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## Don't shoot science messengers, they're an endangered species

SCIENCE

Robyn Williams



There is a paradox about science broadcasting. Surveys going back to the Jurassic will tell you it tops the favourites list of viewers, listeners and readers. They want lashings of medical matters, wildlife unleashed and science unlimited: from Big Bangs to nanotubes. Yet science on air is almost unknown outside a few public broadcasters such as ABC, SBS, BBC and CBC.

Do the commercials not want this source of guaranteed ratings bonanzas? Or is something else going on?

A clue is Channel 7. Recently it brought back *Beyond 2000*, originally invented by the ABC, and immediately scored big audiences: 1.3 million, fine for Australia. Yet, after only two seasons, it's gone. Why?

The answer is that science journalism, like science itself, requires investment both in time and money. Without research, experience and a critical mass of qualified journalists the show quickly collapses. Public broadcasters, until recently, have been willing to pay the required bills. Now, just at a time when the world faces monumental problems requiring scientific answers, the field is on its knees.

There are two reasons for this.

First, one is attacked personally for having some kind of high profile and for trying to face general questions beyond the detail. Take Robert Winston, professor of medicine and presenter of several TV series. He says, 'It was a serious issue for me. When I started doing television on a big, popular scale, I was completely ostracised by my colleagues and it was really unpleasant. So much so that I was determined to give up doing television. I thought, this is not worth it...'

Some of us are delighted he persevered.

Second, despite what seems like public recognition (I am supposed to be a 'Living National Treasure' for God's sake!) the reality is slim pickings. I do three programs a week on national radio, 52 weeks a year. What kind of resources might be needed to maintain such an output? Researchers, reporters, locums on stand by? The answer is zero. I have one full-time producer working on *The Science Show* and part-time producers for the other two shows. The odd freelancer provides an occasional report. That's it!

By ABC Radio standards I'm treated well. Imagine what it's like for my colleagues. So why put up with this? Because, without maintaining the airtime for scientific ideas, these windows too, would close. We have repeatedly warned that veterans such as Norman Swan and me (with 60 years of broadcasting between us) will not go on forever and need youngsters hired to succeed us, but the response has been Siberian.

Could science on air go extinct? Well, the ABC Natural History Unit, where we made *Nature of Australia* and *Wolves of The Sea*, closed in August. For many years it had no production budget. The ABC's 'standing army' of TV staff, with no programs to make, has long been an embarrassment. Outsourcing may free up funds, they say.

But where will the expertise come from? The point about public broadcasters is that, from David Attenborough to Adam Spencer, from Norman Swan to Jonica Newby on *Catalyst*, they provide a thorough training ground for both skills and innovation. This may and does happen outside as well, but does anyone really know how much we can rely on the independent sector to take over this role? Whenever I look around Australia for young and willing science communicators ready to grab the baton I'm left floundering.

Meanwhile, in a way, we are being set up to fail. The work expands relentlessly, as 'platforms' multiply and more, much more, has to be made of your material, on webs, nets, blogs and co-pros.

As for my own books, slim as they are, they have to be done on the run, usually in a handful of weeks.

I was dumbfounded the other day when a commission I had received from an academic source, a book review I had done of a biography from America, came back asking for page references. This was over 18 months after I had sent it in, bang on the stated deadline. Can those dons really need as much time as an elephant's pregnancy to cope with each small opus?

Oh such luxury!

There is a third impediment to writing popular science with global or futuristic implications. Personal attacks. I once asked Jared Diamond at his office in Los Angeles how he dared do portmanteau works such as *Guns, Germs & Steel* or *Collapse*. He replied that he had completed his lifetime's bench research and could now go forth boldly, without fearing his academic career would be wrecked. Tim Flannery, his Australian equivalent, is similarly placed.

Both have been attacked for their big picture offerings. My own are smaller and more humble, provided as introductions to more hefty works by big ideas guys.

Shooting messengers is easy. What is far more difficult is coming to terms with the reality that science and the future are suffering a criminal neglect. While some of us try to maintain an output to match the urgency it's easy to miss what's happening. Flannery, Swan, Dr Karl,

and Winston represent a fading generation. The real future should belong to fresh voices. Where are they?

## Smart hospitals need good policy more than clever politics

### MEDICINE & HEALTH

Frances Sullivan

The health debate in this year's federal election will be conducted on two fronts. One is the precinct of the 'policy wonks', the other the preoccupation of aspiring parliamentarians. The former muses about structural reforms to the health system, the latter agonises over measures to reduce health costs and broaden service options. The savvy political performers will blend the two and appeal to a vision that alleviates hip-pocket pressures.



Since the last federal poll health has been very much on the back burner at the national level. It has not drawn the same degree of public debate that was the case prior to the 2004 election. Bulk billing by doctors has improved, health insurance membership has stabilised, private hospital revenues have grown and public hospital woes have almost become 'par for the course'. Sadly, there is a mood of complacency, even resignation, that some issues are becoming too big to solve in a single hit.

Where once shocking front page newspaper stories of public hospital crises would have spun the political class into overdrive, today these same stories draw a considered, almost 'managerial', response from political leaders. Both John Howard and Kevin Rudd have deliberately adopted more reflective stances to the recent emergency department horrors besetting major metropolitan hospitals. This is more a product of the sensitivity of the political ownership of the problem than it is an indication of a 'new politics' in the health debate. Where hospital crises can be contained to administrative bungles rather than a lack of political oversight or investment, the more political leaders can adopt a statesmen-like persona and keep at bay the rising pent up public frustration.

But despite this political management, the health debate is squarely about the system's capacity to meet demand.

The ageing of the population has exacerbated the inadequate size and range of the health workforce. There literally are not enough doctors and nurses, let alone dentists, psychologists and attendant carers. Thus the funding squeeze has only got worse. Now the orthodox health management mantra is to 'do more with less'! As some senior policy makers claim, 'the health system is now too complex to manage, at best it can only be steered in general directions.'

Into this environment come the major political parties seeking to lure votes without sending alarmist signals on how they will handle this complex issue.

To date the Coalition's strong suit has been in providing safety nets for out of pocket

medical costs. They have introduced subsidies for health insurance and concessions for excessive amounts of medical bills. Labor has adopted the health insurance measures and copied the Medicare safety nets.

However, Australians now pay around 20 per cent of all health funding out of their pockets. This is 4 per cent higher than is the case in the USA. The safety nets are structured so that too few families become eligible for concessions in any given year. The drain on household budgets is not alleviated by any extra public subsidy. As the increase in health costs outstrips the growth in take home wages, both parties need to introduce other measures to provide cash flow relief for average income people.



Undoubtedly both sides will consider adjusting the income thresholds at which individuals pay higher tax if they are not privately insured. Currently the levels are too low and in effect penalise people on average incomes whilst the better off receive a handsome tax saving. Labor has raised the issue but is yet to commit to a policy change. Watch this space in the Labor Tax Policy!

A constant irritant since 1996 and now a high profile problem is the availability of public dental care. Labor has made much of the issue for the last 10 years such that the Coalition has introduced new dental measures from the 2007 budget onwards. Both sides have sought to address the issue from different ends. The Coalition will fund care for those with chronic dental problems. Labor will fund general check ups and preventative dental measures across the community. As usual both approaches combined would be the best solution!

Both parties recognise the dysfunction in governance between the Commonwealth and the states. Numerous reports indicate that savings of around \$2 billion can be achieved from the eradication of bureaucratic duplication. Only Labor has suggested a potential radical change to the current governance arrangements. Labor will give the Commonwealth full responsibility for public hospitals in three years if the state government performances fail to adequately improve the situation. The Coalition has embarked on a different direct management model with the Mersey hospital in Tasmania. It is billed as a test case and may be the fore runner for other Commonwealth run public hospitals.

Neither party can enter a federal election campaign without offering a way through the public hospital blockade. The usual antidote is money! Historically the Commonwealth provides bonus payments to those hospitals treating increased numbers of public patients. There have even been specific funding programs to have public patients treated in private hospitals. It will be unusual not to see similar schemes rolled out again this time.

One glaring problem for public hospitals is the preponderance of elderly patients needing aftercare. Labor has already announced that it will open 2000 aged care beds to ease the burden on public hospitals. The Coalition has yet to counter, but has the potential to expand

the current aged care homes program. However, both sides will miss the point if they restrict changes to the aged care homes scheme. Elderly patients need rehabilitation, sub-acute services for a time-limited, but substantial period. They then require reliable social support and attendant care. The political party that recognises the essence of the problem and responds accordingly will need to match the rhetoric with substantial funding. This may be one area where big spending promises will gain political return.

To date, the major parties are circling each other in an attempt to capture the middle ground of the health debate. Gone are the ideological fronts where Labor championed all things public whilst the Coalition advocated for private sector choice. Gone too is the appeal to public ownership of essential health services. Now the parties have shifted to keep pace with a community sold on pragmatism and impatient with rhetoric.

This does not bode well for the less fortunate and the forgotten.

The underlying inequities in health care particularly for the mentally ill and those with chronic conditions will struggle to gain 'oxygen'. The Realpolitik of health care will dominate. There are more well than sick voters! Both sides of the political spectrum will seek to appeal to the majority of voters who fortunately don't struggle to get to work from ill health or face a debilitating disease that changes life's prospects forever.

Although the pragmatic political aspirant will probably win out, it is incumbent on the rest of us to raise a voice for those who no longer can or are too tired from trying.





Online publication is not bad for magazines. Perhaps the key is to not try to replicate the experience, but rather to create something new, derived from the old. As John Donne might have put it, 'Magazines are enjoying not yet a breach, but an expansion.'

*James Massola is leaving Eureka Street to take up a position at the Canberra Times. His replacement is Eureka Street film reviewer Tim Kroenert, who has spent five years as an editor in the Salvation Army's communications unit.*

## What provoked Burmese people's fearless stand

INTERNATIONAL

Carol Ransley and Toe Zaw Latt

Since the fuel price hikes in Burma on 15 August there have been increasing unrest. Daily demonstrations are loud and spreading across the country, the most public display of discontent in almost 20 years.

But the military have brought both their guns and goons out on the streets to crush rising opposition to their rule in what some Burmese activists are calling their 'Last Stand'.

In a country where 2 out of 5 children are severely malnourished and the majority of people live in a poverty so dire many are unable to provide basic food, clothing and shelter for their families, the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) instructed all Ministry of Energy distribution outlets to raise the prices of petrol, diesel and natural gas by between 400-600 per cent.

They did this with no prior warning and without consulting economists, business leaders or not surprisingly, ordinary people. The next day, relatively small scale but by no means insignificant protest actions broke out in Rangoon, led by former 1988 student uprising leaders, Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Kyi to name a few. Not just a man's domain, women's activists such as Ma Nilar Thein and Ma Mie Mie were also on the streets leading calls for the reduction of fuel prices and calling attention to the need for immediate political and economic change in Burma. As they walked, albeit in relatively small numbers, countless bystanders and small business owners clapped them on, but few of the general public at that time considered joining these protests.

However that situation soon changed. On the 5th September in Pakokku, members of the state-backed Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) and a civilian militia group known as the Swann Arr Shin, also established and supported by the military regime, fired warning shots at a group of 600 monks who had added their voice to spreading protests over the unaffordability of rice and cooking oil. At this peaceful rally, junta thugs beat bystanders and made several arrests. Two monks were tied to wooden posts and in clear view of bystanders, taunted and beaten with rifle butts.

In military run Burma, this event was a turning point in the protests which until that time had been relatively small and involved people already openly active in the pro-democracy movement. For the estimated 80% of the population who are Buddhist, this act of violence by the military against respected monks was deeply shocking.



The next day, monks from Pakokku's central Mahavithutarama monastery set fire to four government vehicles after locking up a group of officials who had approached the monks to apologise for the bashing, arrest and disrobing of three monks the day before. While the officials were later released, monks invoked a 2,500 year old tradition of *patam nikkujjana kamma*, a campaign of refusal to accept alms (donations) from military leaders, their families and their supporters.



Buddhist law and custom outlines eight circumstances in which *patam nikkujjana kammarites* are to be applied, including incidents where monks have been vilified, where dissent has been incited between monks and in cases where the Buddha, Dhamma and the Sangha have been defamed. It was the strongest action taken in 17 years by the monkhood, and has been tacitly supported by senior monks on the military-appointed *Thangha Maha Nayaga* or Sangha Council.

As staggering images of tens of thousands of barefoot and crimson-robed monks were filmed by undercover journalists inside Burma, after two decades, Burma finally grabbed the attention of the world. Armed with nothing but upturned bowls and monastic cloth, these monks have created the most significant threat to military rule in Burma for two decades.

The monks' profound moral influence was clear felt when they marched peacefully, chanting Buddhist *suttas*, to the blockade on the road to the house of Burma's detained opposition leader and Nobel Peace laureate, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. After making the crowd of monks and people promise to show discipline and follow the instructions of the head monk, they took up position outside the gate to her home. A few minutes later, in her first public appearance in many years, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi held her hands in a gesture of respect and prayer, spoke to a monk for a few minutes, and was seen to shed a few tears. This simple and single event testified to the influence that monks have over police and foot soldiers. This event gave millions of Burmese through out the country and abroad a renewed sense of hope and pride in the movement.

### **Monks play important role in Burma's history**

Burmese Buddhist monks have, historically, played an important role in Burma's social and political movements. From the anti-colonial period and the subsequent period under parliamentary government, through until the military-socialist regime in 1962 that prohibited religious activism. And then, again, in 1988, the activism of young Buddhist monks resurfaced and brought a direct confrontation with the military regime. At the height of the democratic opposition's victory in the May elections of 1990, the activist monks declared a boycott against the military and their families, refusing to accept alms from them and limiting their ability to earn donor merit in fulfilling future lives, or to participate fully in wedding and funeral ceremonies.

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, the military crushed the protest with force and detained and disrobed several young monks associated with the incident. The raid on the Mahagandayone Monastery in Mandalay, the religious capital of Burma, left several casualties and resulted in the imprisonment of young activist monks. It inflicted a deep wound on the relationship between the military and the Buddhist order.

Following the incident, the military junta implemented a campaign of 'purification' for the Sangha order, a move against activist monks, while promoting traditional pacifiers who endorsed strict non-engagement in politics to the higher echelon of the State Sangha Council. In reinforcing state patronage of Buddhism, the military leaders often paraded senior monks at public activities staged at national monuments and local pagodas, as well as on key religious celebrations during *akha gyi yet gyi* and on other important religious dates.



### **Buddhist Monasteries: Backbone of Community Life**

In Burma today, Buddhist monasteries remain the backbone of community life. In a country that allocates a pitiful amount of official funds to health and education spending, monasteries and their abbots play crucial roles in providing food for the hungry, traditional medicine for the sick and dying, and in educating young boys who otherwise would miss out on their chance to learn to read and write.

In the last few days as violence has escalated in Burma, we have seen monks shot and killed. Other monks have been brutally beaten during nightly monastery raids. Eyewitnesses said three trucks filled with soldiers arrived at the Ngway Kyar Ka monastery in Rangoon at midnight on the 27th of September. When the monks refused the soldiers' demand to open the gate, a fight broke out in which both sides hurled bricks at each other for about 20 minutes. After enduring beatings in which considerable blood was shed, many of the monks were loaded into the back of trucks and taken to a temporary detention centre.

Later that same day, reporters from [Democratic Voice of Burma](#) interviewed eyewitnesses to the violent raids on these monasteries. A young novice monk from one such monastery, with no parents or monks nearby to care for him, asked reporters, with tears in his eyes, when the Sayadaw would be coming back as he was scared and alone. Many young children are sent to Burma's monasteries to be cared for and schooled because their parents live in such dire poverty that they cannot feed and educate their children themselves.

Reporters also interviewed sick and dying AIDS patients with nowhere else to go, living in the compound of Maggin monastery, their voices breaking as they recounted their terror at what happened the previous night.

These eyewitness accounts are too numerous for the small team of 6 reporters in the Thailand office of the *Democratic Voice of Burmato* immediately get out into the public demain,

in English. But as the news slowly gets out, and is then broadcast back into Burma via satellite TV and shortwave radio, people's outrage grows.



Some journalists reported army troops attempting to raid monasteries in Mandalay and Rangoon on the 28th of September. These troops were forced to withdraw by local residents. Residents had heard rumours of impending raids and made preparations to thwart the security forces' approach.

'We setup an alert system of banging pots and pans when anyone saw soldiers approaching the monastery, and we prepared ourselves with any available weapons to stop these unholy people from harassing the monks,' one resident is reported to have said. Other residents have witnessed some soldiers defying orders to shoot and lowering their guns. The result was new troop deployments to both Rangoon and Mandalay.

Monks are still effectively imprisoned in the five main monasteries in Rangoon, with countless others held at temporary detention sites. Residents are committed to protecting them from further harm. Statements being received from protest groups inside revealed a commitment to continue and even step up the protests with a more resolved and united front. 'This is our last chance to get the generals out', said one activist. 'If we can't do it now, we may never reach our goal'.

Brave and committed monks continued their protest over the weekend despite the arrest and detention of around 6,000 people in 4 temporary detention centres throughout Rangoon. Young monks aged between 16 and 18, and novices as young as 5 to 10 years old are believed to be among the detainees. An estimated 200 monks and demonstrators have been reportedly killed, their bodies taken for swift cremation at the Yae Wah Crematorium in Rangoon, according to staff working there. It has been impossible to verify the names, exact whereabouts and condition of detainees or to obtain an exact number of the dead.

Despite the climate of terror, the street protests have continued, although not currently in Rangoon, and the monks alms boycott holds firm. In Mandalay a crowd of 3,000 and in Sittwe a crowd of 5,000 came out on the streets over the weekend as UN Special Envoy, Ibrahim Gambari met with top generals and detained leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in an attempt to broker talks.

The monks refuse to take donations of food from the military, who in turn block laypeople making offerings to them. The monks are effectively starving. And of course, the many street children, homeless and AIDS patients that they care for are also suffering. But still they sit, chanting their sutta's on loving kindness and protection from evil and harm.

The violence and intimidation also continues. *Democratic Voice of Burma* released gruesome footage of a man, believed to be a monk, badly beaten and bruised, floating face down in a small body of water in Sanchaung. Other reports coming out of Burma indicate a campaign of



intimidation against arrested monks, authorities pressuring or in some cases forcing monks and nuns to de-robe, and denying medical treatment to sick and injured monks and nuns who refuse to do so.

In a move that shows the 500,000 strong network of monks resolve, the Thangha Maha Nayaga or Sangha Council Chairman and Vice-Chairman this week refused to sign documents presented to them by the military authorising the de-robing on monks who had been arrested over the previous week. Senior General Than Shwe promptly ordered the dissolution of this council, and the religious university in Rangoon, however it remains unclear whether this order has yet been implemented.

Meanwhile, as Special Envoy Gambari flies back from Burma to meet with the United Nations Security Council who have recently found themselves at an impasse over what to do about Burma, we hope his visit and the increased attention of the international community will help stop the growing violence, and that the resolve of the international community grows stronger. The violence, repression and hardships of ordinary people in Burma must cease. The people have waited far too long and suffered far too much.

*With thanks to the [Irrawaddy](#).*

*Carol Ransley is a human rights advocate who has monitored the situation in Burma for 15 years.*

*Toe Zaw Latt, a former 1988 student activist, is the Thailand Bureau Chief of Democratic Voice of Burma [www.dvb.no](http://www.dvb.no)*

**Solidarity Action: Express yourself to the people of Burma!**

Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) welcomes videos and pictures bearing messages for the people of Burma, to be shown in Burma via satellite broadcasts of DVB TV. Please include your name and country in the footage.

Please send your contributions to [dvb@dvb.no](mailto:dvb@dvb.no).

## Israel's pain over Darfur refugees

FEATURES

Middle East

Joel Burstyner



Since the humanitarian crisis began in Darfur in 2003, according to [credible sources](#) 200,000 Sudanese have been killed, 2.2 million have been internally displaced, approximately 236,000 have fled to neighbouring Chad and 60,000 to Egypt. Each year in that same period of time approximately 700 African migrants have walked across Egypt's border into Israel. In 2007, the number of migrants that came through Egypt into Israel greatly increased. As the numbers have continued to rise, Israel has been eager to curb the migration across its borders.

The crisis in Darfur can largely be attributed to the emergence of militias that have attacked civilians. The predominantly African population of Darfur has been subjected to raping, pillaging and mass murder led by so-called *Janjaweed* militias, which are ethnically Arab in origin. Complicating things further, some Janjaweed tribes are [now fighting each other](#), with the Terjem fighting the Mahria and further south the Habanniya fighting with the Salamat. Many allege the *Janjaweed* have the tacit approval of the government in Khartoum. The Sudanese President, Lieutenant-General Omar al-Bashir, has denied this allegation. He has also [finally agreed to co-operate](#) with United Nations and African Union, allowing a 26,000-strong joint [peace keeping force](#) to be deployed.

Meanwhile, some Sudanese have fled terror in their country and managed to reach Israel after crossing Egypt, where they might have stayed for one month or forty. They have done this in the hope of a higher standard of living and more freedom in Israel, though in the past three months Egyptian border police have shot at, killed and beaten Sudanese attempting to cross the border.

By June 2007, 50 to 70 migrants were entering Israeli territory each night. Sudanese have been heading to northern Egypt, where Bedouins charge up to \$2400 to be guided to Israel's borders. Due to Israel's prominence in the region, African migrants sometimes think Israel is a large country and not a sliver of land that is approximately one-tenth the size of Victoria, with a population of 6.9 million to support.

In July 2007, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert announced that any further illegal immigrants caught trying to enter into Israel via the border with Egypt would be returned to Egypt. This decision came after an agreement was reached with Egyptian Prime Minister



Hosni Mubarak that the Sudanese would not be sent back to Sudan. Egyptian officials have since denied the existence of such an agreement.

A student petition urging the Israeli government not to return Sudanese refugees to Egypt has [also been signed](#) by 63 of the 120-seat Israeli Knesset. Aliza Olmert, Ehud's wife, has also been [campaigning to protect](#) Sudanese refugees. The Associated Press has reported that Israeli government spokesman David Baker claimed the African migrants were 'illegal economic migrants', indicating that many are not be entitled to refugee status in Israel, despite what is widely considered to be an ongoing humanitarian disaster within Sudan.

Israel's policy on new arrivals is, in short, contradictory at times. Forty-eight newly-arrived migrants were returned to Egypt in an overnight operation on 18 August 2007, but on 4 September 2007 Interior Minister [Meir Sheerit said](#) several hundred Darfur refugees already in Israel would be granted citizenship. Sheerit also said that his ministry had been working with the UN to assess applications for asylum.



Whilst awaiting the outcome of their applications for asylum, many of the migrants have been placed in the low-security Ketziot prison. As bad as this may sound, some of the migrants have said conditions are better than those in Sudan or Egypt. Other migrants have received temporary permits to work and live on communal farms (known as kibbutzim and moshavim) or to live with local volunteers. Although Israel was unprepared for this unexpected wave of migration, [a new facility was built](#) in July near the Ketziot prion to hold up to 1000 more people.

Israel has not specifically justified the deportation of the 48 migrants. If this action was part of a blanket closed door policy which precludes the possibility of claims for asylum being properly determined, then Israel will be falling short of its ethical obligations to all legitimate refugees, and possibly also its legal obligations. However, some migrants may in fact be properly characterised as 'economic migrants' as opposed to refugees entitled to asylum, if it they are not seeking to directly escape persecution but are merely pursuing a better life.

Security is understandably also a major consideration for the Israeli government. The consequences of terrorists infiltrating Israel's borders would be severe. Israel is also a small country and could not cope with all of Africa's would-be economic immigrants, who currently can literally walk in through the relatively unsecured southern border. So between determining 'real' refugees from 'economic' migrants, worrying about security threats, trying to provide safe harbour for people genuinely in need and calculating what the country can actually manage to provide, Israel is facing a major challenge at present.

Israel is likely to increase border security whilst also encouraging Egypt to fulfil its human rights obligations to the refugees and migrants within its borders. Further, Israel may consider revamping its entire immigration policy, which is designed primarily to assist immigrants

with Jewish familial connections in accordance with Israel's constitutional goal of establishing a Jewish state. Although Israel is desperate to discourage the influx of migration from Africa, Israel's readiness to accept the Darfurians and the establishment of a facility to hold up to 1000 migrants indicates that Israel is taking its obligations to genuine refugees seriously and will be influenced by humanitarian principles.

## Senseless death of Sri Lankan Good Samaritan

### FEATURES

South Asia

Danielle Vella



‘Our dearest Fr Packiaranjith has been killed in a claymore mine attack; the Diocese of Mannar is in deep sorrow.’ The news from a friend in northern Sri Lanka was shocking, but not surprising. As a local coordinator for the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) in Mannar District, Fr Nicholaspillai Packiaranjith lived and worked in a contested territory in Sri Lanka’s long-running civil war.

The 40-year-old priest was killed on 26 September, when his van was blown up by a mine in rebel-held territory as he was delivering aid to displaced people and orphans. Typically, the army and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) blamed each other for the blast. We are unlikely to discover the truth, because both cynically use war casualties to bolster their propaganda.

More than 10,000 people attended the funeral of Fr Packiaranjith on 29 September. In a press statement, the Bishop of Mannar, Rayappu Joseph, said Fr Packiaranjith served with ‘exemplary dedication’ and was ‘deeply committed to the poor and the marginalised’, which made his murder all the more heinous.

Apart from being a priest who gave his life for his people, Fr Packiaranjith represents the victims of Sri Lanka’s civil war, which has raged intermittently for over 25 years, claiming at least 70,000 lives. The LTTE wants autonomy in the north-east for the minority Tamils, whose grievances date back to post-Independence days, when they bore the brunt of mob violence and of discriminatory laws and policies imposed by governments dominated by the Sinhalese majority.

The war shows no signs of abating. The Defence Secretary, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, also the President’s brother, recently announced the government’s intention to defeat the LTTE ‘100 per cent’ before negotiating a political solution to the so-called ‘ethnic problem’. Rajapaksa later went back on his word and claimed to want to reach agreement with the LTTE, but the writing on the wall is clear.

The ceasefire signed in 2002 is no longer worth the paper it is written on. Fierce fighting rages anew. The defection in 2004 of a senior LTTE leader from the east, Karuna, has fuelled the conflict. Both the LTTE and the Karuna faction are indulging in forced recruitment, extending this even to children. Thousands of people have been displaced, and at least 4,000

have been killed since late 2005 when the peace process started to come apart. Over 1,000 have 'disappeared'. There is scepticism about official inquiries set up to investigate well-known cases, like the disappearance of Fr Jim Brown, a priest from Jaffna, on 20 August 2006.

Sri Lanka has a history of failed peace talks. The high hopes of those wanting peace are frequently dashed. The island ranks second only to Iraq in the number of unsolved disappearances, a phenomenon fuelled by the notorious 1979 Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). Commissions of inquiry set up by the former president, Chandrika Kumaratunga, ascertained that 26,000 people disappeared — others put the figure at close to 60,000 — and concluded that the armed forces were largely responsible.



The cases also included disappearances perpetrated in the suppression of an uprising among the Sinhalese in the late 1980s. But impunity is the name of the game in Sri Lanka. There is what the Asian Human Rights Commission aptly described a 'total collapse of the rule of law'. The armed forces and Tamil paramilitary groups literally get away with murder.

The LTTE is not accountable to anyone. It eliminates perceived detractors, uses terror tactics, and expects all Tamils to contribute to the never-ending liberation struggle. Apologists depict LTTE-held territory as a *de facto* state on a war footing and use this rationale to justify violations of human rights.

Nonetheless, the LTTE has been internationally accepted as the legitimate representative of the Tamils and remains a force to be reckoned with, despite recent military setbacks. The government strategy of talking peace and waging war is bound to fail and only serves to bring suffering.

For all their rhetoric, neither warring party has the welfare of civilians at heart. They fail to learn from the mistakes of history and instead repeat them, with the result that innocents like Fr Packiaranjith pay the price. Sri Lanka's people can only beg for peace and draw international attention to their plight, as Bishop Joseph did when Fr Packiaranjith was killed: 'Enough blood has flowed. We call on all men and women of goodwill to condemn this killing and to voice their strong condemnation of the ongoing senseless war.'

## Critics with the measure of a good film

### FEATURES

#### Film

Richard Leonard



The annual Pascall Prize is not a misspelling of the surname of the 17th century French mathematician Blaise Pascal. Instead it is a memorial to Geraldine Pascall, a Sydney critic who died suddenly from an aneurism in February 1983 at the age of 38.

It is Australia's only major award for arts criticism. It carries with it a large cash prize, and the honour of joining a hall of fame which includes Andrew Ford, Bruce Elder, Roger Covell, Adrian Martin, Sandra Hall, Andrew Riemer, Joanna Mendelssohn, John McCallum, Alan Saunders and Elizabeth Farrelly. The award is concerned with criticism in all its forms —

food to film, music to architecture.

This year's winner is the *Sydney Morning Herald* film critic Paul Byrnes. In accepting the prize for 'always distinctive, mature, incisive and argumentative' work, Byrnes declared that serious film criticism was in trouble. 'The biggest reason is that the most powerful parts of the film industry want it to die and they always have ...! Since *Star Wars* and *Jaws*, the balance between audience, critic and film has shifted to the extent that much of the public now believes that a great film can't be great unless the box office makes it great.'

He has a good point. Take last year. The top ten box office films were:

1. *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* \$38m
2. *The Da Vinci Code* \$27m
3. *Ice Age 2* \$24m
4. *Casino Royale* \$21m
5. *The Chronicles of Narnia* \$21m

6. *Cars* \$17m
7. *Borat* \$17m
8. *X-Men: The Last Stand* \$16.59m
9. *The Devil Wears Prada* \$16.55m
10. *Over the Hedge* \$16.3m

While I think we should take this list very seriously in terms of the cultural themes and value formation it suggests, Byrnes does not draw attention to the largest group of cinema-goers in the country: 13-30 year olds. The list indicates their desire for escapist and accessible fare, with science or animation fantasy leading the charge.

As a catholic film reviewer I note that this age group may well be absent from the pews of any or all religious collectives, but that their thirst for metaphysics, metaethics, transcendences, other worlds and other forms of being is satiated not in churches defined by such enquiries, but by less demanding, but infinitely more entertaining, celluloid temples.

My hunch is that for the majority of teenagers and young adults, the Hollywood blockbuster has always had greater appeal than the work of Godard, Eisenstein, Fellini, Kurosawa, Bergman, Cassavetes, Truffaut, Lubitsch and Lang. There is nothing new in this, and good film criticism has survived.

It all depends on which public we are talking about; and every art form has a variety of them. For a spectator who falls in love with the cinema as art, the experience of film is a world away from the punter who likes going to the movies. Both have their place.

Even our own notoriously difficult national market can give us hope. If we look at the top 20 box office films in Australian history, adjusted for inflation, the list includes:

11. *Crocodile Dundee* 1986 \$47.7m
12. *Babe* 1995 \$36.8
13. *Moulin Rouge* 2001 \$27.5
14. *Crocodile Dundee II* 1988 \$24.9
15. *Strictly Ballroom* 1992 \$21.8
16. *The Man from Snowy River* 1982 \$17.2
17. *The Dish* 2000 \$16.8
18. *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* 1994 \$16.4
19. *Muriel's Wedding* 1994 \$15.8
20. *Young Einstein* 1988 \$13.4
21. *Gallipoli* 1981 \$11.7
22. *The Wog Boy* 2000 \$11.4
23. *The Piano* 1993 \$11.3
24. *Mad Max II* 1981 \$10.8



25. *Shine* 1996 \$10.6
  
26. *Green Card* 1991 \$10.6
  
27. *The Castle* 1997 \$10.3
  
28. *Lantana* 2001 \$10.1
  
29. *Looking for Alibrandi* 2000 \$9.9
  
30. *Phar Lap* 1993 \$9.2

With *Chopper*, *Crackerjack*, *Kenny*, *Rabbit Proof Fence* and *Breaker Morantin* the next five places, I think the public has struck a decent balance between flocking to see engaging and quirky films that are thoroughly entertaining and socially revealing, and serious films on serious topics by serious directors. There are only a handful of important Australian films that cineastes could argue should be there.

It is also good to remember the power film critics still have in Australia to set up some very pleasing box office results: *As It Is Heaven*, *The Lives of Others* and *Romulus My Father* are recent examples. We hope the recent searing Australian drama *The Jammed* will soon join them in not sinking without a trace because film critics kept saying they were too good to so do so.

I am more hopeful than Paul Byrnes about the balance between audience, critic and film. Maybe Pascal's wager resonates for in me on many levels, but, with some titanic exceptions, and given the multiple audiences the cinema plays to, I think the box office usually gets it more right than wrong.



## Australia needs distance from US Iran attack planning

INTERNATIONAL

Tony Kevin



International concern about the risk of US air strikes on Iranian nuclear installations, and possibly on power generation and central command infrastructures also, rises and falls as the click ticks away on the Bush-Cheney regime. Here are the main factors at work.

On the US side, there is no moral or international legal constraint against a first-strike air attack on Iran. If Bush and Cheney decide the potential benefits outweigh any risks, nothing would stop them — neither scruples about taking life and destroying property, nor respect for international law. The reported Israeli air attack on an alleged Syrian nuclear facility (all the facts here are, deliberately, still obscure) may have been a trial balloon to test international reactions.

The US has achieved its main goal in Iraq — a geostrategic military placement astride the richest oil-producing region in the world. It also has a well-placed forward base from which to dominate Middle Eastern commercial oil flows and even in extremis to try to commandeer those flows or impede oil supply to the US's main potential antagonist, China. As long as the oil keeps flowing under US protection major Iraqi death and destruction and some US casualties are acceptable collateral damage for Bush and Cheney. The only irritant to complete success in Iraq is the growing Shia Iraqi guerilla resistance to US military dominance in Iraq, and the so far secure rear supply base that Iran provides to this increasingly effective resistance.

Significantly, the war has changed character over the past year. The US occupation is now increasingly siding with Sunni Iraqis, and most American casualties are now being inflicted by Shia operations.

But lashing out at Iran is risky. The US would not send US land forces into Iran, obviously, but precision bombing is in a direct sense risk-free. However, air attacks would enrage Iran and would energise the present low-level war in Iraq. This could inflame the whole Middle East, threatening pro-American regimes. Sabotage and hostage-taking could become a major issue in Arab countries where the US has a commercial presence. Iran could stress the NATO military operation in Afghanistan to breaking point, and the shaky Musharraf regime in Pakistan could fall. Russian and Chinese reactions are unpredictable but could be serious. Competent policy planners in Washington would still conclude these are unacceptable risks, and would recommend against US air strikes.

In the present power game, each side is blustering to keep face. Neither is giving ground. Iran insists — and may be telling the truth — that it has no interest in developing nuclear weapons but wants to secure its energy supplies after oil by developing an independent domestic nuclear industry. Iran has that right under the NPT to which it adheres. Iran is in dialogue with the IAEA — the proper body — on some issues relating to its adherence to NPT safeguards.

The US claims that Iran is clandestinely developing nuclear weapons. It is following the Goebbels maxim that if you repeat a claim loudly and often enough, most will eventually believe it. However the recent history of false US claims of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction have damaged US credibility. Many in the international community do not believe US claims on Iranian nuclear weapons intentions.

The US, by threatening air attacks on Iran, hopes to keep a lid on the Shia insurgency in Iraq. This is the most rational interpretation of the present US stance.

The UN Security Council arena is problematic. Having recently lost Tony Blair as their European Union cheerleader — Gordon Brown would have no truck with any unilateral strike on Iran outside UNSC authority — Bush and Cheney have a new recruit, French President Sarkozy: a man with the same high opinion of his diplomatic skills in riding the Washington tiger as Blair had in the run-up to the Iraq invasion. Sarkozy is playing a subtle game, trying to steer the US back to the UNSC while publicly siding with them. He may find, as Blair did in 2003, that in the end Bush and Cheney will do exactly what they want.



The next year will be scary. The world may be subjected to a lot of anti-Iran propaganda to condition us to the necessity of a US attack. There can be no guarantee that the present uneasy face-off, the war of words but not bombs, will continue until Bush's term ends. People with the kind of world view Bush and Cheney have, their propensity to recklessness, and the war-initiating powers they have, can do irrational and dangerous things.

Iran is also the test case for the US-led nuclear suppliers group initiative, under which the decaying Non-Proliferation Treaty system — which allows sovereign states to develop civilian nuclear industries under IAEA safeguards against clandestine nuclear weapons development — would be supplanted by a new regime of the great-power nuclear weapon states leasing nuclear materials to other countries, thereby maintaining control over the enrichment, reprocessing and disposal of those materials. This would perpetuate the nuclear monopoly of the present nuclear weapons states and favoured allies (India, Israel). Iran rejects that ideology. A lot of other countries are watching to see who wins.

What should Australia do? This will test an incoming Australian government. I think we should keep a safe distance from any US war-planning that may be happening. We should

also seek diplomatic dialogue with Iran and the interested major powers — the UK, France, Russia, China — and with the IAEA and the UN Secretary-General. We do not want our country to be dragged haplessly into what may be Bush's Last Great Adventure.

## Cuban detainees' hope for fair trial

INTERNATIONAL

Rodrigo Acuna



Outside the alternative media, last month saw nearly no coverage of the incarceration in the United States of Cuban agents Gerardo HernAndez, Antonio Guerrero, Ramon Labaino, Fernando GonzAles and Rene GonzAles.

Now into their ninth year of imprisonment, the Cuban Five — as they are otherwise known — are serving a variety of sentences that include convictions for conspiracy to commit espionage and homicide. By most credible accounts, the Cubans are in prison — some on life sentences — for political reasons and not because they have broken any serious laws, other than overstaying their visas.

The current saga began in 1997 when nearly a dozen bombs struck Havana. With hotels, restaurants and nightclubs targeted, one explosion at the Copacabana Hotel wounded 11 people and killed Italian tourist Fabio di Celmo.

Experience has taught the Cuban government that when bombs explode in Havana, or failed assassination plots against Fidel Castro take place, the first place to look is Miami — the haven for ex-patriots who fled after dictator Fulgencio Batista was overthrown in 1959. And there is one man who has stood out for his use of terrorism to overthrow Castro; CIA-trained Luis Posada Carriles.

If there were any doubts, on July 12 1998 in the [The New York Times](#), Carriles admitted to paying a Salvadorian mercenary to carry out the 1997 attacks in Havana, including the bombing which killed di Celmo. When asked if he had regrets for the murder, Posada Carriles replied in the negative: 'I sleep like a baby ... It is sad that someone is dead, but we can't stop ... That Italian was sitting in the wrong place at the wrong time.'

When it was clear that Cuban exiles in Miami were behind the new wave of attacks in Havana, Castro's government took two courses of action.

The first was to dispatch Castro's personal emissary, Colombian Nobel laureate Gabriel GarcI-a MARquez, to request US president Bill Clinton address the issue of terrorism by Cuban exiles. The second was to monitor the activities of Posada Carriles and 60 other emigrI@s, many whom belong to paramilitary organisations. This was the role of the 'Cuban Five'.



For its part, the Clinton administration seemed to have displayed some willingness to address Cuba's concerns. Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) agents travelled to Havana

and exchanged information with local officials regarding the bombing that had taken place. But unfortunately, like many of Clinton's policies towards the Caribbean island, incompetence or sheer cynicism won the day. Instead of addressing the threat posed by the Miami emigrants, the FBI arrested the Cuban Five in September 1998 in Miami using information provided by Havana.

The court case which then unfolded was bizarre.

In the initial proceedings, [according to](#) defence lawyer Jos  Pertierra, the prosecution stated:

'We arrested these five men and confiscated 20,000 documents from their computers, but ladies and gentlemen of the jury none of these 20,000 documents contain a single page of classified information.'

Instead, US authorities claimed that the Five had conspired to commit espionage — predominantly based on the fact that Antonio Guerrero was employed in a metal shop in the Boca Chica Navy Training Base.

The charge of conspiracy to commit homicide was established around an incident which occurred in 1996 over the Florida Straits, where Cuban MiGs shot down two Cessna aircraft belonging to the Miami based group Brothers to the Rescue (BR).

Although the exact location of the downed aircraft — which left three individuals dead — is contested by both Cuba and the US, prosecutors claimed that the Five were in part responsible for the pilots' deaths because they had relayed information to Havana on the actions by BR.

Why Cuba would need undercover agents in Miami to perform the tasks of their air radar systems remains in question, as do most aspects of the prosecution's case.

Reviewing the legal proceedings, a United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions [noted](#) that 'the trial did not take place in the climate of objectivity and impartiality which is required in order to conclude on the observance of the standards of a fair trial'.

Noting that the Cuban nationals were unjustly detained for 17 months in solitary confinement — a point also raised by Amnesty International — the UN report also documented that the Five's lawyers were denied the opportunity to study all the available evidence before US authorities invoked the Classified Information Protection Act.

Moreover, in August 2005, a three-judge panel of the Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit in Atlanta quashed the convictions of the Five. They ruled that the Cubans did not obtain a fair trial in Miami and acknowledged that the defence had produced evidence that revealed terrorist actions by Cuban emigrant groups in the US. This included the role played by Posada Carriles who was referred to as a terrorist.

The incumbent Bush administration however had other ideas about the case and through its Solicitor General appealed to all 12 judges of the Eleventh Circuit. A year later they nullified the decision of the three-judge panel.

With more legal entanglements moving the case back and forth the latest appeal by the Five [has been rejected](#) . It seems the case will remain unresolved for some time yet.

However, with international pressure mounting for the release of the Five — which includes eight Noble Prize winners and six British MPs — Washington's double standards on terrorism regarding Cuba seem all too apparent.

A clear indication of this is that despite the [further evidence](#) of Carriles' involvement the US refuses to extradite him to Cuba or Venezuela for trial over his role the 1976 bombing of a Cuban civilian airliner, which left 73 people dead.

Leaving aside what one may think of the government in Havana, there can be few doubts that since 1959 almost every US administration — directly or through the Miami exiles — has seen Cuban civilians as 'fair game' in their efforts to overthrow Castro. Cuban estimates of the number of victims of terrorism are 3,478 killed and 2,099 wounded.

If the Democrats win office next year, will a different approach to US-Cuban relations be embraced? Current reality leaves the Cuban Five incarcerated.

## Australia's ageing theological workforce

### COLUMNS

#### Summa Theologiae

Neil Ormerod

#### Jesuit Theological College



The last five years have witnessed significant challenges to the Catholic theological education sector as it has had to adjust to an increasingly regulated higher education environment. However, the next five years will place increasing strain on the sector as it struggles to find properly trained personnel to fill the depleted ranks of theologians and biblical scholars.

Some 20 years ago the major suppliers of a Catholic theological education were theological colleges which functioned as seminaries (or at least provided theological education for seminarians) with lay people a happy addition to the student body. Many of these colleges were part of ecumenical theological consortia which provided structures for the accreditation of awards. In this way students would receive state-recognised degrees, initially at bachelors level but eventually leading to research masters and doctorates. These theological consortia have been a major ecumenical achievement, bringing together diverse ecclesial traditions into a common theological venture.

In those days the forms of state accreditation focused on the maintenance of proper academic standards. The regular rounds of accreditation and reaccreditation of awards would consider academic standards and the qualifications of teaching staff. These were rigorous but non-intrusive processes which attended to the basics but left the colleges to work out much of the details for themselves.

This is no longer the case. Federal government moves over the past five years in higher education have led to the development of national protocols which have placed increasing administrative burdens on all theological colleges.

State accreditation processes mirror federal requirements and now focus not just on the qualification of staff and the standards of courses but on governance structures and policies in relation to overseas students, study leave policies for academic staff and so on. Meeting these requirements is an increasing financial burden on a sector which generally runs on the smell of an oily rag. Further, to give students access to Fee-Help, the federal government student loan scheme for higher education, these colleges must also face the cost of an audit by the federal government Australian University's Quality Agency (AUQA).

To face these challenges consortia have had to re-structure their governance, develop multiple policies on every issue the national protocols require and in many cases raise their

fees to meet the cost on the added administrative load. Government demands have put enormous strains on the resources of theological education.

While these past five years have provided many challenges to theological colleges in general, the next five years are going to provide an extra challenge to Catholic theological colleges in particular. Last year a taskforce comprising members from the Forum of Australian Catholic Institutes of Theology (FACIT) and Australian Catholic University (ACU) undertook a survey of all Catholic theological college staff. While the taskforce had a long history of collecting and analysing data on student numbers, this was the first time it had surveyed staff. The aim was to obtain a snapshot of the current situation, considering issues of age distribution, qualifications and areas of expertise.

Some of the results of the FACIT-ACU survey came as no surprise. Theologians are in general extremely well-qualified, for example. Most of those employed outside the university sector (ACU and Notre Dame) are priests and religious. Two questions however produced answers which while not surprising should be raising red flags for all those with a concern for theological education.

In terms of the age profile of the sector over 12 per cent are over seventy, and 42.5 per cent are over 60 years old. Less than 20 per cent are under fifty and 2 per cent under forty. Close to 37 per cent indicated their intention to retire in the next five years or less. Out of the 122 who responded to the survey, this means we will be losing at least 45 in the next five years. And this is an intention to retire. It does not take into account other ways in which we will lose theologians from the pool of teachers. Just after the results of the survey were tabled we heard news of the elevation of Tim Costelloe to the episcopacy. While it is pleasing to have a theologian made a bishop, it is likely to mean the end of his teaching career at the Catholic Theological College in Melbourne.



It would not be difficult to predict then that in the next five years we will lose some 50 of those who are currently teaching theology in our Catholic theological colleges. It is near impossible to see how this shortfall can be made up, particularly from the pool of Australia theologians. Younger theologians are not available to fill the gaps. Already some colleges have appointed people from overseas. There is a good numbers of people undertaking theological research degrees in Australia, but sampling two major institutions revealed an average age of over 50 for the research students. Even here there is only a short-term solution.

In the past Australia has produced a number of theologians and biblical scholars of international standing, including John Thornhill, Bill Dalton, David Coffey, Tony Campbell, Brendan Byrne, Frank Moloney and Tony Kelly. Most of these have come from religious orders with the resources and determination to maintain a pool of well-trained and qualified theologians and scholars in their colleges. Many of these religious orders are in decline and the demands of providing theologians and scholars are not the top priority when parishes need



priests. The solution will not come from here.

On the face of it Catholic theological education is facing a major crisis. It cannot go on 'business as usual'. We cannot produce anywhere near the 50 replacement theologians and scholars we will need over the next five years to keep our current operations going. Major structural rationalisations need to occur and they need to start now. At present where this will take us is not clear, but the next five years will lead to the rise and fall of many as we struggle to adjust to the realities we face.

## Beijing Olympics media freedom sham

SPORT

Dan Read



Next year China is to have the honour of holding the Olympics. The international prestige granted to the nation lucky enough to act as host is eagerly sought after, and the competition between countries all looking to bring the Olympics home can reach almost comical proportions.

However, as journalists prepare to head east next year to cover the event, there has been cause for concern. China has a bleak reputation when it comes to freedom of the press, having a history of media censorship that few nations can match.

Media workers visiting the country can expect all manner of coercive measures from phone tapping to intimidation and arrest. Journalists are often branded with a special 'J' mark on their visas to advertise their occupation to authorities, with hotel managers instructed to contact local security if somebody with a dreaded 'J' mark checks in.

Recently however the government appeared to have a change of heart on its relationship to the media. In December 2006 the secretary-general of the Beijing Olympic Games Bid Committee, Weng Wei, promised to introduce temporary measures designed to give foreign journalists freedom of movement up to and during the Olympic proceedings.

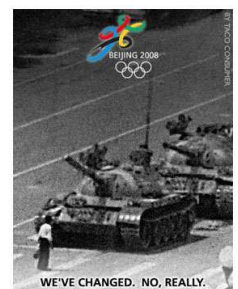
Stating that they would have 'complete freedom to report when they come to China' this show of good faith went a long way with the International Olympic Committee, which ultimately determined the outcome of their decision to permit the games to be hosted in Beijing.

Not to be caught out, Liu Jianchao — who is a spokesman for the foreign ministry — stated at a press conference that 'It is crystal clear that as long as the interviewee agrees, you can do your reporting'.

But since January several journalists have spoken out against continuing state censorship which, if the alleged 'temporary measures' are anything to go by, should not be taking place.

According to the international media pressure group 'Reporters Without Borders' (RWB) the Beijing Organising Committee has so far refused to take concrete steps to loosen up on censorship. Despite the earlier promise, there has been no policy enacted to provide adequate access for the many foreign journalists looking to enter the country next year.

Even worse, government bodies are remaining tight-lipped on the multitude of journalists within their own borders who remain subject to



criminal penalty. One venerable writer, Zhang Jianhong, has been imprisoned for the writing of an article on China's human rights record and the treatment of journalists in particular.

Calls for his release have fallen on deaf ears, despite the fact that he suffers from a rare nerve disorder. The refusal of the authorities to make good on their promise after what was initial optimism has caused many to lose heart, with RWB claiming that 'This silence allows the Chinese government to shamelessly continue its massive human rights violations.'

Additionally, Zhao Yan, a researcher for the *New York Times*, was only released last week after serving a three-year sentence. He is widely regarded as just one of many journalists who were or are imprisoned for the crime of doing their job.

Amnesty International fears that journalists now actually fare worse than they did before the earlier announcements regarding greater media freedom. In a recent press release, Catherine Baber, Deputy Asia Pacific Director at Amnesty International, commented that 'There has been a renewed crackdown on journalists and internet users in the past year — a fact that makes government commitments to 'complete media freedom' ring hollow'.

Speaking passionately on the situation, she went on to state that "Gleaming stadiums and spectacular parades will be worthless if journalists and human rights activists still can not speak out freely, if people are still being tortured in prison, or if the government continues its secrecy about the thousands of people executed".

Only time will tell how journalists — native or otherwise — fare next year as hundreds of thousands of Olympic fans descend on Beijing. Whether they can do their job is an important question, but one thing is for certain — renewed media crackdowns and infringements on human rights will only lead to greater scrutiny from the international press.

## Ecumenical sensitivity meets church law on women bishops

### THEOLOGY

Charles Sherlock

APPELLATE TRIBUNAL  
REPORT TO PRIMATE  
REFERENCE ON WOMEN BISHOPS  
To The Most Reverend Dr Phillip Aspinall, Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia  
Dated 22 April 2005  
On behalf of the Appellate Tribunal I have the honour to make the following report as to the Reference on Women Bishops  
1. A reference has been received from the Primate dated 22 April, 2005 in the following terms:  
"Given that

The last pane of the 'stained glass ceiling' was removed last week for most Australian Anglicans. Until 1986, women could be as committed Christians as their brothers in Christ, but not ordained as deacons. Until 1992 the same applied to women being ordained as priests (at least in dioceses that passed the rule change needed). Now Australian Anglican women who are priests can become bishops — and have been eligible since 1995, it turns out!

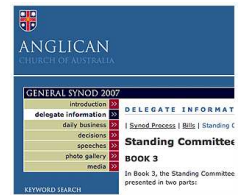
The story made media headlines. But underneath this somewhat unexpected ruling from the church's highest legal body, the Appellate Tribunal, lies a wider, richer story. A decision made for ecumenical and post-colonial reasons turns out to have enabled the change.

Tribunal members must give written reasons for their decisions. The 79-page [report](#) setting these out requires close reading, and reveals that the conclusion is more strongly based than the 4/3 vote (2/2 from the lawyers, three of them being judges, and 2/1 from the bishops) might suggest. The judges' review of the legal and historical issues is fascinating; the bishops bring a wider theological perspective.

What lay behind the Tribunal's conclusion? The Anglican Church of Australia is governed by a constitution, as one would expect. Unlike most bodies, however, it took 36 years to be agreed upon, from 1926 to 1962. The struggle revolved around the balance between local and national powers. If European Australia has multiple beginnings and is shaped by the 'tyranny of distance' and state rivalries, the Anglican story is fiercer, because the beginnings of the major dioceses were largely aligned with the emerging 'parties' of the Church of England in the 1840s.

Melbourne's first bishop was Evangelical, and Sydney, steeped in the independent tradition of two generations of chaplains, was firmly Protestant. On the other hand, the first bishops of Adelaide (then including SA and WA) and Newcastle (then including Queensland) were of more Catholic sympathy. The dioceses also have different constitutional set-ups: Melbourne (and dioceses formed from it) are based on state law, while Newcastle and Adelaide (and dioceses formed from them) are based on 'compacts' made between bishop, clergy and laity.

Broadly speaking, Sydney held out for local autonomy in the constitution, while others wanted national decisions to apply across the nation. The deadlock was resolved in 1962 after the first visit by an Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Geoffrey Fisher who — so the story goes — drafted the constitution on the voyage home. The outcome is a complex compromise: key issues need high majorities in General Synod, but the Synod’s decisions only apply locally where a diocese accepts them.



When a question arises about a decision (local or national) being constitutional it can be referred to the Appellate Tribunal, which consists of three diocesan bishops and four judges elected by the General Synod. Previous Tribunal decisions cleared the way for women to be ordained deacon and priest, along with General Synod decisions that needed 2/3 majorities by the lay members, clergy and bishops separately. While strong majorities supported female bishops, the motion failed twice in General Synod (in 2001 and 2004) to get the necessary 2/3 majority in the clergy and laity (the bishops’ vote stayed over 80 per cent). The matter is not on the agenda for the October 2007 meeting — presumably it was deemed pointless and divisive to raise it again in that context.

Following the 2004 ‘non-passing’ (‘defeat’ hardly applies when there is a solid majority in favour) some 25 members used their right to raise the deeper question with the Tribunal, ‘would it be unconstitutional to ordain a woman who is a priest as a bishop?’ And as we now know, the Tribunal answered ‘no’ for diocesans, though a 1966 Canon which presumes that clergy are male would prevent women being appointed as assistant bishops (which can be corrected locally).

The 2007 Tribunal decision hangs on the following sequence of events:

The 1962 constitution presumes existing law of the Church of England, so that women were unable to be ordained. Section 74(6) states, In the case of lay but not clerical persons words in this Constitution importing the masculine shall include the feminine.

It also required baptised people who had not been confirmed by a bishop to be so confirmed to become Anglicans — a decidedly unecumenical position in relation to Protestants.

In 1966 ‘Assistant’ bishops were not mentioned, so General Synod set down conditions for their appointment - and this relies on the 1962 assumption that clergy are male. In 1981 General Synod agreed that baptised Christians may become Anglicans by being ‘received’ rather than being confirmed by a bishop, and that such a person is as Anglican as any other.

In 1986 General Synod agreed that Anglican women could be ordained as deacons. In 1989 Section 74(1) of the constitution required that a bishop-elect have their ‘canonical fitness’ confirmed, referring back to English and colonial conditions — including being confirmed.

A long Constitution-changing process began, requiring that a bishop-elect must be baptised, 30 years of age, and a priest to be 'canonically fit' — confirmation is not mentioned. In 1990 the Tribunal ruled that the legal barriers to women being ordained as priests would be removed if General Synod passes a canon 'clarifying' this possibility. This clarification passed in 1992, and women in many dioceses were ordained priests (Sydney being the main exception).

In 1995 the constitutional change about the 'canonical fitness' of a bishop-elect was completed, allowing 'received' as well as 'confirmed' Anglicans to be bishops.

Finally, in 2007 the Appellate Tribunal ruled that there is no constitutional barrier to women being elected, confirmed and consecrated as bishops, though the Assistant Bishops' Canon must be changed to allow a priest who is a woman to take up such a position.

The Tribunal decision recognises that the change to 'priest' from 'confirmed' in the 'canonical fitness' of a bishop-elect — largely made for ecumenical and post-colonial reasons — also has the effect of allowing women who are priests to be ordained as bishops.

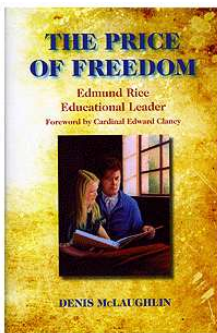
Two separate concerns, one about seeing 'church' as bigger than 'Church of England', the other about seeing humankind as more than 'men', came together in this unexpected outcome. Coming as it does in the lead-up to the forthcoming General Synod, the ruling may free the Anglican Church of Australia to place the evangelical mission of the church catholic as its core business, and to consider new questions on the basis of the wider church and wider world.

## The urbane and inclusive vision of Edmund Rice

### BOOK REVIEW

Andrew Hamilton

***The Price of Freedom: Edmund Rice Educational Leader, Denis McLaughlin, Melbourne: David Lovell Publishing, 2007, 450 pp, HB, RRP \$45.00, ISBN 978-1-86355-120-7***



The institutions of Australian Catholicism reflect its largely Irish origins. The stories, too, that Australian Catholics have told about their relations to Rome, to government, to other churches and to the ideas that underpin modernity, have been shaped by similar stories of Ireland.

But stories are always open to new interpretations. As Irish history is re-interpreted, new light falls on the story of the Australian Catholic Church. So a revisionist history of the origins of the Irish Christian Brothers by the Australian historian, Denis McLaughlin, stimulates questions about the Australian Catholic Church.

Few institutions represent better the character of Australian Catholicism and of its links to an Irish tradition than the Christian Brothers. Memoirs, novels and plays have explored the distinctive quality of their education. They have generally rooted it in the patrimony of the Irish Christian Brothers. They have identified this inheritance as a passionate Irish nationalism based on a tribal loyalty to the Catholic Church. The Church was combative to secular governments and Protestant Churches.

Denis McLaughlin shows that Edmund Ignatius Rice, the founder of the Christian brothers, was of a different temper.

Edmund Rice himself was a canny businessman who became passionately committed to educate the children of destitute families. Neither church nor state then provided education for them; indeed contemporary social philosophies saw no point in doing so. McLaughlin describes the keystones of Rice's educational philosophy as fatherly affection, personal liberation and a deep faith.

Rice was pragmatic. If the schools were to gather the poorest children, they had to provide free education for them. But the schools soon attracted also children of working families. He was open to charging those who could pay in order to subsidise the education of those who could not.

More significantly, Rice was happy to cooperate with the Irish authorities and with representatives of other Churches. He took for granted the Ireland that he knew from his

business dealings. In particular, he was happy to work under the National Schools Board that had been introduced after Catholic Emancipation. It inspected schools and produced texts. The Board had Catholic representatives to ensure that its texts were non-denominational but were able to be adapted to the purposes of different churches. Rice saw that putting his schools under the Board would help educate more poor children.

Not all his schools, however, associated themselves with the Board. The Brothers of Cork in particular were of a harder temper. They undermined Rice and voted him out of office. Michael Riordan, who in 1838 replaced him, was a divisive figure. He was naturally sympathetic to Archbishop Cullen's vision of a strongly nationalistic Ireland based in Catholic faith. Cullen saw other churches and British institutions as opponents. Riordan withdrew all schools from the National Education Board, and insisted that the Brothers charge in none of their schools. After school had finished, they went around the area begging. The result was that some poorer schools had to close.



Much water passed under bridges both in Ireland and Australia before the Christian Brothers arrived here. But the sharp boundaries of Cullen's definition of Irish Catholicism were accepted in both nations. It was a vision for hard times. But it was not the only shape of Catholicism possible. Nor, as Rice shows, was it the only form represented in Ireland. It has now run out into the sand both in Ireland and Australia.

In a time of perplexity about Catholicism and religion generally, the urbane and inclusive vision of Edmund Ignatius Rice is attractive. It is strongly anchored in faith, and commends faith in its focus on the neediest groups in society. It is also confident. It suggests that we read the society in which we find ourselves and act confidently in it. We are free to recognise the good values and motives of those with whom we differ.

In Edmund Rice's vision Catholic identity is taken for granted. The task is to build on it. He does this neither by adversarial definitions of Catholic identity nor by pugilistic relationships with those from whom he differs, but by living out the Gospel.

This strand of Irish Catholicism is also represented in the stories of the Australian church. It deserves more attention than it often receives.

## **Everything has its own colour**

### POETRY

These five poems were written by students of the [Fitzroy Community School](#) in Melbourne. They were amongst the many submitted to the [Dorothea MacKellar Poetry Awards](#), the oldest and largest annual national poetry competition in Australia. This year's subject was Colour.



### **Colourful Life**

When a clear, blue sky  
Meets a deep, blue sea,  
An endless margin  
Keeps them apart.  
Both are filled with colour and life.  
The sea is full of colourful fish:  
Angelfish, multi-coloured crabs,  
Soft, grey sharks - dangerous and feared by all.  
The sky is full of different birds:  
Bright pink flamingos, rainbow parrots,  
Majestic brown eagles,  
Tiny black swallows, migrating south in winter,  
And irritating seagulls.  
Everything has its own colour.  
My favourite colour is blue.

*Emma Lightfoot (Age 10)*

### **A Colourful Dog**

It's got all the different colors in the world.  
Its tail is yellow.  
His paws are black.  
His legs are pink.  
His body is every colour.  
His head is grey  
His eyes are grey.

All of his head is grey  
Except his nose.  
His nose is orange.  
His bark is green and red.  
His collar is every colour.  
His name is Barkly Dog  
He lives in a forest,  
Where there are lots of vines and that stuff.  
There were even dinosaurs in that forest once.  
They were all the same colours as the dog.

*Zak Aldenhoven (Age 5)*

### **White to Blue to Pink to Night**

A white piece of paper,  
Fluttering in the breeze,  
Floating across the blue sky,  
Like the name tag across  
My sky-blue apron  
I wear to work.  
You know the one,  
With pink poppies on the back;  
The ones that look as if they are  
Pink clouds at sunset,  
Fading away into the night.

*Sam Neesham (Age 12)*

### **Untitled**

My favourite colours were blue and green.  
Green poison burns the glass  
Green traffic lights change all the time  
Blue is a sea wave  
Blue is on the computer when it's loading  
Now red is my favourite colour  
Sometimes I have three or more favourite colours,  
But usually two.  
One of my favourite colours is white.  
White is the colour of the snow  
I have never seen snow  
But I have seen hail  
I love hail  
Sometimes you see through it,  
It is like the colour of the air.  
On the ground it is white  
I like to eat hail.  
*Sunny Chiron (Age 7)*

### **Opposite**

Orange is opposite to blue.  
Blue is kindness, blue is faith.  
Blue is a tall, smoky wraith,  
Haunting the house, and yelling 'Boo!'  
Orange is sweet, orange is wroth,  
Orange is a thin, soft, silk cloth.  
When you put these colours together on a page,

You think of blue as softness,

You think of orange as rage.

*Estelle Morrissey (Age 10)*