vatican II document.

To come back to the two cases with which I began, neither necessarily engages the commitment to freedom of religion. They are personal expressions of religious belief, and not communally central expressions. But in each case the limitation of freedom needs justification. Freedom is in possession until its limitation is shown to be necessary.

## The simple pleasure of collecting an author's works

### COLUMNS

#### Simple Pleasures

Of those who collect books, some might have copies of the 12 novels written by Patrick White. Or the 50 novels written by the elder statesman of Australian storytelling, Jon Cleary. Or the full works of fiction and non-fiction titles—the number is around 60—written by Sydney's Peter Corris. Few collectors, however, could hope to match Stewart Russell's collection of books by the late English writer John Creasey, who died in 1974.



Russell, an unlikely expert on Creasey's extraordinary output, estimates that Creasey wrote almost 800 books. Russell's collection of books by Creasey adds up to more than 1000, including several editions of the one title, or several editions of the one title in different languages.

Creasey's eventful life included founding his own political party, the All Party Alliance, for which he fought five parliamentary elections. Aside from writing and politics, he took an 18-month trip around the world in his Rolls-Royce, which he recorded on film. Creasey was married four times, smoked up to 100 cigarettes a day, founded the British Crime Writers Association, and pioneered the philosophy he described as selfism..., as detailed in his book *Good, God and Man*.

In his main genre of writing, crime, he was among the first to write what is known as 'police procedurals'. After first being published in 1930, aged 22, he wrote under 26 pseudonyms as well as his own name. By the time of his death, aged 64, his books had sold 100 million copies in 28 languages. Russell knew nothing of all this when he chanced across a Creasey book on holiday in his native Scotland.

After Christmas 1993, Russell and a bunch of artist friends hired a house on Scotland's Isle of Skye to see in the New Year. In the house was a copy of a book called *The Toff on Ice* by John Creasey. Russell liked the cover. He began reading. Over the next few days, he was drawn in not so much by the power of the literature, but by its familiarity. Russell always felt he knew where the book was taking him. He believed that anyone who had been educated in a British school would have done so.



Russell souvenired the book, which had a list of 50 Creasey titles inside the jacket. During a subsequent weekend, he chanced across a Creasey title in a second-hand bookshop in Edinburgh. This book also had a list of 50 Creasey titles inside the jacket. Russell checked the titles listed in both books and found that only two were the same. That meant that one writer had 98 books. Russell wondered whether he was on to more of a "cultural inheritance" than he first



thought.

After alerting friends to his discovery, Russell had several on the lookout for books by Creasey. He himself sought out Creasey's son Richard, a television producer in London, who was very helpful. He went to a museum in the Salisbury, County Wiltshire, Creasey's home town, which has a library named in honour of Creasey. The library put Russell on to one of Creasey's friends, Julian Symons, who was also a crime writer, and quite a renowned one. Symons's advice was to overlook the Toff... titles and go for those that featured the character Gideon....

Symons told Russell that Creasey had written more than 500 books. He was more than ready to admit that such fecundity had diminished quality, and that Creasey had written to well-worn formulae. He was laughing, too,... Russell said.

Creasey's fourth wife, Diana Farrell, was curious as to why anyone would bother with her late husband's books. She told him she had not met anybody who was interested in them, not even his friends.

Russell, of course, was on the trail of cultural inheritance. The books weren't very good,... he said. But that didn't mean they weren't of value or interest....

He used his collection as the basis for works in fine-art exhibitions in London. Sometimes he arranged the books according to jacket colour. Other times they were arranged according to the year in which they were written. On one occasion he exhibited more than 200 books that had the word death... in the title.



In 1997, by which time filmmakers were interested in Russell's Creasey quest, he estimated that the late author had written 786 books. Three years later, in 2000, by which time a potential documentary had fallen through, Russell, his wife Donna and daughter Grace emigrated to Australia. (Another daughter, Flora, has since been born.) His collection of Creasey books and paraphernalia was shipped over.

Russell remains proud that his Creasey collection provides a substantial document of the everyday... of life in British in the middle decades of last century. It's all about preserving,... he said.

## No place for Colin Thiele in memorial ratings

### COLUMNS

By the way



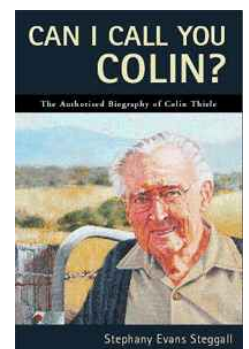
When I was a wide-eyed little bloke with shirt tails that wouldn't stay tucked in, and shoelaces that refused to stay done up, a beatific Presentation nun undertook one day to explain to me what "eternity" was. "Imagine a solid steel ball as big and round as the earth," she said. "And imagine that every ten thousand years an eagle flies by and brushes the steel ball with its wing. When the eagle has worn away that entire ball of steel," she concluded with saintly breathlessness, "eternity would only just be beginning."

Well, the only answer to that is, "Bloody hell!" but I wasn't equipped with such ripostes in grade four and no doubt I was suitably inspired to hit the moral straight and narrow, just as she had intended, because to land in the wrong place for an eternity like that would be, as Phillip Ruddock might say in one of those immoderate, passionate outbursts for which he is well known, "inappropriate".

But that image of the brushing wing—the ghostly eagle cruising through time's ethereal dominions on his ten thousand year circuit to flick imperiously at the shining steel (in later years I have seen the eagle as a Wedge Tail)—often comes back to me, not as its intended warning about the longueurs of eternal damnation, but as a metaphor for the machinations of fate.

Let me explain. A couple of weeks ago, towards the end of a cold, rigorous Clare Valley winter, during which frost after white frost had scythed through fragile plants and the kangaroos and wild ducks had decided that our pea straw mulch had been put there for them to nestle into, the higher power declared that we had earned a break. We went to Port Douglas. After the shortest week in Time's quiver and daily temperatures of 28 to 30 degrees under flawless blue skies, we found ourselves back on the shuttle bus bound for Cairns airport and home. And as we left Port Douglas we passed Steve Irwin's caravanserai going the other way. I didn't actually hear the brushing wing of fate at the time, but a few days later I realised that its eerie warning must have sounded. If I could have glimpsed the bigger picture, from eagle height, for example, I would have seen our path crossing one that was doomed. Very sobering.

From eagle height, though, I might have also seen in another part of the big picture how my path crossed intricately and several times with Colin Thiele's. Years ago, with a colleague, I wrote a series of radio broadcasts for the ABC on Thiele's life and work. It was the first such commission either of us had ever received, and



we expended a great deal of cash and early morning hours trying to do it justice, though in the end a fair enough result was undercut by being too rushed.



When Colin Thiele asked to meet us, having previewed the broadcasts, we regretted our haste even more because he was such a magnificently civilised, intelligent, insightful human being. With great gentleness, he speculated on some of the things we might have been more interested in and on some of the ways in which he felt his work might warrant more profound recognition. We didn't feel in the slightest degree rebuked; on the contrary, neither of us ever forgot that meeting or the man, and his eventual towering presence as a writer and educator came as no surprise at all.

My path would "cross" Colin Thiele's again when, looking for our dream in the mid north of South Australia, the higher power and I very nearly bought land at Eudunda, Thiele's birth place, as I was pleased to point out to the real estate bloke.

Thiele and Irwin died within a week of each other. The Prime Minister said that Irwin died a "quintessentially Australian" death while Colin Thiele, whom Howard never mentioned, died of a heart attack in Brisbane where he and his wife had moved some years ago to be near their grandchildren. Never grandstanding, diffident to a fault, proud of his Barossa Deutsch heritage, as Australian as the mid north landscapes that he grew up in, immensely gifted yet modest about it, Colin Thiele was quintessential, not the tragically unlucky, fate-tempting Irwin. But in a philistine nation under philistine leadership, Thiele's quiet cultured tone and its sad silencing could not compete for proper, courteous and deserved recognition with the phony vernacular outpouring that is supposed to be our true voice.

At a time coincidentally of renewed and heated debate about our history, fate—that imperturbable, circling eagle?—presented the nation with an opportunity to recognise our true heroes and our authentic voice, and our loudest official spruikers duly failed the test.

## If governments won't fix climate change, people power will

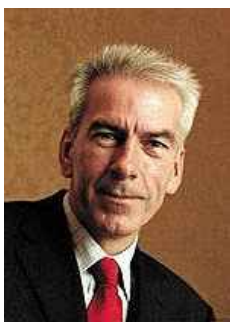
### ENVIRONMENT

At times sustainable living... is seen as too broad a goal for practical and realisable implementation. Most of us would like to make a positive contribution to the environment—we would like to “make a difference”. Al Gore, in his recent whirlwind visit to Australia, spoke passionately about living a “carbon neutral” life, and the measures one can take to ensure that one puts back as much as one takes out of this planet’s delicate ecosystem.



Dr Wim Hafkamp, a visiting academic from the University of Rotterdam, is someone who is very passionate about living a life that is sustainable”. He has a background in environmental economics, with a PhD that concentrated on building models which looked at the interaction between the economy and the environment. In the Netherlands, Dr Hafkamp looked at how emissions generated by various activities affected air quality in different regions of the country.

Dr Hafkamp suggests that governments and private enterprise begin to pursue alternative policies on emissions, and that they start to work towards pollution reduction. One of the projects Dr Hafkamp was involved with, was modelling the economic effects of a more sustainable environmental policy at both an industry level, and at the level of individual firms. Heavy industry today faces more and more criticism about the role it can and should play in providing jobs and making consumer goods, on the one hand, and making more of an effort not to pollute and degrade the environment, on the other.



Dr Hafkamp brings up both the coal and car industries as examples of industries who are in denial about the damaging impact they can have. However, through his work with groups in these industries, Dr Hafkamp has found that some are willing to be proactive about the environment. He believes “the key thing is the shift in (industry’s) frame of mind, and all of a sudden new avenues open up as we have seen in industry since the late 1970s. The whole movement towards cleaner production, eco-design, pollution prevention are all industry generated, (it’s) not environmentalists having thought it up.”

For Dr Hafkamp sustainable living is “something that is both individual and contextual”. He takes a more holistic view of our place in the eco-system. Our interactions with, and our physical presence in, the eco-system means that the principles of sustainable living and sustainable development become inseparable. Dr Hafkamp believes that two things need to be done if human beings are going to live in a more sustainable way.

First, he says we have to ...think about what is development and what brings us ahead in life, and how do we do this in such a way that we maintain some kind of sustainability, some kind of relationship with our physical environment.... There is a need to find your place in (a) continuum... that allows one to implement a way of life which incorporates elements of environmentally friendly activities, but fits in with your context, the people around you and your community.

Speaking about the reliance on government to lead the way for sustainable living, Dr Hafkamp says, To hell with governments. If we can't have it the way it should be, let's have it the way we can, which is when you try to go ahead and take action anyway, like a citizens' coalition for climate change.... It may be too late to expect government to wake up to the dire need to make adequate environmental policies and to actually implement them. As awareness grows it is time, at least in Australia, says Dr Hafkamp, that we work on (our own) government..., rather than wait for the government to work on us in making sustainable policy.

Dr Hafkamp is also very welcoming of non-environmental circles, such as the Catholic Church, being interested and concerned about the environment. He recalls having previously thought about the Church's insensitivity to environmental issues, (which really) is about what we are doing to creation.... It's an interesting perspective on what might have prompted the Church to take an interest in environmental matters. Dr Hafkamp says that these different fabrics of society... are needed to guide people. He comments on the fact that the Bible says nothing of climate change, it is a matter of re-interpreting what it says... in a way to show that we care for Earth, God's creation.



Dr Hafkamp, who is speaking at a climate change conference at the MCG in October, hopes to put across a range of options for sustainable living by our own ability to modify and reduce our demands on resources.... He wishes to present ideas and strategies that are both viable and affordable. Dr Hafkamp is optimistic, saying it is never too late... to make a change. Although this motto rings familiar, with our planet showing advanced signs of deterioration, erratic weather, drought and heat waves, it is a message that must be broadcast long, loud and clear, so that change can be absorbed and affected.

## Palestinian factions holding back negotiations with Israel

### INTERNATIONAL

#### Politics



The situation in the Palestinian Territories, particularly in Gaza, remains bleak, especially since public sector employees went on strike on September 2. What is worrying about the strike is that it is strengthening the factional divisions and infighting among Palestinians. The security situation for average Palestinians is also affected, as the security forces of the Palestinian Authority are not receiving regular salaries—and in fact have not been since March

2006.

The United States Congress has provided in the fiscal year 2006 “Foreign Operations, Export Financing and Related Programs Appropriations Act” \$150 million in Economic Support Funds (ESF) for US aid programs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. President Bush, with help from Congress, provided \$50 million in direct assistance to the Palestinian Authority to rehabilitate roads, water facilities, schools and health clinics in Gaza, to help ease the transition after the Israeli disengagement.

The direct aid came out of the \$75 million ESF appropriation for the fiscal year 2005. The “Fact Sheet on Palestinian Assistance” by the US State Department states that since the formation of a Hamas-led Palestinian Authority (PA) government, the US has provided a total of \$300 million in humanitarian and other aid to the Palestinians, of which \$245 million was set aside for basic human health needs, \$42 million for promoting democratic alternatives to Hamas, and \$13 million in project support costs and oversight activities.

According to Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, “the United States of America is not going to stop giving money for the immunisation of Palestinian children... It would be against our values to do that. So, for the most vulnerable and innocent populations, we will find a way to respond to those humanitarian needs.”

The European Union (EU) has spearheaded international efforts to establish a Temporary International Mechanism (TIM). Through a World Bank account, donations or “social allowances” may be channelled to Palestinian health workers and other needy families, but the World Bank account reportedly will not pay the salaries of most other PA civil servants. Although the US supports the funding plan, it has said it will not pay into it. Despite support for a TIM, there is no current consensus on how cash payments are to be delivered to needy Palestinians, nor is there a procedure for determining which families qualify as needy recipients.



On 23 June 2006 the EU announced the contribution of \$105 million to TIM for the Palestinians, of which \$10 million would go for health supplies, \$40 million for ensuring uninterrupted supply of essential utilities such as fuel, and \$40 million for the payment of allowances to individuals—specifically those providing care in hospitals and clinics, and those judged to be in greatest need.

Britain also promised £12 million, and made its first contribution of £3million on August 11 for essential supplies in the health sector. A further £3million was announced at the Stockholm Conference on September 1. This will fund essential operations, maintenance and repair work to keep water, sanitation and electricity services running. The TIM, according to the British Department for International Development, (DFID) has already made an impact by supplying fuel for emergency generators to keep hospitals, water supplies and sanitation facilities working. £15million was also given to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency in April, to provide health, social support and other basic services to Palestinian refugees.

In his speech at the International Donor Conference on the Palestinian Territories, in Stockholm on September 1 2006, Norwegian State Secretary Raymond Johansen urged all donors to join forces in supporting TIM. He stated that TIM offers three windows: it complements the UN cap, increases donor coordination and supports the Palestinian Authority's ability to deliver basic social services such as health care and education to its people.



Mr Johansen stressed the importance of free access to and free movement in the Palestinian Territories, the fact that the international donor community is not doing enough to meet humanitarian needs of the Palestinian population, and the urgency of the need for Israel to release the Palestinian VAT revenues—\$500million—which are still being withheld.

He also stressed that Norway considers a seamless transition between humanitarian assistance and long-term development in the Palestinian Territory to be vital. The common long-term objective of building viable Palestinian institutions remains, according to Mr Johansen, and should not be lost amid short-term relief efforts.

While health and other essential infrastructure is the primary concern of the TIM contributors, and although the US government has offered \$42 million for promoting democratic alternatives, there is still clearly an information gap in identifying the most needy cases for giving out social allowances.

The Department of Services to Palestinian Refugees, part of the Middle East Council of Churches, advocates that a system be worked out whereby the TIM mechanism and US aid can be used to ensure that all government employees will receive their salaries expeditiously and regularly. It is difficult to predict what the outcome will be if the current situation, especially in the Gaza Strip, deteriorates further.

The moves by Fatah, Hamas, and other parties towards a “grand coalition” that can work with Israel are encouraging, but the political process that would allow for this to occur could take a significant amount of time. One only need look at the “road map” for peace to understand just how difficult compromise and progress can be. In the short term, wise and practical ways to save the public employees of the Palestinian National Authority need to be devised, so that the citizens of the West Bank and Gaza strip can enjoy a basic level of human services.



## Zookeeper Irwin preached the wrong message

### AUSTRALIA

*The only creatures [Irwin] couldn't dominate were parrots. A parrot once did its best to rip his nose of his face. Parrots are a lot smarter than crocodiles.*

— Germaine Greer, Guardian, 5 September, 2006

The Australian public is eagerly waiting. Thousands have camped out for a few days for an allotment of 3000 free tickets. The occasion is Steve Irwin's memorial service to be held on Wednesday, 20 September at his Australia Zoo. John Williamson is scheduled to play. The service will be screened before a worldwide TV audience. The "crocodile hunter" (a title used by his fans without self-irony) was dead, killed by the jab of a docile stingray off Port Gladstone on 4 September while filming a documentary.



The story of his life, already being written, will conclude that he was a good conservationist, a global ambassador for protecting "dangerous" animals. But can the owner or manager of a zoo ever claim such a title? Zoos: cordoned off spaces, celebrating the subjugation of nature. They demonstrate a cruel pecking order: you are on show, it tells animals, because you are in captivity, because you are not free, and your ancestors were exterminated. You must sing for your supper; you must perform for the public.



When one sees the praise heaped on this man, it is fitting to bear in mind the historical *raison d'être* of zoo keeping: displays of power through entertainment, imparting knowledge on people about their status in society. Whether it was the Chou Dynasty in the 12th century BCE or the biologically-crazed nobles of Europe during the Enlightenment, animals were exotica, symbols of power. The agents of Imperialism, assisted by improved technologies, caged the animals of colonies first in private menageries, then public exhibition spaces called zoos. By the late 19th century zoos were no longer elitist. Democratised (Irwin was "egalitarian", one of "us" and the great leveller), the zoo became a space of civic virtue. The public could see the wonders of the "wild".

If natural conservation is dependent on the televisual orgy, the gladiatorial contest (Will Steve be eaten? Will the reptile eat Steve's child?), we must be desperate indeed. The images he produced are akin to those that shaped the West's consciousness of the developing world: the dying child, the famine-stricken family. In many ways, both sequences are tasteless: they denigrate their subject in the name of publicity.

Mark Townsend of the Queensland branch for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals must be mistaken to assume that Steve was “a modern-day Noah” (6 September). Perhaps the lesson is this: the animal world is there for the picking, an entertainment bonanza. Preserve it, yes, but only do so at the cost of its solitude and tranquillity. Those in favour of Irwin’s environmentalism cite his purchasing ventures: he bought tracts of land for “conservation”. Perhaps he was more complicated than his fans realise. Irwin, who always realised environmental projects as business ventures, never wavered in his central philosophy: reduce the beings of the animal kingdom to anthropomorphic caricatures: crocodiles and snakes can be handled, cuddled, kissed. Their existence in enclosures implies a loss of sanctuary, not an affirmation of conservation.

It has been just two weeks since his death, and already the hagiographic glow that emanates from the sepulchre of Australia Zoo is overwhelming. Australians like Irwin in spite of themselves, lamenting his fall the way the ill-planned expedition of Burke and Wills is lamented. Nature, we assume, is there to be conquered. Sometimes it proves cruel, but the pound of flesh it extracts from humankind is repaid ten-fold. A week after his death, Wayne Sumpton of the state fisheries department announced that ten stingrays had been found, their bodies mutilated.

Reactions like those of the American organisation, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals are dismissed with the headlines: “US Activists dancing on Star’s Grave” (14 September). The melody they dance to is ignored as macabre and insincere. “He made a career out of antagonising frightened wild animals, which is a very dangerous message to kids,” warned PETA activist Dan Matthews. Its spokeswoman Lisa Wothne added her support in an interview with News Limited, encouraging a boycott of Australia Zoo whilst discouraging Irwin’s children from imitating their late father. A large swathe of international scientific and environmental opinion has also been ignored—what would they know?

Even if Irwin’s treatment of animals was of no consequence to his legions of fans, his treatment of the ray in his last moments could have shed some light. A debate grew up on whether a video filming his last moments would be released. But his management preferred to nourish the legend of the environmentalist rather than the one he was most known for: the “croc” hunter who may have died aggravating an otherwise placid sea creature.



## Pope's Islamic stumble baffles the experts

### THEOLOGY



Pope Benedict is learning the hard way that interreligious dialogue these days is a complex and delicate business. Though he has now affirmed his respect for Muslims, in a long quotation from the official policy enunciated forty years ago by Vatican II, his decision to quote a polemical medieval text against Muhammad and the Qur'an during a lecture last week remains puzzling.

The quoted words were not really germane to his theme, and the lecture would have lost nothing had they been omitted. Ironically perhaps, one of the main aims of the speech was to warn the West that not taking faith seriously and the exclusion of God from the realm of rationality was perceived by the world's religious cultures as an attack on their most profound convictions.... The Holy Father's apologies have failed to convince his critics, as he expressed sorrow not for the offence he caused, but rather for the reactions to that offence. The days to come may shed further light on the puzzle and perhaps bring a measure of reconciliation, but some Christians in vulnerable situations are already paying the price.

There were two related issues in the Christian emperor's attack on Islam which the Pope took as starting points for his reflection: the rationality of God and the irrationality of violence. Neither in Muslim nor in Christian history have these principles always seemed self-evident. In both traditions, contrary to what the Emperor may have thought, it is recognised that any real act of faith must be free and that forced conversion is therefore meaningless. There are several Qur'anic verses to this effect: for example, 2: 256; 10: 99; 16: 125; 26: 3-4. The Pope quoted the first of these—There is no coercion in matters of religion...—though he asserted, against the consensus of both Muslim and non-Muslim scholarship, that that chapter of the Qur'an came from the early period of Muhammad's career when he had no political power and so could not have coerced anyone even if he had wanted to.



In spite of the shared conviction that faith is a gift of God and that forced conversion is therefore irrational, both our traditions have been ready to use coercion and violence to root out schism and heresy, to prevent the practice of other religions, and to enforce at least outward conformity to religion. War and violence still find support among religious people of both traditions, and Benedict seems poised to go even further than John Paul II in his opposition to it.



On the question of the rationality of God, the New Testament itself puts us on our guard against presuming that God conforms to our notions of what is rational. We have to learn God's kind of rationality—what Paul calls the wisdom of the God—through the Cross, which to many who consider themselves wise and rational is simply scandal and folly (1 Cor 1:17-25). Indeed the Pope's speech, whilst extolling rationality, has a very particular kind of rationality in mind—one that has been purified... by the encounter with Biblical faith. A rationality of love.

The Islamic tradition, too, has been wary of presuming that God is somehow subject to our preconceived notions of rationality and justice. Taken to its extreme for the sake of philosophical argument, this has led some thinkers to assert, for example, that a God who is absolutely sovereign is therefore not obliged to tell us the truth, or to command us only to do good things. However, this kind of speculation hardly touches the mainstream of the Islamic tradition, which remains convinced that God is Truth and reveals the Truth. The whole thrust of the Qur'anic preaching is to encourage people to use their reason to reflect on what can be known about God from the signs... of God's activity in creation and history. In this the Qur'an's thought is very close to what Paul says in Romans 1, quoted by the Pope in his lecture.

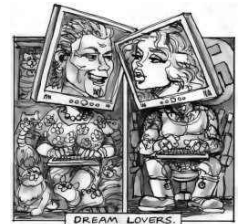
Vatican observers often predict that this Pope will engage much more than his predecessors in substantive dialogue with Muslims about the issues between us. That may be true, and such a dialogue is surely urgent. However, it cannot be done without allowing Muslims to speak for themselves. We cannot presume first to tell them what they believe, and then to criticise them for it. In Regensburg the Pope engaged not with Muslims, but with a version of Islam enunciated by a Christian locked in battle with them. Is it so surprising that conflict resulted?

## Lonelygirl15 exposes the Net's illogical sense of community

### MEDIA

#### The Net

The recent outing of popular YouTube personality "[lonelygirl15](#)" as an out-of-work New Zealander—who lists American and British accents... as acting skills on her resume—has prompted many to ask why we are still so trusting of what we find on the internet.



You'd be hard-pressed to find someone these days willing to respond to a Nigerian widow's email asking for help with a bank transfer, let alone purchase medications or stock options on the cheap from a random website. So how did lonelygirl15 fool people?

Going by the name of Bree, she seemed to be a disaffected teenager with strictly religious parents, posting short video clips detailing the unfolding dramas of her life—sneaking out to a party, getting caught by her father, battling her parents for independence. Her vlogs (video web-logs) were extraordinary only in their ordinariness, and this is what captured people's attention; Bree's videos topped YouTube's "most watched" lists for almost four months. When it was revealed that lonelygirl15 was the work of a Hollywood talent agency, ostensibly promoting a new form of storytelling..., many of her fans were disappointed.

The burgeoning YouTube community—non-existent in 2004, and so popular now that Viacom, MTV's parent company, blames it for a decline in MTV audiences worldwide—has been revolutionary. The sense of community—real or imagined—that YouTube has created is significant. The exposure of Lonelygirl15's creators was perhaps the moment that this community lost its innocence, yet it was only a matter of time before Hollywood creatives started on the YouTube medium.

The response has been telling, in that it reveals the extent to which people are willing to trust in what they find online. Some were not surprised at the deception, not least because of the sophisticated editing techniques of Bree's videos. Yet some comments on "her" profile point to a real disappointment in the actress' decision to carry the storyline beyond the vlogs and into reality, by interacting with her fans "off-screen" via messaging. One commentator argued that by answering YouTubers' messages posted on her profile, she was pretending to be a real person and therefore taking advantage of her viewers' trust; that's where she crossed the line....



The question of whether internet users can expect a level of honesty from the people they interact with is a difficult one. The ethics of creating a persona on YouTube are slippery. Forums like [YouTube](#) and [MySpace](#) are the new soda fountain, the new

shopping mall—a place where kids hang out, chat and learn to be adults, away from the prying eyes of their parents. The difference between YouTube and the mall is that young people can project a carefully crafted image to the online world, create an identity that fits comfortably. The question emerging is whether these identities are more, or less, representative of the individual's true self. The answer, confusingly, seems to be both—yet what is now being lost is the self; why be just one person, when many personas are available?

Jason Fortuny, an unscrupulous blogger, sets a fine example of the depths some will descend to on the internet. In his "Craigslist Experiment", he posted a fake advertisement for a woman looking for rough male sex partners in an online marketplace. After receiving over 200 responses, Fortuny published all of them, including extremely personal photos and contact details, on the pages of his website. Some men begged him to take down the details: Fortuny refused their requests, and published these letters on his website too.

While one may think that these men deserve what they got, the case raises some difficult questions. Arguably, the men who replied to Fortuny's ad were revealing their true identity—yet on the other hand, were they only doing so because of the supposed anonymity of the internet? Fortuny was, technically, not playing outside the rules when he misrepresented himself on Craigslist. But how clear are the rules?

There is no simple solution to the quest for honesty in representation on the Net. We can take some relief in the thought that even the most tech-savvy among us aren't safe from virtual fraudsters. In another corner of the web, a player in the massive role-playing game *Eve Online*, "Cally", set up an in-game corporation called the "Eve Intergalactic Bank". Cally collected hundreds of other players as customers, and his bank offered interest, loans and insurance, just like in the real world.

The problem was that Cally absconded with his customers deposits, by virtually flying off into space, as the game allows any player to do—earning himself a cool 790 billion "inter stellar credits" (equivalent to AU\$225,650) and effectively bankrupting hundreds of players in the game. In true criminal mastermind style, Cally even thought to record a [fairly long confessional video](#) in which he details his crimes, mocks the online gaming community and reveals, rather obviously, that he is a pirate.



Certainly, as users of the internet we must all be aware of the fractured (un)reality it can create. The sense of community the Net can provide is meaningful, and contributes to the ever-increasing sense of this planet being a "global village". Unfortunately, this virtual community also affords pranksters, pirates and PR people fertile ground for deception.

## Why Barcelona is everyone's second favourite team

### SPORT

#### The World Game



The Barcelona Football Club has broken with tradition in a significant way in the last week. Never in its storied history has the club carried the emblem of a corporate sponsor as the frontispiece of its shirt. Barça has stood almost completely alone in this (Atletico Madrid is the only other hold out in Spain); every other major European club—in fact, just about every club you care to think of—has carried a major sponsor on its shirt. Try to imagine, for instance, Essendon without the ubiquitous “3” symbol, or the Rabbitohs without the “TV Week” logo, or for that matter the great Milan sides of the 90s without the “Opel” emblem on the front of their shirt.

BarCa has joined the ranks of those who advertise, but not in the way one might expect. In keeping with its tradition of being “more than a club, BarCa has unveiled a sponsorship deal with a difference—and it has raised eyebrows and garnered further plaudits for a club which is already well loved and respected the world over.

Barca has come to an agreement with UNICEF, the UN agency founded in 1946 in response to the needs of children all over Europe following the end of World War II. UNICEF has worked in 157 countries worldwide since its formation, helping children who are living in poverty to survive, providing vaccines, and helping to provide access to such essentials as drinking water and food.

In return for carrying a major sponsor's logo for the first time in 107 years, you might ask how much Barcelona is being paid. The answer is not one cent. In fact, Barcelona has also agreed to pay UNICEF around \$2.5 million dollars a year for the privilege. As Barca president Joan Laporta said when addressing the UN in New York recently, FC Barcelona is not only a football club, but a club with a soul...



The deal is staggering, for a number of reasons. This must surely be the first time that a club has paid someone to have their logo on their shirt. In mid-2005, rumours were swirling about with claim and counter-claim being made that the club might break with tradition and allow a sponsor. The Barca members were known to be opposed. The actual premium a first sponsor might have had to pay would have been significant. It is now a moot point. But for some idea of the sort of money Barca has turned down by making this deal with UNICEF, one need only look at the income of its nearest rivals.

Real Madrid, the hated (Castilian) rivals, has a deal with BenQ from which they reap \$35 million a year. Manchester United have in recent months signed a deal

with American firm AIG worth \$141 million over four years. Chelsea rakes in \$25 million a year from Samsung, and Juventus (ironically toiling in the Serie B this year due to its match fixing in recent years) make \$37.5 million a year from Tamoil, an oil company owned by Libya, but based in the Netherlands.

The Barcelona deal is stunning. How often is this much advertising revenue refused, let alone given away? On top of this, and the financial contribution that will be made to UNICEF, Barca has agreed to provide support (for) UNICEF activities through its players, promoters and members....

As President Laporta said at the UN assembly, Barca and UNICEF can go a long way to improving life for many children around the world." Could this be the beginning of a new trend for sporting clubs around the world? Time will tell. The cynical among us might simply say that this is the football club executive softening up the all-powerful Barca membership (Barca is owned by its members) for a time when a commercial sponsor might be brought on board.



On the other hand, Barca, like most major sporting clubs, is not short of money these days, with massive revenues coming from TV deals, shirt sales, European and domestic competitions, off-season tours, and of course the 100,000 or so people who go to the Nou Camp every second week to watch the Blaugrana in action.

Jimmy Burns' excellent biography of the club, *Barca*, makes abundantly clear how the club has always sought to be a little different—after all, how many clubs have, as representatives of a region or state, petitioned a national government for independence, as Barca did in the 1930s. They subsequently had their President murdered, and the actions of the club's leadership contributed to the commencement of the civil war. It's somehow difficult to imagine the Eagles, or perhaps the Lions, petitioning Canberra in the same way!

The UNICEF deal shows FC Barcelona for what it is—a forward thinking club, with a long, proud history, and a strong commitment to social justice, and making a difference to all the children of this global community.



## Feature letter: Wadeye youth can master their destiny

### FEATURE LETTERS

I'm pleased that my *Eureka Street* comments challenged Channel 9 *Sunday* reporter Sarah Ferguson. Let me acknowledge that, unlike the minister, she spent time in the community and in her own words, had a "rewarding" experience.

I did make quite an effort to see the report, to see how people, whose first language is Murrinpatha, engaged with a journalist who spoke only English. Aside factual and pronunciation errors, I noted that Sarah sometimes offered words to the person she was interviewing, a tempting technique when people are questioning others whose first language is not English. She was interviewing young men whom she had earlier described in the following way: "They don't go to school and speak little or no English." Listening to young people who have difficulty expressing themselves in a foreign language, requires more than skill. It raises questions about proper and valid communications with young people across gender, age and culture.

My principal reaction focused on the report's claim to have documented the situation "inside the gangs of Wadeye... the cultural and social issues at play." I have known many families at Wadeye for more than 30 years. I spent a number of my early university summers there and was present when Cyclone Tracy was wreaking its havoc in Darwin. My last visit was a year ago. On the day I drove in from Darwin, one small group of young men was threatening another group. After my long relationship, I have become very suspicious of offering simple cultural and social explanations of life there, especially in relation to the young men.



If I wanted to know "the cultural and social issues at play" amongst young people at Wadeye, I would need to have some sensitivity to language, age and gender, and further, understand how kinship and other cultural values were currently being expressed. I would also need to appreciate the history of this artificially constructed "community", and to appreciate how mission life has affected the parents of these young people.

Understanding life at Wadeye is complex. An increasingly large group of young people emerges out of intense and rapid social change in this community, all within 70 years. It is these factors, multiple and interacting, that have formed and narrowed social pathways for young men.

When the report suggested in the opening lines, "the young people of Wadeye are caught between two worlds" it adopted, like the minister, an old and problematic dichotomy. The simple "bush life of their ancestors" was contrasted with "modern youth culture". Such a simple, popular media distinction serves to



make hunting “ancestral” and heavy metal music “modern”, as if modern men don’t hunt, and those who do can’t enjoy heavy metal music.

Whatever the music they and other young men presently follow, they are not “caught between two worlds”. I think they are trying to discover what it means to live within the complexities of this one.

Unlike “our” culture, Aboriginal culture can be perceived as only having integrity when it lives in some idealised and ancient past. In this depiction culture cannot change and, if its young people wish to be “truly” Aboriginal, they cannot follow heavy metal music or by implication, rap, rock or even country and western. If they attempt to change, they are described as being “caught between two worlds”. However, this isn’t the view we take of our own evolving culture. I no longer speak Gaelic or Latin, and I don’t consider myself caught between two cultural or church worlds.



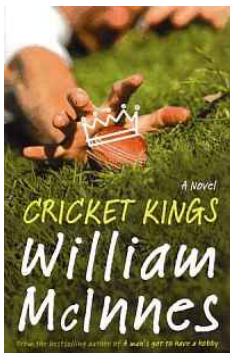
In 1977, Mary Durack wrote *Tjakamarra—Boy between Two Worlds*, a fictional account of a young desert boy who left his desert home for school in Broome. Apart from it being a female and non-Aboriginal view of this young man’s journey, it described his need to leave his Aboriginal world for another, better one.

What have we learned since then? Do we understand why young Aboriginal men follow particular social pathways and not others, listen to various forms of music and adopt different forms of social behaviour? How do we avoid simple explanations of a community’s struggles to grow up its young people? How does the media scrutinise its own non-Aboriginal self to avoid reinforcing history and colonisation?

## Cricket King's saintly gestures

### BOOK REVIEW

*Cricket Kings*, by William McInnes. Hodder, 2006. ISBN 0-7336-2049-3, RRP \$32.95, [website](#) .



According to one newspaper, William McInnes is unique among Australian authors. In spring 2006, McInnes had both works of non-fiction and fiction in the respective "top ten" best seller lists. The autobiographical *A Man's Got to Have a Hobby*, a saying of McInnes' father, and the novel *Cricket Kings* are related thematically in that both concern masculinity, inter-generational relationships, social change and Australian suburbia.

Chris Anderson is captain of Yarraville West "fourths" whose home ground is the Cec Bull oval. Chris' tale begins on a Friday, as he intersperses his work as a solicitor for the public sector union with his passion for finding a team for the last game of the season. Although the story concludes the next day as the match unfolds, McInnes skilfully employs flashbacks and other devices to portray the life of the Anderson family through four generations. He also expands the story horizontally as players remember past experiences, from inner Melbourne to a medical mission in Africa.

The prompts and nudges are many and varied. As a wedding car cruises around waiting for a bride to be ready, Chris reflects on his own wedding. He remembers how Julie, his wife, accused him of liking cricket because it allowed him to play with himself in public. Chris' mind drifts to his vasectomy "on the edge of eternity" as he became a "slightly sore dud entry in the reproductive race". It happens to be hard rubbish day, when "people throw out so many things. So many broken dreams and good intentions." Chris reflects that "Bull Oval had once been a tip" and now it was a playground. He ponders the suburban passion for renovations and notes that people at barbecues talk about their tradesmen and architects the way they used to talk about hobbies or pets. "Whatever happened to footy or cricket?".

Chris laments a "world of uncertainty and fear (that) we're buying into". He wonders "why do we fear...| life?" and cannot understand what there is to fear "on a day like today". Although he is big and loud and swears in front of his son Lachlan, Chris is warm, sincere and generous. He interrupts the match because an African woman, not knowing that the route is unserved on the weekend, is sitting in the heat at a nearby bus seat. He and Doctor Michael Martin escort her to a working bus stop. Chris is also highly protective of Brian, whose intellectual underdevelopment causes the opposition team to tease him. He ponders the nature of the difference that surrounds the park containing twenty-odd players dressed in white uniform:

*We all look the same but what goes on underneath?... Just the same things that went on underneath the people in the flats and the people in the pool and the people on the other side of the planet. He supposed, as he scratched his testicles in that languid way cricketers do, that understanding is the problem.*

Michael Martin notices that conversations in the slips are unique, starting and stopping at random. Some snippets "came from the deep, quiet well of reflection and comfort...| But sometimes the water drawn from the well can be tainted with that awful toxin of self-reflection and truth."

With just nine players, including three juniors, Yarraville West cannot compete. It hardly helps that Michael is distracted by the bride. Years earlier he had climbed the fence after the ball and encountered her dog, Atticus. Almost a passenger, bus driver Rob Orchard fields on the boundary listening to a girl having cello lessons in a nearby house. After a makeshift lunch that includes Hawaiian pizza garnished with tinned spaghetti, Chris tells his team that they cannot hope to reach the 319 for victory. What is important he tells them, is to "have a go". Together they recite a litany of heroes, including a test cricketer who batted with his jaw broken and bandaged.

The motivated Yarraville batsmen excel, but Chris makes one outstanding gesture. An opposition bowler, recruited from a higher grade, loudly disparages an Aboriginal man walking past with his son. Chris Anderson says:

*We bother to have a go because it's a way of saying that we care...|. About everybody getting the right to have a go. We care about the right of everybody, black, white or bloody brindle to be able to come here on this oval and not to have to put up with somebody saying they shouldn't be here... We have a go because it's actually what makes us a bit better than what we are.*

The reactions of many Australians to the deaths of a crocodile showman and a racing car driver suggest that media idols might one day become our secular saints. While the fictional Chris Anderson should not be canonised, his love for his family and friends, his integrity and humility are very appealing characteristics. In *Crickets Kings*, William McInnes has certainly had a go. Though not an iconoclast, McInnes has something meaningful to say about the significance of the ordinary, everyday person, and further, he says it with a gentle good humour that makes this book well worth reading.

## An inconvenient but upbeat truth

### FILM REVIEW

#### Documentary

*An Inconvenient Truth*. Running Time: 97 minutes. Rating: PG. Director: Davis Guggenheim, Starring: Al Gore, [website](#).

Brace yourself: this may be the scariest movie you see this year. It's an eco-disaster movie as unsettling as anything you've ever seen on the big screen, although the only special effects the doco contains come via an elaborately constructed multimedia display, which presenter Al Gore somewhat humbly refers to as this slideshow...



This slideshow..., combined with Gore's earnest commentary, comprises a frank and frightening dissertation on the devastating, irrevocable effects of global warming, and points the finger of blame squarely at technology and convenience-obsessed modern humanity. Most terrifying of all, the facts and figures Gore presents put the expiry date for life as we know it... at some time in the near future.

Gore has presented his slideshow to wide acclaim across the US and Europe, and Guggenheim's unobtrusive documentation now makes it accessible to a much wider audience. Guggenheim also broadens the film's scope to examine how aspects of Gore's own life—his childhood as a farmer's son; the near-fatal accident that nearly claimed his young son some years ago; his contentious presidential election loss to George W. Bush in 2000—all inform and fuel his anti-global warming crusade.

True, it's hardly new to point out the ecological dangers of global warming. In fact, Gore presents little in the way of new information, and is a tad vague about some of his sources. On the other hand, other aspects of the presentation, such as before and after... photos depicting the radical deterioration of glaciers and major bodies of water worldwide, are far more compelling. So is Gore's linking of recent, atypically severe and frequent natural disasters (Hurricane Katrina et al.) to global warming, and his repeated emphasis of just how badly global warming has progressed.



Gore himself is a surprisingly engaging orator, who injects his lecture with passion and even humour. Take, for example, his self-introduction—"I used to be the next president of the United States." Sure, he probably had scriptwriters help him produce such material, but his comic timing is impeccable, and such touches make the film even more accessible and, ultimately, more compelling.

Despite the bleak prognosis, *An Inconvenient Truth* is an optimistic film. Gore is no doomsday prophet, he advocates change; text during the closing credit roll suggests simple action individuals can take to decrease their carbon emissions (the major cause of global warming).

*An Inconvenient Truth* is, in parts, overbearingly emotive—never more so than during said closing credit roll, over which Melissa Etheridge croons sappy new chart I Need to Wake Up.... Still, it's unlikely anyone who sees it will walk away unaffected. And if there's any grain of truth to *An Inconvenient Truth*, then individual change is the vital first step towards much-needed global change.

## Eating in and out in Rome

### FOOD

It's fascinating what travel does for food prejudices. Tripe, abhorrent back in Australia, off-white spongy mounds in parents' horror stories of post-Depression childhood, was *trippa* on [Taverna Guila](#)'s menu. I hoped to discover its true nature: after all, a 1940s Tasmanian housewife surely couldn't have done it justice. It duly arrived, concealed under spinach sauce, but with one bite my hopes were dashed. It was still there, that mucousy blandness, dominating even though garlic put up a good fight. It may have been more palatable than the boiled, pallid version of my father's misfortune, but...| well, I tried it once.



When in Rome, city of anticipated best dining in the world, we didn't eat out much. By-and-large, we couldn't afford Italy's own cuisine, so we rented an apartment with a "kitchenette" in Piazza Farnese. Thank God for the luxury of real Italian ingredients and for my battered paperback, Elizabeth David's *Italian Food*. Our cobbled square opened onto the famed and infamous food market, Campo di Fiori. Giordano Bruno was burned for heresy right where I bought swordfish.



Even the chain of supermarkets, [La Rinascente](#), bore little resemblance to Coles. Their equivalent of supermarket ham was San Daniele prosciutto. I can still taste the sausages with mouldy coatings. Supermarket mozzarella was sheep's-milky, yielding, and delicious; nothing like hard yellow snowmen. Sicilian broccoli: pale green with alienesque spikes. I smuggled a beef-stock concentrate, a cross between Vegemite and barbecue scrapings, home through Customs. Artichokes became an obsession.

We persevered with rudimentary utensils and a stove delivering electric shocks; the simultaneous use of hotplates plunging the apartment into darkness. The fuse-box enclosed a plastic crucifix. We complemented our cooking with garlicky slices of *pizza bianca* from the Campo's Il Forno, where we also bought green-olive-studded bread, and I became addicted to *pinolate*. We bought our drinking water from an old woman round the corner in Vicolo del Gallo, who enquired where we came from—"ah, si, l'Australia"; a sage nod.

I dutifully visited every notable chapel but soon realised guiltily that I'd rather be looking out for my stomach. I found myself whipping around the Santa Maria Sopra Minerva thinking about lunch. Or at the Villa Borghese, looking hungrily out at the symmetrical cumquat trees, my basket in the cloakroom full of waxed-paper-wrapped cheese and pungent sausage, ciabatta, dark chocolate peppered with hazelnuts. Food for the soul, forsooth!

We had to eat out sometimes, though. Tony, my partner, heard somewhere about the possibility of Alba truffles in any Roman restaurant if you picked the right day, and enquired in vain everywhere we went. Finding *rigatoni con pajata* was another mission: the dish of suckling veal's intestines still filled with mother's milk, a fascinating if confronting prospect. *Perilli* in Testaccio beckoned, where *pajata* has retained pride of place on the menu since 1911. The incredibly rich result wasn't for recounting to vegetarian friends, but I regret I haven't the resources to make it here for the rest of us.



We stumbled on La Campagna and *spaghetti vongole*. Replicated many times since, it's very nice in the backyard with, strangely, a Corona. But it was something else in a dark, smoky trattoria with paper tablecloths and real waiters, adults, their grace and courtliness unknown in spotty students here (I know, I've been one). Of course, it's different in Europe, food is important and waiting is a real vocation; the waiter a real person.



There's a flip side to this—wait-staff and patrons look askance at the English-speaker and criticise openly the way you hold a fork. Be self-effacing, wear your new Italian shoes and cashmere throw and they'll still spot you a mile away. We imagined we'd conceivably pass as Italian, at least until opening our mouths, but were invariably approached in English. We studied our clothes, our attitudes, but remained mystified. Fancying ourselves urbane, we eschewed cappuccino before dinner, ordered morning espresso in Italian, knocked it back at the bar and left like everybody else.

Roman morning people don't linger over lattes and laptops. Nonetheless, the baristas smirked at our feeble attempts, their dismissiveness rendering some Australian establishments pale imitations. That was okay. They had the power. I tipped them anyway while Tony fumed. It was understandable, their being so jaded with tourists that anyone not local was fair game.

Especially in Trastevere, all too inured to *turistico*. But never mind, the tiny gelateria in Piazza San Calisto attracted us daily across the Tiber. Come siesta, and everything else closed, we would murmur, *Baci!* Not to each other, together too much; but rather the mocha-hazelnut gelato unlike anything this side of heaven. We'd trek through endless December rain, between headless statues lining the Ponte Sisto, the people who slept beneath busy hawking Louis Vuitton, and up the Trastevere hill. It even beat Gelateria Giolotti near the Pantheon, erstwhile suppliers of Pope John Paul II's favourite, marrons glace...



## Russian

### POETRY

You only hear it now & then  
but it seduces every time—  
original good and original sin  
came wrapped in its undisputed terms:

you are crying on your mother's lap,  
you are holding your father's hand,  
and the rise & fall of their voices  
binds you to them like blood.

This foreign language I speak so well  
is the algebra of my mind, the  
grammar of my heart—I love it,  
and take it for granted, like

bread, or the light of day. But then  
there are the other sounds—the  
pitch & tone of my mother tongue  
is the nearest I know to breathing;

I see lips moving on subtitled screens  
but let their sense drift over my head,  
and wallow in the sound—they may  
be plotting shame, or murder, but

the pitch & tone are beyond corruption

and carry me home every time: I am  
on my knees, I am speaking to God,  
and preparing for untroubled sleep.

With  
POETRY

With my highs & lows  
my highs of hot air rising & lifting the alls of  
my alls or nothings  
& my lows flattening my nothings  
as if there were nothing there

with all languages but the English language  
gibberish  
with everything but the English language  
gibberish  
& the English language loud, sleepless  
& unstoppable as gibberish  
as a second language

you'd think I would have by now  
but I haven't  
have I.

## Peace of Mind

### POETRY

Finding it hard to write something I like  
I tend to revise it a thousand times before I gain peace of mind  
The way an old woman arranged her hair when she was young  
Not letting anyone see her till she was done  
*Translated by Ouyang Yu from the Chinese of Yuan Mei (1716-1798)*